UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

NAME OF CANDIDATE	DAVID IYORNONGU KER
Abstract of thesis entitled	AN EXAMINATION OF POINT OF VIEW IN SELECTED BRITISH, AMERICAN AND AFRICAN NOVELS
Submitted for the degree of	DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
Date	SEPTEMBER, 1984

Dedication

To my wife, Beatrice, and to our children

Ter and Taver

CONTENTS

		Page
Abstract		
Acknowledgements		
Chapter One	Introduction	1
Chapter Two	The Dramatised Perspective	41
Chapter Three	The Inward Perspective	96
Chapter Four	Multiple Perspective Part I	148
Chapter Five	Multiple Perspective Part II	210
Chapter Six	Communal Perspective Part I	272
Chapter Seven	Communal Perspective Part II	311
Chapter Eight	Communal Perspective Part III	355
Chapter Nine	Conclusion	383
Bibliography		395

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a contribution to the ongoing debate over standards of criticism for the novel in Africa. After reviewing the three main approaches, the 'Afro-centric', the 'Euro-centric' and the 'syncretic', and highlighting their shortcomings, I hope to demonstrate that if the devices of point of view are used properly they may provide a valuable tool for a useful reading of the novels.

Point of view is seen as a holistic device and not, as Lubbock and others suggest, a question of 'the relationship of the narrator to the story'. The views of Boris Uspensky, Gerard Genette and Susan Lanser on this subject are modified to suit the eclectic and comparative designs of the study. Point of view is thus seen as the means through which a given device operates in a specific context, what it reveals, and how it relates to other textual elements. Four main categories are proposed, namely the dramatized, the inward, the multiple and the communal perspectives. These categories demonstrate the flexibility of method which point of view allows and they show how novels from different backgrounds may be examined under one 'convention' without depriving such novels of their originality.

Twenty novels by British, American and African novelists are subsequently divided into these four categories and each of the novels is described, allowing them to define one another. The communal perspective is found to be a unique feature of the five African novels examined in the last three chapters. These novels require the reader to modify his opinions about point of view,

for the novelists seem to speak on behalf of their communities. The communal pose thus becomes a literary device. It is a device which manifests itself in the case of the novels of Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah and Gabriel Okara through the skilful use of character, language and setting. The reader who comes to the novels with the conviction that character is a paradigm of traits will need to bear in mind that traits in these novels are what are normally known as characters in other novels and that in the novels, therefore, characterisation is largely transferred from the individual person to the communal personality.

This is the contribution these African novelists have made to world fiction. It is nevertheless shown that this distinct feature need not deny a common ground from which the critic of the African novel can define the novels' themes and methods and that ultimately the isolation which the three main approaches seem to recommend is neither desirable, nor is it helpful as a way of making the reader aware of the form and content of the novels.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Several people helped to shape this work and I am grateful for all their contributions. I wish particularly to thank Professor A.N. Jeffares for his comments and for the encouragement he gave when things looked difficult. I also wish to acknowledge with gratitude the contributions of Felicity Riddy who looked at early drafts and whose concern for me and my family enabled us to bear our hardships with restraint. The timely arrival of Angela Smith from Sabbatical leave brought insights into the novels that would have eluded me and I am most grateful to her for the speed and concern with which she treated the drafts.

I also wish to acknowledge the encouragement given to the study of African literature in Stirling by Professor Thomas Dunn which made it possible for me to study here and I am happy to have met such helpful teachers in the English Studies Department as Lance St.John Butler, Alisdair Macrae, Martin Davies, Ian Milligan, Donald Low and Grahame Smith, who among others encouraged me in the course of this study. Peter Lamarque of Philosophy Department helped at an early stage and John Riddy taught me to smile in the face of teeming research problems.

My wife, Beatrice, performed the difficult and seemingly impossible tasks of looking after our children, of completing her own postgraduate degree and caring for a husband who studied at night and slept during the day. I cannot thank her enough for her patience and endurance.

I am grateful to the authorities of Ahmadu Bello University and the Benue State Scholarship Board for financing the research.

Irene Lindsay handled the typing with speed and concern for which I am most grateful.

Chapter One : Introduction

I Trends in the Criticism of the African Novel

II The Thesis

III Point of View

IV Method

Trends in the Criticism of the African Novel

Criticism of the African novel has become repetitive. The main reason for this tendency lies in the fact that the task is carried out in the wrong spirit and often with the wrong tools. It increasingly resembles revealed religion demanding no more than faith on the part of its practitioners. Protestants are being ex-communicated and their predicament has produced syncretists who are attempting to reconcile the various beliefs. Yet in spite of numerous attempts by critics at synthesis the subject seems stagnant and the critics appear to be rehearsing old arguments rather than opening up new perspectives. Commonly described as 'approaches', these arguments fall roughly into three categories.

An Afro-centric approach is suggested by those, like Chinweizu, Jemi and Madubuike, who are plotting a rebellion against the dependence of African literature on European and especially English models. What is needed, they claim, is a declaration of literary independence, the creation of a 'national' literature making use of African materials and African themes. For them:

> African literature is an autonomous entity separate and apart from all other literatures. It has its own traditions, models and norms. Its constituency is separate and radically different from that of the European or other literatures. And its historical and cultural imperatives impose upon it concerns and constraints quite different, sometimes altogether antithetical to the European. These facts hold true even for those portions of African literature which continue to be written in European languages.
>
> 1

Historians of American literature may find such rhetoric and similar attempts at 'decolonization' all too familiar. John D. Hazlett has shown in a recent article how the attempt to purge American literature of its dependence on English letters led some critics to set about 'drawing up a list' of topics that ought to be dealt with in a truly American literature.[2] The famous Chinweizu trio have drawn up a similar list and have gone further to teach the poets, for instance, how to curse in 'traditional style'.[3] Afro-centric critics might learn a lesson from the failure of their American counterparts because what has now emerged as an authentic American literature bears the marks of the influence of Europe yet no one can say, for example, that Faulkner is an English novelist. The major fault of the literary nationalists lies in the fact that they too easily forget the circumstances that gave birth to their nations, the great social, political, economic and cultural changes which undermine any isolationist philosophy. It is unrealistic to talk about 'traditions, models and norms' without accounting for the various changes that have taken place in Africa in the wake of its contact with Europe. The problem with the African novelist cannot stem from any links he may have with novelists from other cultures. The only relevant question is whether he is an able or a poor novelist.

Afro-centric critics avoid discussions about the quality of individual works and concern themselves more with abstract notions about African aesthetics. Thus Edris Makward is convinced that it would be most often 'irrelevant to try to apply to African literature the same critical treatment that one would apply to the works of contemporary European or American writers' but fails in

his long essay to provide the alternative 'treatment'.[4] Both Joseph Okpaku and Ezuma Igwe seek, in a similar vein, to build 'a body of African critical standards'[5] which would be 'totally independent of any other tradition'[6] but they both fail to describe the means by which their new edifice will be constructed. It is, therefore, not unfair to say that faith alone sustains the Afro-centric approach. The argument is not amenable to any serious critical scrutiny, and is based on assumptions that have more to do with national (racial) pride than with the realities of the literature whose integrity the critics seek to defend. Whenever the writers themselves comment they do admit the influence of other cultures and the majority of them would probably agree with Kofi Awoonor's observation that:

> African culture must represent a continuous growth from the past, through the present, into the future, bearing select gifts from VARIOUS CONTACTS IT HAS MADE WITH OUTSIDE FORCES and maintaining a unique personality in its verve and dynamism. (My emphasis)
>
> 7

The second approach is commonly described as Euro-centric. The critics in this category believe that modern African literature is an extension of English literature and should be judged by the same critical standards. Thus John Povey talks about Achebe as if he was a cousin of Thomas Hardy and should only be seen in that light.[8] The argument has revolved around the notorious issues of influence and universality. In Eustace Palmer's study of Okara's The Voice the reader is asked, for instance, to observe the influence of the Bible, Chaucer, Cervantes, Bunyan, Eliot, Kafka, and E.M. Forster.[9] The list is so long that the reader may wonder if the mentors, and not Okara's novel, are the subject of Palmer's study. Palmer is

not alone. The obsession with influence has been the hallmark of the Euro-centric approach and some critics, such as Charles Larson, have fought a fruitless battle with the issue. Ayi Kwei Armah's now famous quarrel with Larson exposes the limitations in the approach adopted by some Euro-centric critics. The fact of influence in itself teaches us almost nothing about a work of art. Whatever a good writer learns about character and motivation can be transmuted into a form that allows the work to speak in its own voice. The failure to locate this innovative voice in the works has led some critics sometimes to apply archaic terminology to explain the new. Douglas Killam, for instance, searches unsuccessfully in Ngugi's Petals of Blood for a central character as does Gerald Moore.[10] They both fail because the contemporary novel has passed such limits and cries out to be examined by fresh and more open criteria.

The Euro-centric approach also has the problem of universality. Critics such as Eldred Jones consider a work great only if it fulfils this criterion.[11] This perhaps is not peculiar to criticism of African fiction but others such as Achebe have seen this yardstick as an indirect way of imposing Western concerns on the African writer. 'Am I being told for Christ's sake',asks Achebe, 'that before I write about any problem I must first verify whether they have it too in New York and London and Paris?'[12] Achebe's question perhaps overstates the case against universality but studies of the Euro-centric approach such as Thomas A. Hale's recent 'Africa and the West: Close Encounters of a Literary Kind', indicate quite persuasively that Achebe has a point. In his article Hale argues that the problem of universality in the criticism of African fiction may be traced to what he sees as 'the exposure of Westerners from childhood

to the usual stereotypes of Africa' which, for some, makes the discovery of African literature as 'unexpected as the appearance of an extra-terrestrial being at the podium of an ACLA meeting to compare Martian and Venusian epics'.[12] The problem with universality lies in the fact that, rather than throw more light on the merits of individual works, it has instead polarised the argument between two irreconcilable groups of African writers and critics on the one hand and their 'enemies' the Euro-centric critics on the other. Consequently no progress has been made as more and more disciples join each of the competing ideologies in the field.

The third approach which may be described as syncretism has unsuccessfully tried to defuse the tension. The approach fails because the initial argument has never been well focussed or analysed in detail. Theo Vincent's observation is to the point:

> Part of the difficulty is that in the present period of transition, critical methods, whether borrowed or modified, have not been sufficiently tested and found either suitable or unsuitable for African literature.
>
> 14

Methods are tried and easily 'jettisoned' and each new contribution seeks for a theory which will solve the problem. Solomon Iyasere has probably made the most effort towards a theory of African poetics. Some of his useful terminologies such as 'cultural formalism' and 'pre-criticism' are beginning to form part of a nascent theory of the form of the novel in Africa.[15] A few other critics have enlisted in Iyasere's 'avant-garde', among them Romanus Egudu. Victor Aire, and Lewis Nkosi who argue persuasively that there is a need to synthesise the 'socio-cultural' and 'aesthetic criteria'.[16] It is argued that Africa is 'special'

and the criticism must recognise this apartness. This argument, unfortunately, seems merely to serve the cause of both the Afro-centric and Euro-centric critics. The paradox may be seen in the fact that all the groups are insisting on isolation, only from different angles. Critics of other literatures who have tried to encourage the dichotomy between content and form, between 'sociology' and 'aesthetics' experience the same difficulty which the practitioners in Africa experience. Iyasere's 'new way' is, in fact, not new and is applicable to any literature. The difference between the world of Umuofia and Umuaro in Achebe's novels and the Yoknapatawpha County of William Faulkner is really one of degree. Is there any need to seek to differentiate when there are so many grounds that are common?[17]

ii

The Thesis

Point of view provides this study with a place to start discussion of the African novel which will eschew the angry polemics of the debate so far. But before delving into terminology and method, it is useful to establish what the study hopes to achieve and to explain the choice of texts. The main concern is with the contribution that the novel in Africa has made to world fiction. It is therefore comparative in nature. A very useful book was published when the research for this thesis was nearing completion. Neil McEwan's Africa and the Novel states an intention which is similar to the one the thesis assumed from the start, namely, 'to show how

Africa has contributed to the novel during the last thirty years'. Since it is a new book McEwan's premise deserves an extended quotation:

> My purpose is to offer an account of the best work of African novelists since 1950, and of some novels by outsiders inspired by experience of Africa, in the context of a discussion of the competing claims made on literature, and on all of us, by the idea of 'the modern'. When novels by Africans began to be published in London in the 1950s they were often discussed in terms of earlier periods of English Literature. Amos Tutuola was said to be 'Elizabethan', Cyprian Ekwensi was called an African Defoe - a comparison which became almost routine. It was even argued that an 'emergent bourgeoisie' in Africa was repeating the experience of England in the eighteenth century. There have been good critical accounts of the new African fiction in English, but studies of the contemporary novel have ignored them. Critics of African fiction have often seemed to justify that by assuming that new content has been put into old forms, African materials appearing in the traditional European form of the novel. I hope to show that Achebe, Ngugi, Soyinka and others have been writing fiction which is fully contemporary.
>
> 18

McEwan's book thus pinpoints the main problem areas discussed in the first part of this chapter. The choice of novels in this study, however, is different. British and American novels have been chosen from writers who have been generally regarded as the great innovators of the form of the novel in this century: Henry James, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner. The innovations which these novelists brought about have influenced and shaped the novel in Africa. Their novels are thus examined side by side with the works of six major African novelists whose concern with the form of the novel is as serious as that of their British and American counterparts;

Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Ayi Kwei Armah, Kofi Awoonor and Gabriel Okara.

With few exceptions, criticism which focusses on influence and similarities between European and African novels has so far been based on assumptions. Few try to probe these connections in any detail. This state of affairs has led many to assume that the African novel is not yet 'ready for the modern'. Up till 1979 Kole Omotoso, himself a novelist, could still say, for example, that:

> Very few African novelists, if any, have bothered to keep up in their novel-writing with the technical development in the novel form in the respective languages of their writing, being, as it were, satisfied with the conventional form of the European novel.
> 19

In the same essay, which treats 'the form of the African novel', Omotoso quotes two other influential critics to buttress his point. The first is Nadine Gordimer, a good novelist herself, who declares:

> African writers have their story to tell ... For most of them, the straightforward narrative suffices to carry it, and the form of the conventional novel, story, biography, or essay to contain it.
> 20

In similar vein Eustace Palmer observes that:

> In fact, most African novelists have been quite content to use the established forms of the English, American and Continental novel. From the point of view of form, there isn't much to choose between Achebe and Hardy, Ngugi and Conrad, Camara Laye and Kafka.
> 21

Theo Vincent also ends an otherwise brilliant article on the issue

of Black aesthetics by lamenting that:

> It is quite possible that the African writer will add some new dimension to the novel form, but we have to wait for that.
>
> 22

These observations have been made a bit too hastily and cannot account for the twelve novels by Africans that have been chosen for the study. In examining them side by side with their British and American equivalents it is demonstrated that there are striking similarities between them and that most of the instances of difference cannot be attributed solely to the Africanness of the writing. The reasons have more to do with conscious attempts at experimentation based on a good knowledge of the traditions which gave birth to the experiments of the British and American writers than with the nationalist feelings of the African novelists. This is not to go back to the problems of influence and universality, nor is it meant to question the Africanness of the novels. It is impossible to deny these writers their originality, which is taken here to represent their Africanness, but cultural chauvinism can stifle the richness that these novels have acquired from other traditions. What is needed in this comparative task, as has been pointed out in a recent article, is 'cross-cultural humility' and 'homework'[23]. Helen Tiffin observes in her article that 'the discipline of Commonwealth literary criticism' should enable us to comprehend that the practice of literary criticism in the contemporary world cannot be conducted from 'a single national or ethnic perspective'. So far this has been the case with the criticism of the novel in Africa.

Similarities in theme have sometimes compounded the problem.

It is quite common to group, for example, Fragments, The Interpreters, and This Earth My Brother, as novels of disillusionment. Such an approach, adopted by Charles Larson and many other critics, strips the novels of the innovations in technique which the novelists have deployed.[24] The novels are about disillusionment but they are written from entirely different points of view.

iii

Point of View

Point of view is a favourite term in criticism of the novel. Since Henry James the term has been used largely in the way James used it, as a question of the centre of consciousness, and the adequate or inadequate frame of vision such a consciousness gives us on the story. Following the example of James, for instance, Percy Lubbock defined point of view as 'the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to the story.'[25] Dictionaries of literary terms have stuck to this definition and some have established classifications which distinguish two broad divisions between third-person and first-person narratives. More elaborate classifications, such as those advanced by Wayne Booth and Norman Friedman, place emphasis on narrators who appear especially in Friedman's case to be graded in terms of their dramatic relationship to the story which they narrate. There have thus emerged such terms as 'I protagonist', 'I as witness', 'editorial omniscience' and 'neutral omniscience'[26]. These classifications have helped to clarify the term but they tend to be prescriptive and thus do not seem to make room for numerous other

possibilities open to the novelist and reader.

Current studies of the concept are, however, beginning to release point of view from its preoccupation with the question of the relationship of the narrator to the story. More attempts are now made to exploit the ramifications which the question of perspective poses. In their study of the nature of narrative Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg have made some firm observations which have, perhaps, opened the way for a more comprehensive approach to the question of point of view. They distinguish between what the term means for 'a generalised novelist and his equally generalised reader' and conclude that:

> For the novelist, point of view is the primary way he controls and shapes his materials. Once made, his choice of point of view and the mode of language appropriate to it will influence his presentation of character, incident, and every other thing represented. For the reader, however, point of view is not an aesthetic matter but a mode of perception. The point of view in a given novel controls the reader's impression of everything else ... The story takes the shape its author has given it, a shape governed for us primarily by the point of view through which the characters and events are filtered.
> 27

Scholes's and Kellogg's observations about the holistic nature of point of view render the question of person in the discussion only secondary. Indeed in the highly experimental novels discussed here the novelists establish what Gerard Genette describes in a related context as 'a variable and floating relationship, a pronomial vertigo in tune with a freer logic and a more complex conception of personality'. Genette further observes that the

type of 'emancipation' these novelists have achieved is not perceptible because the 'classical attributes of character have disappeared along with the signs that direct pronomial traffic'[28]. The arguments against 'the classical attributes of character' and the primacy of the narrator with regard to the management of point of view are supported in this study by a category which is described as the communal perspective. In Two Thousand Seasons, for example, pronomial usage is dominated by the collective 'we' but the reader soon discovers that such a sign is not helpful in determining the position of the narrator to the story. The attention of the reader is drawn, instead, to a unique characterisation which is worked through an inventive use of language and setting. The novel uses a 'simple' language which, the reader may assume, is the hallmark of the community that is portrayed but such words as 'discombobulation' reveal another narrator who clearly supervises the performance of the communal narrators; one who tries to control the reader's judgement on the central concerns of the novel. Moreover in the case of Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God and Gabriel Okara's The Voice this communal perspective or voice of the community is achieved without the benefit of the collective pronoun.

It is perhaps more helpful to consider Gerard Genette's view of 'narrating situations':

> A narrating situation is, like any other, a complex whole within which analysis, or simply description, cannot differentiate except by ripping apart a tight web of connections among the narrating act, its protagonists, its spatio-temporal determinations, its relationship to the other narrating situations involved in the same narrative. [29]

This view has inspired this research as has the argument advanced by Boris Uspensky who considers 'the dispersion of points of view (or the absence of that dispersion) as an important factor in the composition and organization of a text'. Uspensky further argues that a work could be discussed on three levels:

> the SEMANTIC level, on which we consider the relationship of the description (narration) to the described reality (the relationship of the representation to the represented); the SYNTACTIC level, on which we investigate the internal structural laws and regularities which govern the construction of the text; and the PRAGMATIC level, on which we deal with the relations between the text and the audience for whom it is intended. We may speak, then, about the semantic, the syntactic, and the pragmatic aspects of composition of the artistic work (that is, in terms of point of view).
> 30

Point of view may thus be manifested on many 'planes'; it initiates and develops the devices which convey the presence and the attitudes of a textual voice, it is, as Susan Lanser has observed, the 'stylistic-philosophic centre' of a text.[31] The purpose of this study, however, is not to establish point of view as the blueprint of literary theory and criticism, nor is it claimed as the only 'sensible' way by which criticism of the African novel may be conducted. It is neither an attempt to write a theory of point of view nor is it a prescriptive poetics for a study of the novel in Africa. The device has simply been used as a point of departure which may pave the way for a style of criticism which is less polemical than that found in several studies of the novel in Africa.

iv

The Method

The twenty novels selected for study are classified into four broad divisions inspired by the theories of Uspensky, Genette and Susan Lanser; these theories, however, are modified to serve the comparative objectives of the thesis. The divisions,therefore, are different from the ones that inspired them in the first instance. The question of emphasis and relative weight has determined which novels are considered as deploying the dramatised, the inward, the multiple and the communal perspectives. These divisions are not watertight. There is, for instance, a very strong temptation to consider Faulkner's novels as novels deploying the communal perspective along with the novels of Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah and Gabriel Okara but Faulkner's multi-layered perspective overshadows his concern with the perspective of the folk of Yoknapatawpha County. Similar fine points could be made about the other novels and the categories into which they fall but these divisions are considered more helpful than those which simply classify novels between first-person and third-person narratives. The divisions, as the rest of this first chapter demonstrates, throw more light on the question of point of view.

Chapter two deals with the novels of Henry James and Wole Soyinka. The DRAMATISED PERSPECTIVE is used as a guiding concept to provide a useful approach towards technique and thematic definition in the novels. To use it, however, is not to imply that the mode is peculiar to the two novelists. On the contrary it can be successfully argued that every novelist integrates dramatic elements in his novels.

However, while it is generally agreed that Samuel Richardson gave birth to the dramatised point of view which was later adopted by many great novelists such as Fielding, Jane Austen, Dickens and George Eliot, few people will dispute James's claim to the title of the modern master of the dramatised perspective. James not only wrote his novels from a dramatised point of view but he also left a rich legacy of critical terms for evaluating his novels in particular, and the art of the novel in general.

In the preface to The Tragic Muse, for example, he refers to 'Scenic conditions which are as near an approach to the dramatic as the novel may permit'.[32] The material of The Ambassadors is taken, James asserts, 'absolutely from the stuff of drama', emphasising that it 'displays a scenic consistency'.[33] Percy Lubbock and other critics of James have added a great deal to our understanding of his novels, explaining and supplementing the numerous terms such as 'scene and summary', 'foreshortening', 'pictorial fusion', 'the ficelles', James's 'scène à fàire' and 'coups de theatres'.[34] It is sometimes difficult to say whether drama, and not the novel, is the subject-matter of most of the critical studies of James's novels.

Wole Soyinka is the reverse side of the same Jamesian coin. Soyinka is, unlike James, a successful dramatist, and can perhaps be called an amateur novelist. Like James, however, Soyinka seems to believe that the novelist should show events in the act of happening, indeed, the intended title for his first novel was The Happening.[35] For both writers each event that is crucial to the story must be presented in action. In their novels action and characters interact to the point of fusion. A close study of the

novels reveals further similarities in structural and thematic concerns. Many critics of James's novels emphasise what they see as 'renunciation and repudiation' in them. Sallie Sears, for example, insists that we view James's vision as negative because of what she describes as his inability to assert positive values with any degree of success.[36] Similarly, Wole Soyinka has been accused by many of a negative vision and several critics are frustrated by what they see as his 'aimless virtuosity'.[37] The choice of novels was influenced by these similarities in perspective.

The Tragic Muse represents the story of the 'artistic life' and it bustles with characters as well as with scenes and actions. There are, in fact, two stories in the novel but as Ernest Baker observes, James 'manages to give a good general picture of life going vigorously on'.[38] Similarly, Soyinka's _The Interpreters_ dramatises 'stories' of the artistic life. It is also crowded with characters and with scenes and much activity and, as in _The Tragic Muse_, the major characters are faced with choices which prove 'tyrannical'. The characters in both novels are in every sense interpreters. What Gabriel Nash says in _The Tragic Muse_ about his role might well apply to Egbo and his fellow interpreters in the Soyinka novel:

> He was so accustomed to living upon irony
> and the interpretation of things that it
> was strange to him to be himself interpreted.[39]

The Ambassadors and _Season of Anomy_ do not yield such immediate instances of similarity, but they are both dramas of self-revelation. Ofeyi, the protagonist of Soyinka's novel, like Strether in _The Ambassadors_,

goes through an imaginative quest that makes him 'see'; the business of The Ambassadors and the whole march of the action, to paraphrase James, is the demonstration of this process of vision. The reality in the two novels is chaotic and each of the protagonists acts and reflects on what he perceives with the help of his 'accumulated character'.[40] To examine the workings of point of view in the novels is to examine the characterisation, the way the characters are linked by numerous dramatic scenes and actions in which relationships are entangled, each scene or action being thus structured by the conflicting attitudes of the characters. These attitudes are largely expressed through dialogue. Dialogue is the essence of drama and consequently the dominant feature of the novels of James and Soyinka. Dialogue as it is deployed in the novels is examined as an indispensible technique in determining point of view in their novels.

Time also plays a significant part in the development of character and character relationships. It, therefore, has a great bearing on point of view in the novels. There are significant differences between James's and Soyinka's use of time and these are also examined in the discussion.

The INWARD PERSPECTIVE, a term preferred to the more familiar stream-of-consciousness, is used in chapter three to examine the novels of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Kofi Awoonor. Joyce's name has become synonymous with the technique which is described as the inward perspective. Readers of Virginia Woolf have also found a kinship in method between some of her novels and those of Joyce and the pair can be regarded as the quintessential 'stream-of-consciousness' novelists. Identification has, however, not helped definition:

critics have found it difficult to agree on a definition of the technique of stream-of-consciousness. For instance, following the example of Robert Humphrey, who makes a distinction between stream-of-consciousness and interior monologue, Melvin Friedman insists that 'there is no stream-of-consciousness technique'. Instead, both critics raise stream-of-consciousness to the status of 'genre', distinguishing it from what Friedman calls the 'narrative novel', in Friedman's words:

> The novel of narration, attempting communication by means of conventional syntax, is troublesome and exhaustive; the stream-of-consciousness novel, on the contrary, carries on uninterruptedly without difficulty, working spontaneously with reminiscences and anticipation.
> 41

Such explanation is suspect: the distinction between simple and difficult novels does not help the reader define the technique of stream-of-consciousness. Further categorisation into interior monologue, internal analysis and sensory impressions solves only half the problem.

Commenting on Sterne's A Sentimental Journey, Virginia Woolf said:

> No writing seems to flow more exactly into the very folds and creases of the individual mind, to express its changing moods, to answer its lightest whim and impulse, and yet the result is perfectly precise and composed. The utmost fluidity exists with the utmost permanence. It is as if the tide raced over the beach hither and thither and left every ripple and eddy cut on the sand in marble.
> 42

Critics will find in Virginia Woolf's metaphors a more useful way to arrive at a definition of the stream-of-consciousness technique. Those who call these novels psychological novels in the way

Virginia Woolf suggests assign them to a more accurate 'genre': through these novels, 'the very folds and creases of the individual mind' are unravelled. In praising Sterne, Virginia Woolf directs our attention to his ability to transfer the reader's interest from 'the outer to the inner ... his preference for the windings of his own mind to the guide-book'.[43] It is for this reason that the term inward perspective is preferred to stream-of-consciousness. The latter term seems inadequate and does not precisely define the device which shapes the novels under study.

Kofi Awoonor employs similar devices to those of Joyce and Virginia Woolf. This Earth, My Brother[44] has quite correctly been described as a 'prose-poem' and Awoonor himself has acknowledged a debt to Joyce.[44] Yet, in examining the novel, Richard Priebe describes it as a work which 'thoroughly defies conventional Western criticism'.[46] The purpose of the comparison in this chapter is to show how these novels may be examined within one 'convention'. 'The details of language, culture, history', observes Awoonor, 'may define the variations. But they are all variations upon the same theme - MAN'.[47] Indeed there are striking similarities in thematic concerns which match the similar techniques used by all three novelists. The reader notices in these novels a kinship of search and pilgrimage. All their protagonists embark on adventures in real and metaphoric terms. George Moore, one of the earlier exponents of the inward perspective, has provided an accurate metaphor for these adventures:

> There is a lake in every man's heart ... And every man must ungird his loins for the crossing.
> [48]

Stephen crosses into exile, Bernard into eternity and Amamu joins his

ancestors. In each case the journey is both a real adventure as it is a 'shared soliloquy' with the reader. A 'fertile' imagination maintains the balance between symbol and action; in many ways symbol is action in these novels.

An examination of the way the inward perspective works involves 'ripping apart' the means by which a character's inner mind is exposed to the reader. Such a task involves a detailed examination of symbolism, which is largely conjured through memory, and an analysis of the way the question of time is affected by, and affects the point of view which the novels put forward. The characteristic features of the inward perspective cannot be exhausted in the study. It can be argued, for instance, that language and rhythm are also deployed in a unique way and could therefore be used as a point of departure. However, the four chosen categories represent an adequate, though arbitrary, sample of the ways in which point of view may be seen to function in a novel. Awoonor's novel is enriched by this reading and by the comparison between it and Joyce's _A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man_,[49] and Virginia Woolf's _The Waves_.[50]

The MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVE is used in chapter four and in chapter five to examine the novels of Joseph Conrad, William Faulkner, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Ayi Kwei Armah. 'A work of art', Conrad once said, 'is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to a definite conclusion'.[51] His observation could apply to many novels and more specifically to those of his contemporaries but Conrad's aim in his own novels seems to have been to test the full implications of his observations. Consequently the novels highlight the difficulty of understanding human nature and motivation

in general. They are usually the confessions of witnesses who are given ample opportunity to speak and who pass the narrative back and forth to one another so that the same story acquires different shades and forms. In Conrad's novels, the reader, like the detective, weighs the evidence and analyzes action by studying the surface as well as the psychological states of the characters in order to arrive at conclusions which may differ from those of other observers of the situation. The MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVE, which Faulkner later adopted, compels an often baffled, and at times irritated reader, to explore and organise the fragmentary. Faulkner, however, appears to have been attracted by the devices which Conrad used in the Marlow novels, especially in Lord Jim, in which the eye-witness tells of a protagonist and attempts to understand the protagonist through an imaginative sharing of his experience.

But there is also the device which Conrad put to use in Nostromo and Under Western Eyes,[52] which, while maintaining the basic feature of the fragmentary in perspective, also creates an added impression of rapidity, of suddenness and of the startling. The impression is one of the disconnected and confused vision of the dream from which several of his characters never seem to wake. Characters in these novels seem to lose control of their lives and are compelled, like Jamesian characters, to engage in dramatic relationships with other characters and to strive to realise, often unsuccessfully, certain ideals. Experience becomes a test in which several questions are asked without yielding useful answers. This is true of the teeming crowd of characters in Nostromo who seem compelled to engage in relationships with others but who find that these involvements, rather than enhancing a communal identity and fuller

understanding, distance them instead from those whom they would seek to understand. A similar situation occurs in Under Western Eyes which, like Nostromo, also highlights the separateness of characters and the impossibility of ever knowing fully the nature of another, but at the same time creates characters such as Razumov and Haldin who can, paradoxically, realise their ideals only in securing their place in the community which eventually betrays them. Their dilemma makes extra demands on the reader who must probe their motivations from their actions and anguished confessions which in the end turn out to be questions rather than clues. Both novels question and requestion issues.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o admires and has adopted Conrad's questioning technique. 'This kind of questioning',he admits,'has impressed me a lot because with Conrad I have felt I have come into contact with another whose questioning to me is much more important than the answers which he gives'.[53] Ngugi's Petals of Blood and A Grain of Wheat[54] deploy similar devices to those used by Conrad in Nostromo and Under Western Eyes. Petals of Blood, like Nostromo, is a complex of interfused confessions emanating from the dramatic actions of characters who are caught in a crucial historical event. In both novels that event is the advent of capitalism; of 'material interests' and the impact this event brings to bear on individual characters and on the societies depicted. What Thomas Moser says of Nostromo could well be said of Petals of Blood. Both novels, to quote Moser, 'literally annihilate the reader with a surfeit of sounds, sights, names, facts and complicated information imperfectly apprehended.'[55] Moser has suggested, with regard to Nostromo, that this is a deliberate way of enabling the reader to experience some of the emotional chaos

of the characters. This is also true of Petals of Blood. The two novels show that there are other sides to the central concerns of the novels. Each of the major characters in the novels, like Munira in Petals of Blood, imagines that he has found a key which opens up, 'once and for all time the true universal connection between things, events, persons, places and time',[56] but Munira's conviction only leads him to the arson which causes the three murders under investigation and is as mistaken and as disastrous as Nostromo's decision to 'get rich slowly'.[57] In these novels, as all but a few of the characters learn, things are not what they seem. What appears as a clue to one character becomes just a fresh question to another.

There are also striking resemblances between A Grain of Wheat and Under Western Eyes some of which have been pointed out by Ebele Obumselu, Peter Nazareth and Douglas Killam.[58] Both novels, like Petals of Blood and Nostromo, are a complex of personal stories linked by a crucial historical moment. Here, the moment is a political assassination in nations undergoing dramatic tensions. Under Western Eyes portrays an eye-witness but he is neither a Marlow, nor one of Faulkner's protagonists who shares the anguish of his 'double'. Here the teacher of languages simply represents the eyes through which the reader may watch the drama that unfolds. Similarly, Ngugi's narrator, if occasionally seeming to participate in the action, is only the eyes through which the drama of the novel unfolds: all the races, the nocturnal meetings and the tensions revolve around Mugo, Kihika, Karanja, Gikonyo and Mumbi.

Each of the major characters in all four novels presents a point of

view on the major concerns and in each novel these variegated attitudes are expressed largely through metaphor. Metaphor is a pervasive feature of Conrad's technique as it is of Ngugi's and in each case these metaphors recur in simple or cumulative repetitions. Both writers also violate chronology although their violations do not take the reader into the middle of things as is the case in the dramatized perspectives of James and Soyinka. Instead, the reader is taken to a point after the fact, then around and around the fact - a method Faulkner also employs in Absalom, Absalom! It is an 'evasiveness' that stimulates greater appreciation of their works, it provides each with complexity and enriches the narrative.

Ngugi's novels are, however, not mere derivations of his mentor, much as their techniques and themes match. The comparison in this chapter highlights the affinities and similarities in method but it also highlights the differences and gives the possible reasons for such differences and shows how they represent a significant addition to Ngugi's favourite technique.

Much of what has been said of the novels of Conrad and Ngugi could also be said of the novels of Faulkner and Ayi Kwei Armah but there are significant variations on the multiple perspective by the latter pair which justify their separate treatment in chapter five. Studies of Faulkner's narrative techniques have generated some useful metaphors which underline the subtlety in his novels and the essential difference between them and the novels of Conrad. Warren Beck, for example, describes Faulkner's narratives as 'one of those brightly coloured Chinese eggs ... which when opened, (disclosed) egg after egg, each smaller and subtler than the first.' Warren Beck elaborates:

> There is no absolute, no eternal pure white radiance in such presentation, but rather the strain of many colours, refracted and shifting in kalaedoscopic suspension, about the centre of man's enigmatic behaviour and fate, within the drastic orbit of mortality.
> [59]

Faulkner allows a variety of consciousnesses to reflect on the central concerns of his novels and each novel reveals a subtler variation of the technique: each gives the reader the task of fitting pieces together. The sum total of the fragments makes the story, in much the same way, Faulkner once suggested, that a carpenter fits bits and pieces together to build a cabinet. <u>As I Lay Dying</u>[60] is a good example of this technique at work. The story of the novel emerges through the interplay of fifteen narrators; each of these narrative fragments contributes to the central story which records the journey undertaken by the Bundren family.

Faulkner's analogy, however, though appropriate for <u>As I Lay Dying</u> could be misleading in the context of <u>Absalom, Absalom!</u>[61] Here Faulkner's technique offers, perhaps, not so much a finished cabinet, but the bits and pieces with which to build one. The narrators in <u>Absalom, Absalom!</u> are apprentice carpenters: curious but incompetent. Even though Faulkner tried to minimise the problem by describing the novel's technique as 'thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird', it is more useful, as Richard Poirer suggests, to look at the novel as the work of historical recreation.[62] The narrators tell their story more in the manner of the historian, who, to paraphrase Albert Guerard, clarifies and vivifies the past from often sparse, distorted and conflicting evidence, sometimes refusing to decide between alternatives and even describing his process of inconclusive

reasoning.[63] Their narration of the Sutpen saga thrives on the historian's sense of conjecture. Conjecture, here, becomes a point of view and thus a vehicle for plausible creation of character and events. A double focus, akin to Conrad's in Lord Jim, emerges, in which the observer-narrators themselves are centres of dramatic interest as well as the story they relate to the reader: Absalom, Absalom! is as much a story of Quentin,Compson, Shreve and their collaborating narrators as it is of Thomas Sutpen.

Ayi Kwei Armah employs similar techniques to those used by William Faulkner. Fragments,[64] as the title itself reveals, is a story put together through the consciousnesses of three major narrators in collaboration with other witnesses. In the novel, as in As I Lay Dying, the main narrators are caught in the dilemma of trying to understand an impossible situation. In As I Lay Dying, Cash the carpenter tries, with much anguish, to explain Darl's 'madness' but is unsuccessful even after 'driving the nails down and trimming the edges well'.[65] Similarly, Naana finds that things have passed which she has never seen whole, 'only broken and twisted against themselves'[66]. For the reader, however, the other bits and pieces, revealed through the consciousness of the other narrators and witnesses, make the larger meanings of which both Cash and Naana are unaware.

Why Are We So Blest?[67] is a variant of the technique of multiple perspective, different from Fragments in the same way that Absalom, Absalom! differs from As I Lay Dying. Solo Nkonam treats the stories of Modin and Aimée in the same way that Quentin and Shreve, with help from Rosa Coldfield and Mr Compson, handle the

story of Thomas Sutpen. In place of the skeletal story of Sutpen, Solo has Modin's notebooks:

> I searched them, filling in holes, answering questions I have asked myself and found no answers to, speculating, arranging and rearranging these notes to catch all possible meaning.
>
> 68

Solo's need 'to catch all possible meaning' coincides with the desperate need of the two Harvard roommates to make meaning out of Sutpen's story. Solo arranges and rearranges Modin's notes to catch a meaning in the same way Quentin and Shreve, and their collaborating narrators arrange and rearrange Sutpen's story. Seen in this way repetition becomes an inevitable ingredient of their narrative technique. Repetition serves as an accummulative device which enables the narrators to tease out meaning from the numerous ambiguous situations in which they find themselves. An elaborate use of metaphor enhances this ambiguity. Metaphor is used as a pliable and flexible tool, one which should help the narrators to catch the meaning they so desperately need. Also, the time-scheme of the novels is affected by their persistent arrangement and rearrangement and, as in the novels of Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Kofi Awoonor, time constitutes a major element in the novels.

The chapter, therefore, highlights the kinship and affinities between the novels of Faulkner and Armah through a close examination of the nature of their characterisation, through their use of metaphor and of repetition and the way in which time is handled in the novels. They are, however, examined, as in chapter four, as novels deploying the multiple perspective. As in chapter four it is affirmed that similarities in technique have been matched by affinities in thematic concerns. As I Lay Dying and Fragments are both family stories

which set the members of a family against each other. Baako, like Darl Bundren, is declared insane by the rest of the family even though it is difficult to say which,the individual or the family, is sane. Similarly, Solo, who 'even before (his) death has become a ghost wandering about the face of the earth',[69] bears a resemblance to Quentin who is also 'too young to deserve yet to be a ghost, but nevertheless having to be one for all that, since he was born and bred in the deep south'.[70] Both characters are doomed through some cause antecedent to their own existence; both are victims of some larger fatality marked for their respective environments, the American South for one and Africa for the other. Indeed Armah's Africa is portrayed in the two novels in the same melancholy tone for which Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha county has become famous. Michael Echeruo is right to assert that 'Armah is for (us) what Faulkner was to the American South: A Jeremiah without Jehovah'[71].

The novelist who speaks for his community may adopt the voice of the community or he may assert the communal voice by creating characters who represent the group. The novels examined in the next three chapters are written on behalf of a community and the novelists probably agree with Achebe that 'their aims and the deepest aspirations of (their) society meet'[72]. The technique at their disposal is described as the COMMUNAL PERSPECTIVE. We may agree with Mark Schorer that 'the devices of point of view enable the novelist to disentangle his own prejudices and predispositions from those of his characters'[73] but such a view needs modification with regard to these novels which deploy the communal perspective. This is because the novels emerge as the record of participant observers whose identification with the world they relate is total but they also

reveal another voice looking over the shoulder of such observers and, as in Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers[74] highlighting and endorsing the dichotomy created between 'us' and 'them'. The novelist 'disappears' only to reinforce values and attitudes which the created world depicts.

Several innovatory issues emerge from such a concept of point of view, some of which have already been pointed out. It will be recalled that pronomial usage, for instance, can no longer be relied upon as a yardstick for determining point of view in the novels. Moreover the reader who comes to the novels with the conviction that character is 'a paradigm of traits',[75] or who 'joins character and psychological representation as the Siamese twins of novel theory'[76] will face serious problems of interpretation. The traits of the community may not be hard to describe and their psychology may be equally easy to decode but the reader will need to revise his views about what constitutes traits and what constitutes psychology in order to accommodate a human referent which is larger than the figures to which he has become accustomed. Such an open theory of characterisation would enable the reader to see a figure with varying degrees of richness of detail not commonly associated with a single character. In Two Thousand Seasons, Anoa emerges as such a figure, so that the twenty narrators through whose eyes the story comes to the reader become mere manifestations or traits of this protagonist; they provide diversity to what is, in fact, a unified whole, or what we may now call a character. A similar situation occurs in The Healers where Esuano is the focus of attention while the other 'characters', though more developed than those in the other novel, still appear as the many traits of a dominant character.

Both novels, like the novels of Achebe before them, demand a review of the classical attributes of character that the reader has come to expect in a novel; such attributes as 'proper name', 'physical and moral nature' need to be transferred from the individual to a community. Similarly, questions which help characterisation such as 'who is he?' and 'what does he stand for?' are still relevant but in the novels under study they should read as 'who are they?' and 'what do they stand for?' The innovative use of language in the novels provides the novelist with an effective tool to manipulate point of view and thus lead the reader to answers which such questions about character demand. There are novels, as Rimmon-Kenan observes, 'in which the language of the characters is individuated and distinguished from that of the narrator',[77] but, in Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers, for example, Armah attempts to submerge the voice of the narrator in the collective narrative voice, making the plurality of the narrator an integral part of the novel's meaning.

With Achebe such a voice finds expression in terse proverbial sayings and in the songs and tales, but Armah attempts, not very successfully, to create a completely new language through a reversal of symbols and metaphors and a combination of 'imitation' and 'translation'. Armah's novels reveal a 'simple' language which, the reader may assume, is the hallmark of the communities that are portrayed. The novels also create a setting in time and in space which is unique to the communities portrayed, one which the narrators clearly love and with which they wish to be identified. This is usually given poignancy through the use of contrast whereby a beautiful garden, for instance, is destroyed by forces of evil. Fertile lands and times are violated by the forces of destruction and the nostalgia which pervades the

novels is a lament for what might have been as it is a prayer for what will yet be if 'the people of the way' discover their true voice and their true homeland.

The novels are also marked by a sense of performance in the manner of folk-tales. The narrators regard their task more as an exercise in 'verbal art' aimed at an audience of 'hearers' or 'listeners' than the narration of a story to passive readers. The awareness of an audience becomes thus an integral part of the novels and also helps in establishing point of view in them. The reader is required, like the audience at a folk session, to participate in the 'eloquent' story-telling in which he has become a part.

Both Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers seek to recreate and renact history. Both are novels which explain the destiny of black people as Armah sees it. Armah's communal perspective dispenses with the individual character which is the hallmark of the Western novel and substitutes in its place the character of the black race depicted as the communities of Anoa and Esuano respectively. He uses individual characters where they appear as traits of the larger character whose destiny he seeks to fashion into what Soyinka has described as a 'rational ideal'. The devices Armah deploys are similar to those which were used earlier by Chinua Achebe and Gabriel Okara even if they have different emphases. In their novels the character of the communities is delineated with the kind of attention and detail which may be found in novels which would normally be described as novels of character. The shifts in emphasis have made it necessary to divide this section on the communal perspective into three chapters. Chapter six considers two novels of Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart

and Arrow of God,[78] while chapter seven examines two of Armah's novels, Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers. Chapter eight focusses on Gabriel Okara's only novel, The Voice.[79]

Point of view is the bonding theme of this study. It plays a crucial role in the concept of the novel held by all the novelists discussed. Each of the novels has various levels of emphasis through which point of view may be analysed. Thus only characterisation is constant in the discussion of each chapter. It is held that the redistribution of the elements of character does not totally destroy it and that the method by which character and motivation are brought to the reader is paramount to the reader's understanding of the novel's point of view. Other methods, however, differ. For instance, a novel whose primary perspective is to dramatize the events and actions will be better understood if other dramatic elements such as the use of scene and action, or dialogue are taken into account. The inward perspective requires greater attention to symbolism and to the uses of memory while the novel deploying the multiple perspective requires greater regard to the use of metaphor and to the ways through which repetition emphasises the novel's central concerns. Language is a common denominator of all novels but attention to it becomes more crucial when the reader needs to distinguish between numerous voices in a novel. It is also assumed that setting (spatial and temporal) may be common to most novels but it may not be as essential in some novels as it is, say, in the novels of Chinua Achebe and Ayi Kwei Armah. Point of view thus provides a flexibility of method that makes adjustments according to a novel's main areas of emphasis.

In discerning kinships and affinities between the novels the loaded question of influence has been assumed in essence. This is not an unreasonable assumption given the nature of the education and experience of the African novelists. Ayi Kwei Armah, for instance, has published stories in the same journals which published Faulkner and since he studied in America in the years following Faulkner's Nobel Prize it is not too much to assume that he would have read and appreciated Faulkner's novels and could not have remained unaffected by them.[80] Moreover most of the writers themselves, Achebe, Awoonor, Ngugi and Okara have acknowledged debts to their British and American counterparts. Influence, however, is not the prime concern of the thesis. Rather the novels are allowed to define one another. They reveal very striking similarities in method and thematic concerns which may be food for thought for those concerned with the question of influence. The guiding philosophy behind the work, however, may be found in Achebe's metaphor:

> Let every people bring their gifts to the great festival of the world's cultural harvest and mankind will be all the richer for the variety and distinctiveness of the offerings.
> 81

The gifts, as it were, are displayed and described in the following chapters.

Notes

1. Chinweizu et al., Toward the Decolonization of African Literature Vol.1 (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980) p.4.

2. John D. Hazlett, 'Literary Nationalism and Ambivalence in Washington Irvin's The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus, in American Literature Vol.55, No.4 (December 1983), p.560.

3. Chinweizu et al. op. cit. p.170.

4. Edris Makward, 'Is There an African Approach to African Literature?' Bulletin of the African Studies Association (New York, 1968) pp. 11-12.

5. Ezuma Igwe, cited in Lewis Nkosi, Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles in African Literature (London: Longman, 1981), p.ii.

6. Cited in Nkosi op. cit. p.ii.

7. Kofi Awoonor, The Breast of the Earth (New York: Doubleday, 1975) p.347.

8. Cited in Chinweizu et al. op. cit. p.9.

9. Eustace Palmer, An Introduction to the African Novel, (London: Heinemann, 1972), pp.155-167.

10. Douglas Killam, An Introduction to the Writing of Ngugi (London: Heinemann, 1980), pp. 96-118. Gerard Moore, Twelve African Writers (London: Hutchinson, 1980) pp.263-288.

11. Cited in Chinua Achebe, Morning Yet on Creation Day, (London: Heinemann, 1975), p.52.

12. ibid. p.52.

13. Thomas A. Hale, 'Africa and the West: Close Encounters of a Literary Kind'. Comparative Literature Studies Vol.20, No.3 (1983), p.262.

14. Theo Vincent, 'Black Aesthetics and Criticism of African Literature', West African Journal of Modern Languages, Vol. 2 (1976) p.23.

15. Solomon Iyasere, 'Cultural Formalism and the Criticism of Modern African Literature'. Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1974), p.442.

16. Romanus Egudu, 'Criticism of Modern African Literature: The Question of Evaluation', World Literature Written in English, Vol.21, No.1 (1982) pp. 54-75.
Victor Aire, 'African Literature and the Problem of Evaluation' West African Journal of Modern Languages, vol.2 (1978) pp.35-43
Lewis Nkosi, Tasks and Masks op. cit. pp. 1-8.

17. All this of course is not to deny the existence of some very good critical studies of the novel in Africa. Many of these, however, have been those that go to the text without any preconditions and are prepared to listen to the voices within the text. See especially David Caroll, Chinua Achebe (London: Macmillan, 1980).

18. Neil McEwan, Africa and the Novel (London: Macmillan, 1983), p.1.

19. Kole Omotoso, The Form of the African Novel: A Critical Essay (Akure: Fagbamigbe Publishers, 1979), p.v.

20. K. Omotoso op. cit. p.v.

21. ibid. p.v.

22. Theo Vincent op. cit. p.22.

23. Helen Tiffin, 'Commonwealth Literature and Comparative Methodology', World Literature Written in English, Vol.23, No.1 (1984), p.30.

24. In an apparently desperate urge to explain the literature to 'outsiders' much of the criticism of the African novel has concentrated on thematic questions.

25. Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (London: Jonathan Cape, 1921) p.251.

26. Both essays by Wayne Booth and Norman Friedman are included in The Theory of the Novel, ed. Philip Stevick (New York, The Free Press, 1967), pp.85-138.

27. Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative, (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.275.

28. Gerard Genette, Narrative Discourse (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p.246.

29. Genette op. cit. p.215.

30. Boris Uspensky, A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form trans. V. Zavarin and Susan Wittig (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973) p.127.

31. Susan Sniader Lanser, The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p.60.

32. The Art of Fiction ed. R.P. Blackmur, (London: Charles Scribner's Press, 1934), p.171.

33. ibid. p.186.

34. R.W. Short, 'Some Critical Terms of Henry James' PMLA Lxv (1950) pp. 668-679.

35. Information obtained from James Gibbs through correspondence.

36. Sallie Sears, The Negative Imagination: Form and Perspective in the Novels of Henry James (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968) p.39.

37. Derek Elders, 'James Ngugi: A Grain of Wheat'. ALT No.1 (1968) p.52.

38. Ernest Baker, The History of the English Novel, IX (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1936) p.257.

39. The Tragic Muse p.510 and The Interpreters p.178.

40. The Art of Fiction p.310.

41. Melvin Friedman, Stream of Consciousness: A Study in Literary Method. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955) p.4.

42. Virginia Woolf, The Common Reader Second series (London: Hogarth Press, 1965) pp.79-80.

43. ibid. p.81.

44. Kofi Awoonor, This Earth My Brother (London: Heinemann, 1972).

45. Palaver: Interviews with Five African Writers, (Austin: African and Afro-American Research Institute,1972) p.61.

46. Richard Priebe, 'Kofi Awoonor's This Earth My Brother as an African Dirge', Benin Review, 1 (1975), p.95.

47. Kofi Awoonor, 'The Poem, the Poet, and the Human Condition', Asemka, No.5 (1979), p.20.

48. George Moore, The Lake (London: Heinemann, 1905), p.334.

49. James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (London: Granada, 1977, first published 1916).

50. Virginia Woolf, The Waves (London: Granada, 1977, first published 1931).

51. G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, Life and Letters, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1927), p.204.

52. Joseph Conrad, Nostromo (London: Penguin, 1963), Under Western Eyes (London: Penguin 1957),

53. Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse, African Writers Talking, (London: Heinemann, 1972), p.124.

54. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Petals of Blood (London: Heinemann, 1977), A Grain of Wheat, (London: Heinemann, 1967).

55. Thomas Moser, Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline, (Connecticut: Anchor Books, 1957), p.43.

56. Petals of Blood, p.190.

57. Nostromo, p.446.

58. Ebele Obumselu, 'A Grain of Wheat: Ngugi's Debt to Conrad'. Benin Review 1 (1975) pp.80-91. Peter Nazareth, 'Is A Grain of Wheat a Socialist Novel?' Literature and Society in Modern Africa (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1973) pp.128-154. Douglas Killam, An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi, (London: Heinemann, 1960), p.17.

59. Warren Beck, 'William Faulkner's Style' in Four Decades of Criticism ed. Linda Wagner, (Michigan: University Press, 1973), p.152.

60. William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying (London: Penguin, 1963)first published 1930

61. William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (London: Penguin, 1971)first published 1936

62. Richard Poirer 'Strange Gods in Jefferson' in Twentieth Century Views on Absalom, Absalom! ed. Arnold Goldman, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: 1971) p.14.

63. Albert Guerard, The Triumph of the Novel: Dickens, Dostoevsky, Faulkner. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976),p.322.

64. Ayi Kwei Armah, Fragments (London: Heinemann, 1974).

65. As I Lay Dying, p.185.

66. Fragments, p.280.

67. Ayi Kwei Armah, Why Are We So Blest? (London: Heinemann, 1974)

68. ibid., p.231.

69. ibid., p.11.

70. Absalom, Absalom! p.6.

71. M.J.C. Echeruo, Poets, Prophets and Professors, Inaugural Lecture, (Ibadan, 1977) p.15.

72. Chinua Achebe, 'The Novelist as Teacher', in Commonwealth Literature, ed. John Press, (London: Heinemann, 1965) p.279.

73. Mark Schorer, 'Technique as Discovery' in The Theory of the Novel ed. Philip Stevick (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p.66.

74. Ayi Kwei Armah, Two Thousand Seasons (London: Heinemann, 1979).
The Healers (London: Heinemann, 1979).

75. Stephen Cohan, 'Readable Character', in Novel: A Forum on Fiction Vol.17, No.1 (1983) p.6.

76. ibid p.7.

77. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics (London: Methuen, 1983) p.64.

78. Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart, (London: Heinemann, 1958, 1981)
Arrow of God, (London: Heinemann, 1964).

79. Gabriel Okara, The Voice (London: Heinemann, 1964).

80. Armah's stories have appeared in Atlantic Monthly and Harper's Magazine both of which were Faulkner's main journals.

81. Chinua Achebe, Morning Yet on Creation Day, op.cit.p.54.

Chapter Two : The Dramatised Perspective

Henry James, The Tragic Muse

The Ambassadors

Wole Soyinka, The Interpreters

Season of Anomy

i

Both James and Soyinka push their novels as far toward the spoken and the dramatic as they can. Both create scenes which are composed of the conflicting attitudes of the protagonists. These scenes and their underlying conflicts give the novels form and meaning; they determine their point of view. Mark Kinkead-Weekes has observed similar tendencies in a study of Richardson who, it appears, clearly anticipated both novelists. Of Richardson's novels, Kinkead-Weekes has remarked:

> We have to measure the points of view against one another to understand how things happen and what will happen next; as scenes are repeated with variations, Richardson keeps giving his characters the freedom of another chance, which they use increasingly to determine themselves. Scenes become linked in chains, where apparent repetition points up significant differences and reveals development.
>
> 1

It is thus not surprising that 'interpretation' is at the heart of the novels being examined. The protagonists interpret others, are themselves interpreted by other characters and by readers who may assume the role of an audience at a play. The process is enhanced by a skilful use of scene and action and by the use of dialogue. Each character plays significant roles in the action. 'The action', observes Edwin Muir, in a related context,'begins never with a single figure, but with two or more; it starts from several points on its circumference which is a complex, not a nucleus, of personal relationships'.[2] To understand the nature of the point of view expressed in the novels is to penetrate this complex.

ii

Characterisation

If Soyinka or James was to begin his novel by inserting a page announcing the 'dramatis personae' it would all be in order, for the first thing that strikes the reader of the novels is a sense of characters impelled by the need to engage in dramatic relationships with others. Characters in their novels have an inherent dramatic element in them which makes the relationships they subsequently engage in mere antagonistic attractions warring for their soul, a situation not unlike the law of physics which defines the contact of like and unlike poles. Each of the major characters is portrayed as 'two men' with scarcely a point in common. There are, thus, two concomitant dramatic situations posed in characterisation which consist of the drama within the character and the equally dramatic encounter he confronts in relationships.

In The Tragic Muse, there is Nick Dormer, bred up in a richly political atmosphere and with traditionally political antecedents, introduced to environmental influences which push him in two opposed directions - into the House of Commons and into the Artist's Studio. As if the situation were not complicated enough the reader soon discovers that Nick's nature defies any obligations. Choice is a form of tyranny for one who is 'highly imaginative', independent minded and largely a dreamy character. Nick Dormer, however, is not alone. Together with Miriam Rooth, Peter Sherringham and Gabriel Nash he forms a 'community of interests'. Background characters

such as Julia Dallow and Charles Carteret represent the world that is being interpreted. This pair of characters represent the political world against whose influence Nick battles.

Relationships in The Tragic Muse suggest complexities. In considering a writer such as James, who was very concerned with narrative perspective, it is useful to dwell on the nature of these relationships because they help the reader's contextual knowledge of the characters whose type is categorised here. 'The most important of contexts', says Harvey, 'is the web of human relationships in which any single character must be enmeshed. So much of what we are can only be defined in terms of our relations with other people'.[3] In The Tragic Muse the 'web of relationships' itself is a source of drama. What the reader is offered is an exercise in contrast and comparison. In order to facilitate this exercise James arranges his characters as in a director's diagram and we never lose sight of them on stage. Consequently all his characters are a lively and gregarious lot. They shuttle from house to house, in and out of hansoms; we meet them at rehearsals, at restaurants and at playhouses or on several occasions simply walking, but they are very seldom alone. Indeed there is a close relationship between the characters: Nick Dormer and Gabriel Nash were schoolmates and Nick is a cousin of both Peter Sherringham and Julia Dallow. Gabriel Nash introduces Miriam Rooth and her mother to his friends, and again an intricate relationship develops. Often these characters act as one 'family':

> ... Weren't they all caught in a common centrifuge
> through the hurt of gilded abstractions, full
> of flies reaching for a long time - whisk to
> brush away thought smarts embedded in each
> sting. [4]

Soyinka's metaphor sums up much of their story.

The key word in all these close but intricate relationships is conflict, crucial to drama. In whatever way we see them, the relationships of the characters in the novel are built on conflict. Moreover the drama that faces them is not usually a question of choice as they seem to imply, rather they are confronted with a dilemma in which any decision means some major sacrifice, capitulation or surrender. This is the situation facing Nick Dormer who, through Julia Dallow and Charles Carteret, is confronted with the consequences of apostasy . In fact, he finds that he hardly gets a chance to make a choice. On his election Nick confesses that 'he had done something even worse than not choose - he had let others choose for him'[5]. Conflict, for him, is poised in so many directions that he becomes 'a broken reed' destined, as it were, to float with the tide. Yet the alternative is often beautiful, 'the beauty of having taken the world in a brave personal way'.[6]

The need to take the world in a brave personal way is recognised by Gabriel Nash who poses as a father, not only to Nick Dormer, but also to the other artist, Miriam, both of whom find in him an 'ambiguous but an excellent touchstone'. Nash both clarifies and confuses the two artists. He tries to outline the 'choices' more clearly but because he favours the 'artistic life' he tends to ignore the attraction which the political world offers his friends. To intensify the conflict and perhaps to confuse them further, he disappears without a trace, '(melts) back into the elements, part of the ambient air', as dramatic as the situations that he helped to

invent, introduce and reveal.

This inherent conflict within and among the characters in the novel takes further dramatic dimensions when they relate with the 'outside' world. Their lives are a reaction to all that happens around them, indeed, as critics have repeatedly pointed out, the interest in James's novels is not so much in the events but in the reactions of the characters to those events. The corrupt reality is intensified to bring out the potential creativity of the imaginative consciousness. This is why James appears to have chosen his characters very carefully; they are usually people of very high intellect, but in order to evaluate them properly James gives them a rich background against which their talents can be tested to their fullest realisation. There is a sharp contrast, for instance, between the world of politics and the world of the artist when the action takes place in Charles Carteret's house. Everything inside the house down to the shoes is 'King-Size', grotesque, but attractive in its own way. When the reader learns that Carteret would have bequeathed £60,000 to Nick, he begins to see the nature of the sacrifice that poor Nick has had to make. 'The pull of the grandeur of the nation, of politics' is so strong, it is not surprising that Nick becomes restless, walking in and out of the house. As if Charles Carteret, with his constant reminders of Nick's late father, was not enough, Nick is faced with an even bigger dilemma in Julia Dallow who is not only rich but is beautiful and is perhaps even in love with him. Faced with such 'monsters' and with 'only' Gabriel Nash as the guiding philosopher, life, for Nick, presents conflicts at their worst. It is no wonder that he comes out only in partial triumph.

Egbo and his fellow interpreters face similar situations in Soyinka's novel. Egbo, for instance, discovers that he is forced to make a choice between taking over the inheritance of his father's kingdom or becoming a bureaucrat in Lagos; 'to set the war lord of the Creeks against dull grey file cabinet faces of the Foreign Office'.[7] As in The Tragic Muse, Egbo, in The Interpreters is not alone. Together with Sagoe, Bandele, Kola and Sekoni, he forms a community of interests. Background characters such as the Oguazors and Ayo Faseyi represent the world which Egbo's community seeks to interpret. In addition to the corrupt politicians, Sagoe's employers at the Board of the 'Independent Viewpoint', the Oguazors and Ayo Faseyi represent the 'plastic values' with which the interpreters strive to come to terms. They must, however, first come to terms with themselves. But because they are, like the characters in The Tragic Muse, highly imaginative, independent minded and dreamy, they soon find that attempts to clarify their positions are fraught with complications. For them too choice is a form of tyranny and like the characters in James's novel they all have to face the consequences of 'apostasy'.

Like James, Soyinka also 'enmeshes' his characters in a web of relationships which invites the reader to compare and contrast their actions with those with whom they come into contact. As in James's novel Egbo and his crowd of friends are a lively and gregarious lot. The Interpreters presents an ubiquitous cast of characters who move from one town to another, from one night-club to yet another night-club, drinking with epicurian relish. They were all school mates and seem to find it easy to keep in touch. Their group instinct is most noticeable when they are faced with a common dilemma; the outside world inspires unity within the group

which eventually leads to severance. The unity is only a preparation for intense dramatic moments. The close ties do not make the drama less complex, in fact, the contrary is the case, for Soyinka, like James, is a master of the dramatic paradox. At moments when the cast is assembled, such as the night they all go to watch Joe Golder's play, they acknowledge that 'it is a night of severance, every man is going his way'.[8] Even when one of them, Sekoni, is dead, their common grief only triggers separation and it requires the calm of Bandele to bring back some sense of community.

Yet even Bandele fails because conflict seems to be indispensible to their lives. The relationships of the characters in The Interpreters, like those in The Tragic Muse, are built on conflict. Here too the drama that faces the characters is not merely one about questions of choice, they too are confronted with dilemmas in which any decision means some major sacrifice or capitulation. Like Nick Dormer, Egbo likens himself to 'a broken reed'. Perhaps, even worse than Nick, he seems at times incapable of floating with the tide. 'All his friends are busy doing something' he admits, 'but (he) merely goes from one event to the other as if life was nothing but experience'[9]. Yet, like Nick, he has so much talent and promise, indeed all the others, especially the artist Kola, envy him. Egbo's drama is presented through comparison and contrast with his fellow interpreters and through the juxtaposition of his positive and negative features.

Contrast may be recognised, for instance, between Egbo and Sekoni who 'dares to be fulfilled'. In the short period that he lives in the novel he acts as a foil to Egbo's recklessness and apostasy. As an electrical engineer he builds a plant but when he cannot get

a chance to test it he redirects his energies to his latent talent and sculpts 'The Wrestler' which all the interpreters acknowledge is a great work. But perhaps Egbo's greatest foil is Bandele, the taciturn teacher, the mask of infinite patience who at times is like 'a timeless image brooding over lesser beings'. Bandele resembles Gabriel Nash in The Tragic Muse a great deal. Both men are good natured and they both go out of their way to help and comfort others. 'We have only one life', says Nash, 'that we know about: fancy taking it up with disagreeable impression'.[10] There is a similar attitude in Bandele which irritates and exasperates the other characters, notably Egbo, Sagoe, and Kola who cannot find reasons to explain his concern for the beach prophet Lazarus, for instance. Soyinka's method, like James's, works through these contrasting relationships between the highly active characters. He exploits the differences between them to very good use and makes it impossible to understand any character until the reader places such a character's point of view against those of the others.

This is why, as in The Tragic Muse, the reader notices further dramatic relationships when the 'interpreters' enter into contact with others outside their group. As in James's novel the interest in The Interpreters is not so much in the events but in the reactions of the characters to those events. Critics who read the novel as socio-political satire mediated on Soyinka's behalf by the interpreters do not do the novel much justice.[11] It is true that the world of The Interpreters is a corrupt one but the corruption is not Soyinka's subject. On the contrary, Soyinka, like James, is concerned with the way the characters react to corruption. Corruption is the excuse they use to 'review' their lives, and the lives of others around

them. It should not be forgotten that though they are interpreters of Society the technique of the novel equally enables the reader to interpret them as well.

None of them, for instance, would want to be like Sir Derinola, the discredited judge sleeping at the back of a limousine while his accomplice tries unsuccessfully to extract a bribe from Sagoe, but beyond that, and beyond the 'plastic values' which they recognise in the Oguazors, they are themselves just as confused. Kola speaks for them:

> Fitfully, far too fitfully for definite realisation of the meaning, he had felt this sense of power, the knowledge of power within his hands, of the will to transform; and he understood then that medium was of little importance, that the act, on canvas or on human material was the process of living and brought him the intense fear of fulfilment. And this was another paradox, that he dared not truly be fulfilled. At his elbow was the invisible brake which drew him back from final transportation in the act.
> 12

It is difficult to sympathise with their apostacy and Soyinka invites the reader to interpret their 'betrayal' as it compares with that of the Oguazors, the Faseyis and Joe Golder. Even the grotesque beach prophet, Lazarus, as Bandele observes, seems to have done something more useful than most of the other interpreters. Says Bandele:

> ... One thing was obvious, this man did go through some critical experience. If he has chosen to interpret it in a way that would bring some kind of meaning into people's lives, who are you to scoff at it, to rip it up in your dirty pages with cheap cynicism ...
> 13

The inability of the others to follow Bandele's trend of argument is a mark of their delusion and a reflection of the point of view

of the implied author. If they do constantly clash in their numerous gatherings and if they do have more intense conflicts within them, their contact with their world merely aggravates these problems. In Soyinka, as in James, we move from crisis within the individual to that among individuals and eventually to the bigger clash, if only in spatial terms, with the outside world. In each case the movement generates dramatic tension.

In The Ambassadors, however, much of the drama is within the 'accumulated' consciousness of the protagonist. Strether is a man of intense feeling and rich imagination. Of him James had said:

> My poor friend should have accumulated character or rather would be quite naturally and handsomely possessed of it, in the sense that he would have imagination galore, and, that this yet wouldn't have wrecked him. [14]

Strether's qualities find him companions and antagonists. Waymarsh, for instance, is anti-Strether and a rich background of characters including Mrs Newsome emerge and play their various roles. Strether's own role and the web of relationships around him may appear simple but this simplicity must be seen in context. He is a 'promotions man' who comes into curious kinds of relationships with other characters in the course of his 'normal day-to-day duties'. These contacts facilitate and complicate his life at one and the same time. In each case 'coincidence' plays a crucial part. He meets Maria Gostrey in the hotel lobby, for instance, when he is waiting for his friend Waymarsh. This chance meeting, however, turns out not to be a coincidence, indeed it is part of the dramatic purpose of the novel that Miss Gostrey's significance as the 'reader's friend and confidante' should be introduced as early and as dramatically as possible. Tension and conflicts seem to intensify as these

coincidences multiply because Strether is a man with the 'oddity', to quote James, 'of a double consciousness'.

Strether's double consciousness makes some of his encounters assume an intense dramatic significance, indeed he tends to exaggerate a great deal. Paris, for instance, is magnified into 'a huge irridescent object'. His sensitive mind is constantly engaged in a battle, so that, when he makes contact with the more pervasive battle outside, the reader can only watch like a spectator at a play. The world outside is shown to be destructive and Strether seems to need a counter measure to stem impending disasters which are represented mainly by the curious and difficult love affairs in the novel. His power of resistance and his will to control events are called forth by the realities created by the conflicting demands of his 'mission'. As he acts out the drama, he invites the reader's company and sympathy. He starts out as an ambassador but as he goes about his job he finds himself coming into conflict with the very 'nation' that sent him on his diplomatic mission in the first place. He needs to readjust himself but readjustment demands a rejection of all that his nation holds sacred. He has failed as an ambassador and is literally relieved of his post with the arrival of the second batch of ambassadors. This experience, however, throws more light on his 'sacred' society and he begins to question its values. The novel is about his education and the knowledge that is gained through a series of conflicting encounters which eventually open his eyes to the true nature of the world around him. He starts off full of ideals about himself and his plans but the events he witnesses and in which he participates give him all that his imagination requires. The Ambassadors is a good dramatization of a process of

acquiring enlightenment.

Soyinka's Season of Anomy also dramatises a process of gaining wider vision. Ofeyi, like Strether, is a man of intense feeling and rich imagination. Just as Strether's 'accumulated character' finds companions and antagonists in The Ambassadors, so Ofeyi, in his quest, discovers, also by 'coincidence', Taiila, the Indian mystic who serves the same function as Maria Gostrey in James's novel. Ofeyi has further help from the Dentist as well as from the Old Man of Aiyero who open his eyes to virtues that were hitherto 'encapsulated in the floating spore of the Cross River Desert'.[15] Much of Ofeyi's drama, like Strether's, is internal because, like Strether, he is also a man with a double consciousness. He is full of contradictions within him and as the old man tells him 'has been defeated by life' and it shows in his tone. He has a good angel on one side, a bad angel on the other, a situation which, as in The Ambassadors, fuels and intensifies the dramatic tensions in the novel. Ofeyi is also prone to exaggeration. The woman Iriyise, for instance, is sometimes called Irridescent. She constitutes a myth, in the same way that Strether conjured Paris into a huge irridescent object. Hers is 'the irridescent face that lit (us) through the abyss of universal ugliness'.[16] The eyes of the Indian woman are described as 'luminous votives moving on invisible radials to the centre of the universe'.[17]

Ofeyi's vivid imagination intensifies the conflicts he encounters, some of which he in fact initiates. He is a man of action prone to 'grasp situations of chaos and - bang, bang, impose his own order on them'.[18] But he too undergoes a process of education through the dramatic encounters in which he engages with other characters

in the novel. Some of the conflicting encounters such as his violent clashes with the members of the Cartel call forth his powers of resistance and will to control events. Others such as the meetings with the Dentist or the Old Man of Aiyero are tests of his ability to control the twin forces within him. Both the Dentist and the old man preach violence as a necessary tool to contain the disaster created by his employers but he often must equally listen to Taiila who is the embodiment of peace. Ofeyi's alternating shifts between these two poles are the centre of the novel and its main source of dramatic interest. Like Strether in The Ambassadors, Ofeyi experiences life best through a series of conflicting encounters.

All four novels demonstrate how both novelists are capable of making dramatic the impressions that fill the moments of a character's normal day-to-day life. Both novelists make the protagonists live so that the reader may study their surfaces and reach conclusions which may differ from other observers of the situation. This process may best be seen at work in the way James and Soyinka handle the other devices of drama available to them such as scene and action, the subject of the next section.

iii

Scene and Action

In <u>Some Observations on the Art of Narrative</u>, Phyllis Bentley contends that:

> (The) scene gives the reader a feeling of participating in the action very intensely, for he is hearing about it contemporaneously, exactly as it occurs and the moment it has occurred; the only interval between its occurring and the reader hearing about it is that occupied by the novelist's voice telling it. The scene is therefore used for intense moments. The crisis, the climax of a sequence of actions is always narrated in scene.[19]

With regard to James and Soyinka, this observation, concise though it is, requires some modification. Phyllis Bentley is right in linking scene with action: scene functions as an arena where the action takes place. But her relation of scene to 'the crisis, the climax of a sequence of actions' does not apply to the Jamesian and Soyinkan novels under discussion. Nor is it the case that there is an 'interval between its occurring and the reader hearing about it' for, here, the scene is the cornerstone of narration, characters speak for themselves, so do the actions and scenes. As F.O. Mathiessen remarks, James had 'the ability to endow some of his characters with such vitality that they seem to take the plot into their own hands, or rather, to continue to live beyond its exigencies'.[20] There is no story outside these chain of scenes; they carry the action forward: because both novelists write 'to the moment they seem to write from moment to moment'.[21] James's technical requirements consisted more in where to 'alternate, distribute and bring relief'[22] than in the efficacy of the scenic method. Here is how he eulogised it:

> How through all hesitations and conflicts and worries ... the desire to get back only to the big (scenic constructions, 'architectural' effects) seizes me and carries me off my feet making me feel that it's a far deeper economy of time to sink at any moment, into the evocation and ciphering out of that, than into any other small beguilement at all. Ah, once more, to let myself go.
>
> 23

This was not misguided enthusiasm; most of the novels reveal a performed drama. They create life before our eyes; the characters behave as actors in a play, movement and behaviour being well documented in the series of scenes they enact. Each scene, as in drama, is 'copious, comprehensive, and accordingly never short ... it treats all the submitted material' and possesses its logical start, logical turn and logical finish'.[24] It is no wonder that James confessed in the Preface to The Tragic Muse that he always had 'the happy thought of some dramatic picture of the artist-life'.

The characters in The Tragic Muse may be seen as actors in a play. Indeed there is a large cast. Each character, however, is given a good chance to make his appearance felt. The novel's technique is described by Gabriel Nash:

> Ah, repetition - recurrence: We haven't yet, in the study of how to live, abolished that clumsiness, have we? ... It's a poverty in the supernumeraries that we don't pass once for all, but come round and across again, like a procession at the theatre. Its a shabby economy that ought to have been managed better. The right thing would be just one appearance, and the procession, regardless of expense forever and forever different.
>
> 25

The characters 'come around and across again' and their movement is

determined by their actions as well as the actions of those with whom they enter into relationships. The technique of alternation enables James to provide 'relief' and to introduce a freshness into the narration.

The first nine chapters (scenes?), for instance, are devoted to Nick's 'case'. They are scenes devoted to much activity, to the preparation for Nick's potential conflict. The seed of that conflict is cultivated from the very first chapter. Nick, we find, is a dreamer - it sounds for the moment like a bad word - so when he tells his sister that 'all artists are in the same boat'[26] there is an ominous fear, though the cause is not yet apparent, of someone rocking the boat and not long after this a potential rocker of Nick's boat, his mother, begins to make her presence felt; when art is mentioned she gets up 'to terminate the scene'.[27] But these are all 'rehearsals'. There are two rehearsals in this first segment of the story and they introduce Miriam Rooth but, because her 'case' is 'pending', they remain rehearsals in a literal sense. The final scene that ends this first segment (act?) of the story is very significant and it deserves special mention. It begins very slowly; Nick and Gabriel are walking:

> They kept on and on, moving slowly, smoking, talking, pausing, stopping to look, to emphasise, to compare. They fell into discussion, into confidence, into inquiry, sympathetic or satiric, and into explanation which needed in turn to be explained.
> [28]

This scene, however, takes a dramatic turn when the crucial issues are mentioned, the tension that Nick is undergoing begins to show and it is placed side by side with his friend's diligent, cool and

'objective' way of looking at the process of living. Gabriel Nash describes life in dramatic terms:

> ... A passenger jumps over from time to time, not so much from fear of sinking as from a want of interest in the course or the company. He swims, he plunges, he dives, he dips down and visits the fishes and the mermaids and the submarine caves; he goes from craft to craft and splashes about, on his own account, in the blue, cool water. The regenerate, as I call them, are the passengers who jump over in search of better fun. I turned my somersault long ago.
> 29

Nick's boat metaphor springs to life in his friend's dramatic presentation and towards the end of the scene, towards its logical finish, the dramatic conflict is well poised. Nick has to first fight against himself, and as he says to his friend:

> Everyone that belongs to me, that touches me, near or far: my family, my blood, my heredity, my traditions, my promises, my circumstances, my prejudices; my little past such as it is; my great future such as it is has been supposed as it may be. 30

The scandal of his apostasy will inspire horror, in his mother, his late father and Julia Dallow; for Nick, past, present, and future are areas of confusion and conflict and with this conflict dramatically poised James alternates, turning the reader's attention to the other 'case'.

There are parallels and contrasts in James's presentation of the scenes and actions in this second segment of the story. Miriam's existence is 'a series of parts assumed for the moment'[31] and, like Nick Dormer, she has Peter Sherringham, who has committed himself to help her, to look after her affairs. She rehearses her part since

it seems the nature of her art requires this of her and James presents the contrast in their approach to art through these series of rehearsals; this is her first major entrance. Three chapters are devoted to her case; three scenes whose 'middle' also consists of a walk culminating in the startling revelation that Peter is in love with Miriam. This is material for yet more drama, hence James returns the reader once again to the alternative case.

By the third segment Nick has now won his seat in parliament and the seed of conflict is already beginning to bear fruit. James's technique of delay and partial knowledge, which enhances the dramatic quality of the story, is becoming more polished.[32] In this segment skirmishes are made and dropped, as in the potentially explosive case of Charles Carteret's tantalising offer of a fine estate to Nick which is juxtaposed with Miriam's first major performance in London as well as with Nick's now conspicuous flirtation with portrait painting. And when matters get to a head the ubiquitous Nash arrives just in time to keep his word, as it were, to his old friends Nick and Miriam. By chapter twenty-six, the two 'cases' are brought together, action quickens and the dilemmas become more and more complicated. There are two parallel scenes in this chapter, one at the theatre and the other at Nick's studio where tension is heightened by the sudden arrival of Julia. The first scene shows how Nick Dormer's decision to take up painting is already causing problems for him. Part of that problem is related to his first choice of a model for a portrait. She happens to be Miriam of whom Julia Dallow, Nick's cousin and benefactress, would not approve. Both Miriam and Nick Dormer are therefore surprised and tense when Julia suddenly opens the door and enters 'without making a sound'. Julia's

eyes, the reader is told, rested on 'this embodied unexpectedness and grew pale' and all three become restless.[33] The parallel scene at the theatre is tense because the play in which Miriam is acting is 'ridiculous' and is a poor start to what it was hoped would be a glorious career. This restlessness, hence increased activity, assumes prominence and there is a breakdown in communication among the distracted actors. All the 'actors' are disenchanted. These are moments of severance; everyone goes his or her separate ways: Julia to Paris, Peter after going in and out of hansoms disappears to Latin America until James reassembles all the cast again in that final play to end 'The Play'. James's comic spirit nevertheless rewards some deserving and some undeserving people with marriages: Peter marries Biddy, Miriam marries Dashwood and Nick might marry Julia.

A brief description of the way James handles scenes and actions may take away the vividness and graphic details that all the scenes portray. Such scenes, however, are indispensable to the story; they are the essence of the story. They function through alternation, parallelism, juxtaposition, delayed and partial knowledge and through contrast.

Similar techniques have been employed by Soyinka in The Interpreters, indeed with greater dexterity. Movement in Soyinka's novel is breathtaking, sometimes even confusing, but Gabriel Nash's law about recurrence works here as it does in The Tragic Muse. In spatial terms, there are very few major scenes and actions. What creates the confusion is Soyinka's technique of creating mini-scenes through association. In The Tragic Muse one action triggers another and a

sense of sequence and order permeates the whole novel, whereas, in The Interpreters, the association may be a mere word, an image, such as Egbo's 'talkative puddle',[34] which leads to yet another dip into a completely different scene. Soyinka's ability to maintain a sense of unity in spite of this multiplicity of scenes is one of the good features of the novel. As in The Tragic Muse all the characters are performers and each gets a good chance to act his part. Partly because of their inherent dramatic qualities, each of them seems determined to out-perform the other. In the first chapter of Part One the urgency and chaos which is consistent with their role is presented in the cacophony of the night-club. The night-club scene alone presents five separate actions which are depicted in the manner of stage drama. The scene introduces and develops the potential areas of conflict. The reader follows the group of interpreters in the first instance as they battle with a leaking night-club roof and with their beer but he is suddenly taken to Egbo's village to witness the burial place of his father where a hint is given of his 'apostasy'. A third scene outlines aspects of Egbo's dilemma by tracing some elements in his character such as the test of wills between him and his aunt's trading partner. The scene shows some of his independence and intransigence. In the fourth 'scene' the reader is returned to the night-club where through a 'reviewing device' he learns of Sekoni, whose significance in the story cannot be ignored. The review even forecasts Sekoni's future and the final scene highlights the nature of the conflict between the group of interpreters, especially Sekoni, and the rest of society. In The Interpreters, as in The Tragic Muse, the actors are 'in the same boat', the chaos and the incessant arguments are an index of their harsh predicament. Lasumwon is perhaps right when he equates

their plight with that of the fish 'trapped' in an aquarium; 'closed in by avenues on which escape is so clearly written'. The fish 'is outraged, pauses in mid-motion and assaults through the mouth'.[35] It won't get out, nor will the interpreters. Like Nick Dormer, they are individually and collectively fighting their inner selves, their families, their traditions, their past and indeed their future. By the time the chapter comes to an end, Sekoni has already almost gone full circle: he lands in a mental hospital, an ominous sign, especially when it turns out that he is the only one among them who makes an effort, who dares to be fulfilled.

From this stage the action alternates between Sagoe and Egbo, the most dramatic of the interpreters. They carry us through dreams and real-life incidents such as Sagoe's raising of his former boss from the dead, or Egbo's affair with the undergraduate. These incidents are full of daring but are largely vulgar and obscene. They tell more about both men than the events they seek to represent. The first part of the novel ends with a gathering of all of the cast for what is clearly a rehearsal for the second part. Mark Kinkead-Weekes has observed that, as in his plays, Soyinka has:

> A habit of using a two-part structure to transform our view of what we have been watching: a first part predominantly satiric, comic and done in human terms; a second part tragic, mythic, and aware of the forces and perspectives beyond the human.[36]

In so far as this implies that the second part of the book is an exact repetition of the 'present story' of Part One, Kinkead Weekes is right. Where he errs is in implying that the second part is

tragic; it resorts to Yoruba myth but is not tragic, for the whole purpose of the story is the comic possibility that the five interpreters will somehow tame chaos if they try hard enough, if they follow the example of the Gods in whose image they are created. Ultimately the dichotomy in this novel serves a structural as well as a thematic function: by 'contrastive juxtaposition' the scenes display the glaring differences in the interpreters as well as the differences between their ideals and reality. Part two for instance opens on the tragic death of Sekoni and immediately exposes the inadequacies of his friends. Only Bandele is able to cope with Sekoni's absence with a sense of calm and composure. All the others display the triviality that has hitherto dominated their lives. Sagoe needs his Book of Enlightenment to help him cope with the event but it is as void as its sub-title suggests. Kola has clearly lost inspiration. Their friend's death is a major test which, excepting Bandele, exposes their shortcomings. They fail because they are not yet ready to follow the inspiration which their divine equivalents offer. The dichotomy also gives Soyinka the opportunity to reassemble all the fragments of the first part of the story; fragmentation and reassembly are the major theme of the Yoruba myth of creation:

> ... these floods of the beginning ... of the first apostle rolling the boulder down the back of the unsuspecting deity ... and shattering him in fragments, which were picked up and pieced together with devotion. [37]

The devotion of the Gods in picking up and piecing together is matched by a meticulous devotion on the part of the artist who also tries to piece together an otherwise chaotic first part. In this second

part the first scene is again in the night-club but by now Sekoni, who was left demented at the end of the first part, is dead. However, it is not the death on which attention is focussed since it is reported rather in a matter-of-fact way - it is the vibrations which it sets up among the surviving interpreters that is crucial. The scenes from now on depict the increasing knowledge or ignorance, as illustrated above, of the interpreters. There is a clear change in outlook on the part of Bandele, the Gabriel Nash of The Interpreters, who seeks to give a more concrete analysis of what they have witnessed and what their own actions amount to: 'he has gained knowledge of the new generation of interpreters'. The scene at Lazarus's church, for instance, represents moments of honest stock-taking. The reactions of each of the interpreters here is a comment on their character; it is a scene where Soyinka finally turns the satiric lens on them. By showing them as no better, perhaps even worse, than the charlatan prophet, Soyinka exposes them to the reader's 'interpretation'. After several scenes of carelessly interpreting the behaviour of others, however, they now refuse to be interpreted - minus Bandele that is. So, as in The Tragic Muse, they begin to go their several ways. In the scene at the theatre they all find 'it is a night of severance, every man is going his way'.[38] The final assembly at the Oguazors is like 'the tortoise shell around divine breath'. Soyinka has put some semblance of order on this story but only just. What has been represented here is 'an endless chain for the summons of the god' which, as it happens, most of the interpreters refuse to answer to their peril. This last scene, though more inconclusive than its equivalent in The Tragic Muse, represents a possibility, it is an interval. Man and God will sooner or later seek to:

> ... reassume that portion of recreative
> transient awareness which the first
> deity - Orisa-nla - possessed. [39]

The Ambassadors, too, progresses as a sequence of scenes and the continuity and interactions between them are established through Strether's hyperactive consciousness: Strether is 'constantly in the habit of shaking the bottle in which life handed him the wine of experience'.[40] Each confrontation represents moments when he thus shakes his bottle; the story of The Ambassadors is the chemical change that the substance in Strether's bottle undergoes the more it is shaken. Several actions contribute to this exercise, his inner consciousness does more of the shaking as Strether can be both spectator and actor. Since the major aim of the story is for Strether eventually to 'see' all actions are meticulously constructed towards this goal. It is for this reason that the element of surprise plays such a dominant role. Three of these surprise scenes clearly demonstrate their significance in the overall design of the story. In the first coincidental scene Strether meets Maria Gostrey. The woman is frankly straightforward, and even unusually familiar, for one encountered on a first occasion. Strether's imagination begins to run wild. Only the walk which follows steadies him, but, as the scene draws to its logical finish, some crucial details begin to emerge. Strether can take her into his confidence and apparently so can the reader. She is in her own words 'a companion at large, she takes people about, it is her fate'.[41] The significance to Strether of her companionship is the fact that she is full of illuminations and can be trusted, she has the 'manner of a benign dependent paternal old person who wishes to be 'nice' to a younger person'.[42] By the time the two

return to the hotel Mr Waymarsh,'joyless',is already waiting. Mr Waymarsh's morose nature, merely suggested at the end of this scene, is consistent with James's technique of delayed and partial knowledge aimed principally at heightening the drama. In this scene the immediacy is achieved through the chance encounter of Strether and Maria Gostrey, so that, though Waymarsh is a significant character in the story, he must wait for his occasion.

The second 'coincidental' scene occurs at the Notre Dame Cathedral, a place which seems to be good for Strether's nerves. Here he meets Madame de Vionnet, his 'adversary' who reminds him of 'some fine, firm concentrated heroine of an old story, ... something that had he had a head for drama, he might himself have written'.[43] Both characters, the 'surprise' over, retire for an early luncheon at a wonderful, a delightful house of entertainment:

> A place of pilgrimage for the knowing, they were both aware, the knowing who came, of its great renown, the homage of restless days, from the other end of the town. Strether had already been there three times - first with Miss Gostrey, then with Chad, then with Chad again and with Waymarsh and little Bilham, all of whom he had himself sagaciously entertained; and his pleasure was deep now on learning that Madame De Vionnet hadn't yet been initiated.
>
> 44

This scene represents all the stages Strether's quest undergoes. It is significant that this recurrent rendez-vous has seen all the major instruments of his education: Maria Gostrey, Chad, Waymarsh, Bilham. Some irony is implied in Strether's observation that Madame de Vionnet, and not he, is the uninitiated, for, as his consciousness tells him, this encounter is 'the bottom' at last that he has been striving to

reach. He confesses that he has indeed travelled far since 'that evening in London, before the theatre, when his dinner with Maria Gostrey, between the pink-shaded candles, had struck him as requiring so many explanations'.[45] Very few explanations are now required for a man who has already gone through a series of very illuminating moments from the handicap of a double consciousness. Towards the end of the scene 'the golden nail she had then driven in pierced a good inch deeper'.[46]

The third scene is the boat incident where Strether, through yet another coincidence, encounters Chad and Madame de Vionnet:

> They came slowly, floating down, evidently directed to the landing place near their spectator and presenting themselves to him not less clearly as the two persons for whom his hostess was already preparing a meal.
> [47]

This 'show' is very significant because it marks Strether's last but most illuminating moment: 'his consciousness, though muffled, had its sharpest moments during this passage'.[48] The salient feature of the show - the word show is used several times here - is the 'deep, deep truth of the intimacy revealed'.[49] After this coincidence, Strether needs no more evidence to see that things are not what he imagined, he can only realise now how much further he has travelled. This earlier judgment now gains fuller significance:

> He had walked many miles and didn't know he was tired, but he still knew he was amused, and even that, though he had been alone all day, he had never yet struck himself as engaged with others and in midstream of his drama. It might have passed for finished, his drama, with its catastrophe all but reached; it had, however, none the less been vivid again for him as he thus gave it its fullest chance. He had only

> had to be at last well out of it to feel it,
> oddly enough, still going on.
>
> 50

His drama continues until the third scene discussed above, where it is finished and all that remains is stock-taking.

A clear pattern emerges from this random choice of scenes, most notably their comprehensiveness; indeed they are so comprehensive and illuminating that they tell the story of the novel by themselves, they contain all the material. Yet to take them out of context denies James's story its significant dramatic features. The drama relies on three significant roles James gives Strether: he is at once spectator, chief reporter and chief participant. In the three scenes examined above Strether performs all these roles effectively, gaining in confidence and sagacity. The background characters whose action constitutes the scenes which lead to Strether's education have not been discussed fully but this is not to ignore their significance in the novel. Whether at table, on balconies, at theatres, or simply walking, each scene adds its quota to the drama. Even Miss Newsome's letters do carry, in this story, a life of their own; their absence is as tormenting as their presence and when they lie on the table, the alphabets literally kick Strether in the face. Telegrams, here, are as dreadful as missiles, but all these incidents and objects merely crowd impressions on Strether's already over-worked consciousness. He needs, it seems, as many scenes as possible to make the required discoveries about life, to be able to break the myth of Woollett. James's technique piles these scenes up and relies on the accumulated character of his protagonist.

Soyinka's <u>Season of Anomy</u> represents a character similarly involved in the march towards self-revelation. Each scene therefore marks a step toward clarification. The structure and pattern of <u>Season of Anomy</u> is built to enable Ofeyi to carry out this process of self-revelation. Its five major segments (Acts?) represent regenerative stages, their metaphor is closely connected with growth: 1. Seminal 2. Buds 3. Tentacles 4. Harvest 5. Spores. One significant difference, though, is that while movement is gradual in <u>The Ambassadors</u> there is a sense of urgency in <u>Season of Anomy</u>. Ofeyi is a man in a hurry, and is always rushing about:

> He saw where the rest of mankind had rushed and now his was the only consciousness observing the dark pulsating chasms of tearing, grasping, clawing, gorging humanity.
>
> 51

With an outlook such as this, it is no wonder that, like the characters in <u>The Interpreters</u>, and very unlike Strether, who is sometimes content to watch, he seems to chase people all over the place and feels chased in return. Activity in <u>Season of Anomy</u> is as breathtaking as in <u>The Interpreters</u> and this is partly because of the tension between Ofeyi and the Cartel, a corrupt organisation whose methods are antithetical to the beliefs held by their 'promotions man'. When he leaves their darkness and goes in search of light he undergoes traumatic experiences. However, Soyinka provides alternating scenes of relief. Ofeyi's tension usually finds relief in the presence and activities of two women, Iriyise and Taiila, the latter filling the gap at those times when the former is 'caged' or, as happens on one occasion, when Ofeyi himself is exiled. The third source of relief from the chaos and 'the battle' is the ideal society of Aiyero:

> After all the battles of the world one needs a resting-place. And often, in between the battles, Aiyero was created for such needs or perhaps, let's simply say, it can fulfil such needs.
>
> 52

The scene where his first major clash with his employers occurs is significant. It commences in the Board Room of the Corporation. Soyinka describes in detail all the movements of the people at the table, and as one of the Board members has the revelatory name of Trouble-Shooter the drama that occurs at the meeting is not completely unexpected. Ofeyi is literally chased by gun-toting soldiers towards the end of the scene. For solace and temporary reprieve he goes to Iriyise: Queen Bee of the hive. Within it he remains immune, 'protected by a maze of signals and burrows created by the worker ants'.[53] She is also the Celestial Certainty; Iriyise is so many good things that the major scenes present her as a source of respite, inspiration and relief for Ofeyi. Paradoxically, however, it is also in search of her that Ofeyi confronts greater chaos; the line between chaos and harmony can become blurred; 'relief itself is sometimes a sham'.

Taiila's scenes provide much more lasting relief; indeed she abhors violence, and is presented each time as an agent of peace, Ofeyi's good angel. She is a spiritual healer while her brother heals bodies. Her scenes provide the occasions of 'coincidence' which are a feature of the technique which both James and Soyinka use effectively to solve problems of continuity in their novels. She represents 'encounters' that are different from the 'confrontations' that have become part of Ofeyi's life. At the airport scene, for instance, two encounters are introduced almost

simultaneously. In the first scene Taiila is presented as a redemptive force for Ofeyi who has an inherent desire for violence. 'We pass and re-pass each other', she says, 'but you will not step off your circling path. You are trapped on your violent circumference Ofeyi. Why won't you rest?'.[54] She offers Ofeyi the peace which he claims to be in search of but which continuously eludes him. Rather than pay any attention he introduces the dentist. The second scene is that of the dentist, the apostle of violence, again another way of juxtaposing the two basic ideas in the novel, harmony and chaos. As Ofeyi picks his way in this quest for the ideal he continues to confront these two opposing claims which help him in his education.

Taiila's second appearance in the novel is just as dramatic. In the scene Ofeyi is desperately searching for Iriyise who has possibly been killed by the powerful men of the Cartel. The search takes him through a painstaking journey inside a mortuary where he is forced to identify the numerous victims of the massacre perpetuated by his former bosses. By another 'coincidence' it happens that the doctor who takes him around is the brother of his Indian Mystic who has also just arrived to see her brother. The stench, and the torture is soon forgotten in the pleasant discovery of Ofeyi's 'mystery virgin of a transit lounge'. This scene also provides a moment of respite for a mind that is almost going over the edge in its attempt to tame chaos; 'her eyes radiate calm'.[55] She even joins Ofeyi in his search for Iriyise providing the much needed light that will lead the questers into the cave that has swallowed the woman.

The pattern that emerges is one of juxtaposition: chaos with harmony, sacrifice with selfishness, darkness with light, peace with violence. The dominant scenes are the violent ones but the presence of the apostles of peace is also very well portrayed. The contrast brings the conflicting forces in the book into sharp relief.

iv

Dialogue

Neither the scenes, nor the dramatic characters who interact in them would come to life without dialogue. The sheer impulsiveness and activity of the characters in James and Soyinka make dialogue indispensable, since it is only by expressing themselves in their own words that their drama comes to life. Also, -their gregarious nature, their fondness for interpretation and their powerful intellect makes discussion inevitable. Dialogue, here, enhances a direct presentation; through dialogue, the characters 'take over the plot of the story' and their individual characteristics are better delineated; dialogue illuminates both the characters and the subject and invites a greater sense of immediacy; in James's words, this is:

> ... really constructive dialogue, dialogue organic, and dramatic, speaking for itself, representing and embodying substance and form. [56]

Dialogue makes the scenes both James and Soyinka create nearer the experience of the theatre. Sometimes whole chapters are composed exclusively of dialogue, at other times dialogue brings the scene to its climax or dialogue might point to potential areas of the dramatic conflict. Words dropped unobtrusively turn out to be of immense significance; because most of the characters are very imaginative, the symbols they conjure in their discussion with other characters go a long way to illuminate the substance and the form of the story.

The Tragic Muse demonstrates a fairly consistent pattern. James introduces the characters, gives them a setting and then allows them to act out their parts through dialogue which in turn produces misunderstanding and clarification, often simultaneously. The forthright nature of the characters makes their dialogue more dramatic and for some, such as Grace Dormer, the implications of what they say carry much further than their instinctive outbursts. James's introductions, by way of a brief narrative comment, are rendered in the manner of stage directions, as shown in the first chapter of the book:

> Three ladies and a young man, they were obviously a family - a mother, two daughters and a son ... After sometime ... the young man rousing himself from his reverie, addressed one of the girls.
>
> 57

There then follows uninterrupted dialogue throughout the rest of the chapter. More crucial details emerge from the dialogue than in the 'summary', their own words reveal more about the potential rift within the family and the emerging polarity between the artists, Biddy and Nick, and the 'public', Lady Agnes and Grace. The latter pair consider art as 'horrid and messy' and Grace is more concerned with the impending lunch than with discussions about the nature and function of art. The former are 'in the same boat', as they say; thus by the end of the chapter it has become evident that the lines of battle are drawn, and this, without a single comment by the narrator. This is James's way of letting the story speak for itself through its characters who already begin to show individual characteristics: Grace is clearly graceless, the mother is a 'British Matron' and Biddy is biddable since she appears prepared at the moment to be bargained for by the two worlds.

The pattern recurs throughout the novel. 'By their words, it appears 'we shall know them'. Each scene begins with an introduction of the cast followed by extended dialogue between them; dialogue which, when handled by erudite characters such as Gabriel Nash, or by such theatrical characters as Miriam Rooth, has the feeling at worst of a good rehearsal and at best of good drama about it. The setting is often appropriate: dining tables at restaurants, rehearsals in living rooms, a walk or a ride involving at least two of the major characters. Sometimes dialogue consists of assessment of a character in his absence by other characters. This is one way of providing an objective assessment. In chapter eleven, for example, Peter Sherringham and Miriam Rooth walk together. They reveal a lot about themselves, but much more significant, a lot is said about Gabriel Nash who would have remained an enigma but for those moments of revelation through dialogue. Because he is such an incisive and accurate interpreter, yet one unwilling to give away his true nature, it is only when he is discussed by others that such information about him filters through.

There are occasions when dialogue serves useful comic purposes as when Peter makes a last desperate effort to carry off Miriam to a 'more exciting life'. As Miriam knows, all his argument is 'determined sophistry', but he pushes it forward with such passion that it compels the attention, not only of the reader, but of an otherwise busy Miriam who already has an engagement and who, besides, is not going to marry Peter anyway.[58] Peter's comic illusions find their best expression in this chapter and towards the end it becomes clear that he has lost Miriam, that he never really had a 'case'. The whole scene is pure dramatic dialogue, complete with prompter,

Mrs Rooth. The actors, though, know their lines so well that the prompter merely watches and listens; towards the end she offers some help but it is superfluous, the actors have had their evening. The Tragic Muse is full of these 'plays within the play' and each gets its impetus through dialogue. Similarly, in the scenes between Nick and Charles Carteret and the subsequent one between Nick and his mother, when Nick is faced with the consequence of the apostasy he has just committed, dialogue plays a significant part. In both cases the dialogue reveals more clearly the irreconcilable positions between the parties in contention:

> 'The pencil - the brush? They're not the weapons of a gentleman' said Mr Carteret.
>
> 'I was sure that would be your view. I repeat that I mention them only because you once said you intended to do something for me, as the phrase is, and I thought you oughtn't to do it in ignorance'.
>
> 'My ignorance was better. Such knowledge isn't good for me'.
>
> 'Forgive me, my dear old friend. When you're better you'll see it differently'.
>
> 'I shall never be better now'.
>
> 59

Indeed he never recovers from this shock and dies, leaving Nick, as expected, with nothing. Nick's 'callousness' as seen by the mother, and as Charles and Grace would agree, is incomprehensible.

In The Interpreters dialogue is so pervasive that inanimate objects such as Dehinwa's wardrobe and Egbo's 'talkative puddle' contribute to it; indeed ghosts join in useful dialogue with the living; for the interpreters, life itself is one long dialogue. This includes even the stammering Sekoni who joins as a choral voice, but who usually provides a very useful bridge in an otherwise unbridgeable chasm in

opinion and outlook. It sometimes appears as if the other interpreters could do without the bridge but some of Sekoni's outbursts are indispensable to the novel:

> 'T-t-to be afraid of gog-go-goodness. In an intelligent man, a fffear of b-b-beauty or g-g-good is c---cowardice'.
>
> 60

It is significant that when he dies it is this bridge-like quality in him that they miss most; the rainbow figure of Lazarus: 'Sheikh's face de-metamorphosed from the albino's'[61] is not compensation enough. The failure of the interpreters to fulfil themselves is a result of a collapse of dialogue between them and their gods, between them and their fellow-men and the most crucial of all the collapse of dialogue within themselves. In all three stages, Soyinka presents this break-down in communication via the actors themselves with very little intervention, far less authorial intervention than James's in The Tragic Muse. As in James, most of the time the 'interpreters' talk at cross-purposes but what they say throws light on their characters and this is further enhanced by the evaluation each brings to bear on the other. Since each of them is an interpreter, and since each in turn is being interpreted, a complete picture emerges from the accumulated assessment that emerges from the things they say and what others say about them. Sekoni's talk and behaviour illuminate Egbo who in turn illuminates Kola, all of whom are assessed by Bandele, the 'timeless image brooding over lesser beings'. Sagoe speaks and acts for himself. His 'voidante' philosophy reveals his frivolous life, as his excessive drunkenness and his superficiality do. His talk is always that of the journalist, concerned endlessly with the surface and not bothering to probe deep into meaning. What they say when they leave Lazarus's Church is most illuminating:

> 'Why don't you go ahead and paint him, Kola? Then I would use the painting in my feature, give it some kind of dimension ...I don't know how exactly, the idea is just winging its way into my brain'.
>
> Kola shook his head, 'No. I might paint him, but not on the Cross or any such waste of time, I was thinking of him as Esumare. Intermediary. As the Covenant, in fact, the Apostate Covenant, the Ambiguous Covenant. When Lazarus called him Noah, I thought about it then. He does possess that technicolour brand of purity'.
>
> 'Yes, Yes', Egbo murmured, 'And it is just as vaporous'. Bandele was mocking, lightly, 'Sagoe has his story, Kola has filled another heavenly space on his canvas, what are you getting out of this, Egbo?'
>
> Egbo turned angrily on him. 'What are YOU getting out of it?'
>
> 'Knowledge of the new generation of interpreters'.
>
> Sagoe exploded. 'You sound so fuckin' superior it would make a saint mad'.
>
> ...
>
> 'You see', Bandele said,'You haven't even tried to find out. He asked you here didn't he? Have you thought why? Or do you believe in that bull of the Church building alone?' 'What else does he want? Publicity of course. All the local prophets want publicity. Its good business'.
>
> 62

It is left to Bandele to expose their recklessness and ignorance. When they accuse him of sounding 'fuckin' superior' they are of course accusing themselves, for, all through the story, they have continued to behave as if they are models, and what models! Ultimately the difference between them and the Oguazors is one of degree. Those who see the book as an attack on the Oguazors miss the point expressed so vividly and dramatically, especially in the chapter from which

the above dialogue has been taken. The point about the whole book is a failure of dialogue which illuminates as well as criticises all the characters.

Dialogue is not as dominant in The Ambassadors as in The Tragic Muse and The Interpreters, for the main reason that much of the dialogue in the novel is passed through the consciousness of Strether. Here soliloquy would be more fitting. Serving as actor, spectator, and reporter, Strether is made to do most of the talking within himself and has consequently little time to engage in dialogue with other characters in the story, the nature of his task reduces the amount of actual dialogue. It is significant that instances of dialogue occur mainly between Strether and Maria Gostrey, his friend and confidante. Dialogue is used here during moments of stock-taking. Maria Gostrey helps Strether to assess the progress he has made by entering into frank talk with him. It is only in her presence that Strether becomes very vocal, with Chad and with Madame de Vionnet he always seems speechless, especially with the latter who, in Strether's imagination, is 'fifty women, one at a time'. Faced with the subject of his mission he blusters out, 'almost breathlessly':

> I've come, you know, to make you break with everything, neither more nor less, and take you straight home; so you'll be so good as immediately and favourably to consider it!
>
> 63

That is all the ambassador can afford and it reflects his general inability to express himself properly, especially when he is faced with a problem whose real edge he is yet to sort out. Even when he tries very consciously to enter into dialogue with other characters, such as little Bilham, so that he may learn a bit more about the

people he wishes to know, he finds such information being withheld from him and he leaves just as puzzled as he began. In The Ambassadors, paradoxically, dialogue is used to delay knowledge and to sharpen Strether's and the reader's anxiety to go on looking for further clues:

> 'The thing is, you see, Chad ought to marry!' he wound up.
>
> ... He ought to marry whom?
>
> Little Bilham rose more slowly. 'Well, someone he CAN - some thoroughly nice girl'.
>
> Strether's eyes, as they stood together turned again to Jeanne. 'Do you mean HER?'
>
> His friend made a sudden face. 'After being in love with her mother? No.'
>
> 'But isn't it exactly your idea that he isn't in love with her mother?'
>
> '... Oh that I admit. But being in love isn't, you know, here' - little Bilham spoke in a friendly reminder - 'thought necessary, in strictness, for marriage'.
>
> 64

The Woollett imagination which for now determines Strether's values makes a conversation of this nature more puzzling. A world that discounts love in marriage is not yet known to him and so, useful as this information is, it only adds to the many puzzles that Strether and, to some extent, the reader, must sort out. Dialogue here is a challenge, it doesn't seek to clarify or illuminate.

In a similar way, Ofeyi in Season of Anomy, gets so immersed in the events, and is striving so hard to reach an understanding of history from the numerous events he witnesses and in which he participates, that there hardly is any time for him to enter into dialogue with other people. However, like Strether he has a confidante in

Pa Ahime and Taiila and these two provide the opportunities for him to express his views about the nature of the experience he is undergoing. Dialogue has an additional structural and thematic function in Season of Anomy in that it serves as 'relief', a break from the tensions that the cartel unleashes in its bid to silence its promotions man. It gives Ofeyi the opportunity to reflect more on his own activities and question some of his values and motives. Like the ideal town of Aiyero, it is 'a resting place'. Ofeyi's conversations with Taiila and Pa Ahime are the most serene moments in the book. They tend to return the story to some temporary order and harmony:

> 'We have been called everything' Ahime commented drily, 'including a pocket Utopia'.
>
> 'You know what that means?'
>
> 'Oh yes. Our sons bring back all forms of literature. I have little to do with my time these days except read them. And I come to the conclusion over and over again that there is nothing new on the surface of this earth'. He gave his mischievous chuckle - 'Or in the next. Men's minds have travelled across vast distances and embraced one another. Travelled vast periods too, both backwards and into the future and embraced one another. For good or for evil. That knowledge teaches both humility and pride'.
>
> 'You think that's what your people find out for themselves? Is that what brings them back here?'
>
> 65

These metaphysical arguments do not make much sense to Ofeyi, nor do those propounded by Taiila the mystic, but they all seem to offer him solace from some of his dangerous escapades. It is no wonder that both these characters serve as ideals, one is the bud that will grow to yield a useful harvest, the other is the good angel

that tries, rather unsuccessfully, to temper Ofeyi's belligerent nature.

There is a significant moment in the story at which dialogue serves a paradoxical dramatic purpose. It occurs between the time that the Cartel unleashes its violence on its 'enemies' and Ofeyi's chase after the woman, Iriyise, whom he must rescue from the hell into which she has been imprisoned. In the interval Ofeyi groaned:

> God, how I long for peace. Peace, just peace, anything for peace. He paused. 'Yes, that is the problem. Just peace'.
>
> 66

What he gets is completely the opposite of peace. He is thrown, instead, into a more dramatic situation where family friends try to snatch him from the course toward which he has set his mind. He witnesses a long domestic quarrel within the family of a member of the Cartel whose daughter tries to bring pressure on him to stop wasting his life on 'the dregs of society'. Though this domestic scene does not succeed in stopping him from carrying out his designs, it nevertheless provides a useful interlude for Ofeyi and for the writer to play down the longer tension by introducing a useful interval, a relief. Immediately afterwards, Ofeyi speeds off in the car and there is no turning back. Dialogue serves as mediator.

V

Use of Time

The novelist using the dramatised perspective uses time as if in rebellion against the restrictions of drama because the novel spreads out experience and elaborates relations as against the tendency of 'the well-made play' to coalesce them into a set time-span. It is true, as E.M. Forster insists, that no novel could be written without 'the consciousness of the clock'[67] but it is equally true, as Mendilow suggests, that:

> Time assumes different meanings in different systems and varies from one frame of reference to another. Every good novel has its own temporal pattern and values, and acquires its originality by the adequacy with which they are conveyed or expressed.
> 68

Two major conceptions of time manifest themselves in the novels under discussion. Whereas James subscribes to the Western linear sense of time, Wole Soyinka employs the Greek and Eastern philosophies of cyclic time, which, as he demonstrates, are also Yoruba, perhaps African, concepts of time:

> Traditional thought operates not a linear conception of time but a cyclic reality.
> 69

In The Tragic Muse James adheres almost strictly to linear time. The novel begins in the present and though it makes occasional dips into the past it is fairly regular in plotting causal sequence, one event leads to the other. The past has a strong grip on the major characters, particularly Nick, but its significance is shown only as it affects the present and the future; indeed sometimes past, present and future are areas of confusion and conflict but James never really abandons his steady movement in time. Information

about 'the old days at Oxford' comes unobtrusively. The only instance of a pervasive past which sometimes threatens a reordering of events and perspective is the domineering presence of the late Sir Nicholas, Nick's father, but even then, his 'representative' on earth, Charles Carteret, performs the job Nick's mother expects him to perform namely to act as a source of inspiration for Nick. Reference is made to his ghost only once but the narrator is quick to remark that this is part of the hallucinations of Lady Agnes and not so much the work of Nick.

James exploits the lateral quality of the novel in the way in which, at times, the clock stops for certain characters so that others can function. James makes it impossible, for instance, for Nick and Miriam to see each other for ten months even though Miriam has been in London and is already becoming famous as an actress. It is Gabriel Nash, who originally introduced Miriam, who reintroduces her after ten months, by which time James finds opportunities to develop them apart, to give equal attention to the two cases of his story. Gabriel Nash himself comes in and out without much regard to a time sequence, indeed he 'melts back into the elements', 'is part', James says, 'of the ambient air'. Similarly Julia Dallow disappears after chapter twenty-seven, reappearing only in chapter forty-seven. All that is given is that she left for Paris. The duration of her visit can only be implied, but she is no longer crucial to the action by the time she disappears and so is left in Paris until James needs her to sort out the complication, or perhaps, further to complicate Nick's life. Only the novel provides avenues for such a flexible use of time.

In The Ambassadors, as in The Tragic Muse, James maintains a steady movement in time. Occasionally, as when Strether recalls his youth and his earlier visits to Paris, a good dip is taken into the past but this is never allowed to overshadow the unfolding events. Strether's message to little Bilham 'to live' for the moment, as it were, enacts the overall message of The Ambassadors. What matters is the now; it is no use regretting the past and somehow the future will take care of itself if the present is lived properly. Part of the advantage of the dramatised point of view is that it enables the novelist to present even past events 'contemporaneously' and James uses this to great advantage. Strether relives some of his 'fancies' with the same vividness that he had lived then because:

> It was essentially more than anything else a scene and a stage ... The play and the characters had, without his knowing it till now, peopled all his space for him ...
> . 70

To come to Soyinka, however, is to notice a marked difference in the two writers' use of time. This difference is not accounted for merely by the linear and cyclic concepts of time which they employ; it seems to derive mainly from what Kola Ogungbesan described as 'structural manoeuvres ... of a man committed to a genre whose limitations he finds frustrating'.[71] Soyinka appears to have written his novels, especially The Interpreters, as a rebellion against drama and nowhere is this better demonstrated than in his use of flashbacks. Like a calendar-maker, Soyinka seems determined to create his own time: in the beginning was the night-club. Many writers use flashbacks, and many more manipulate chronological time, but few have shown such iconoclastic disregard

for any accepted time scheme as Soyinka does in The Interpreters. This has been part of the reason why several critics have condemned his novel, but, as Kinkead-Weekes observes,'no character in a novel can have a history until he is given one'.[72] In an attempt to give Egbo and Sekoni such histories, Soyinka had committed himself to a very bold venture which, because it was strange and indeed is still rare in the African novel, has been the subject of much adverse criticism. However, if attention is paid more to the significance that history plays in the novel as a whole it will be found that the dextrous time shifts are in themselves part of the theme of the story; they are the essence of Sekoni's domes of continuity. Chapter one of the book is the novel's story and structure; all that happens afterwards is mere repetition, recurrence. The night-club is Soyinka's marker. The lives of the joint-protagonists literally begin and end there. Sekoni, for instance, has 'a reviewing device' which enables him to recollect events from his past with ease. It is this device, perhaps, which makes it possible for the reader to know so much about the characters from one spot. Thus we know about Egbo's past and about the demands he now faces and the nature of his apostasy. With regard to Sekoni, past, present and future become areas of confusion and by the end of the chapter he has been through all the phases of his life. His death, much later in part two, is almost a non-event. Indeed at that point in the novel the reactions of his friends to the news of his death, as has been observed earlier, are more significant than the event itself. Chapter one sets the sequence which later chapters follow. There is spatial movement within a crowded night-club into several other places including Egbo's ancestral home. In time, however, the movement is far more complex. It is difficult sometimes to know precisely what moment is being described. Part

of this difficulty may be deliberate and could well mean, as Egbo implies, that someone has 'broken the crust of time'.[73] Much of the discussion in this chapter, as in the rest of the novel, is about time. Egbo especially is hunted by 'the spectre of generations'. The final scene of the chapter reassembles all the ages in the case history of Sekoni and though chapter two opens with the group of interpreters leaving the night-club it is obvious that their story is over. In any case Sekoni is already in a mental hospital, it is as if the first cycle at least has come and gone. True, new characters are introduced, but Lazarus, for example, merely replaces Sekoni and Joe Golder is only a slight variation of the original group; they are all motherless children, away from home - Golder's song is their common cry. All they need is the link:

> It requires only the bridge, or the ladder between heaven and earth. A rope or a chain. The link that is all. After fifteen months, all that is left is the link ... [74]

The Interpreters is about the difficulty of finding such a link to complete a cycle broken by the first apostate and from time to time broken by those like Egbo and Kola who because of their apostasy cannot forge the required spirit to overcome the problem of fulfilment. Each of the characters tries to find the link in this cycle. Some of them, like Sagoe, stumble from one error to another but there are those like Bandele and Kola who are more conscious of their limitations and are thus more positive in their efforts. Kola's canvas in which each of his friends is given a divine equivalent is the most serious and most concrete attempt to make the necessary link in time. But because each of them seems determined to out-perform the other the novel becomes a confusing stampede of events with a

chaotic sequence. But it can also be argued that time, chronological time, is not material here. If Egbo lives his past and his present in one and the same breath it is precisely because time is theme in the novel.

Soyinka uses a similar technique in Season of Anomy but with more subtlety. Indeed on the surface this story has a relatively clear time-scheme. It may be seen as deploying a linear time-scheme not unlike the method used in The Ambassadors. The deep tone of the story, however, is Graeco-Asiatic. Ofeyi, like Orpheus, is going into Hades (Cross River) to retrieve Iriyise (Eurydice), and the story is about his quest for 'hidden but attainable' goals. The Seasonal imagery suggests a cycle: (seminal), buds, tentacles, harvest and spores. Spores are as capable of germination as the original seed, the cycle completes itself. Soyinka has merely tried to add a variant to the cyclic rhythm. Time in Season of Anomy also moves backwards and forwards, one incident leads to another, both in the past and in its future ramifications, but as in The Interpreters, the line between these 'rags of time' is a very fine one. Chapter two, for instance, begins thus: 'time expired, the prodigal returned'.[75] What follows, however, is not the activities of the 'prodigal' on his return but his past experiences abroad. 'The airports of the world', Ofeyi remarks, 'seemed to have turned hunting-grounds for alienated souls'.[76] He then goes on to recall his meeting with the 'dentist' and Taiila before returning to his mentor Pa Ahime. The reader must wait until chapter six nevertheless before this airport encounter with Ofeyi's 'good and bad angels' is fully narrated, but even then it is triggered by the present activities of the Cartel. In

The Ambassadors, however, Soyinka seems to satisfy both the demands of chronological time as well as his own ambitions of making his own clock. The story moves forward from 'the quaint anomaly' that is Aiyero until Ofeyi begins to skirt round the world:

> The pool stank of history. Slaves, gold, oil. The old wars ... Ever present energies from the past, starving sockets that demanded that living eyes see, learn through their terror ... this spent energy, this spent error, this violent, untimely cycle of waste renewed a demand for transformation.
>
> The Magic mirrors, the sub-aqueous crystals of time-fragmenting cycles persisted ...
>
> 77

The 'time-fragmenting cycles' recall the myth of The Interpreters and Ofeyi, though more clear headed than any of the 'interpreters', perhaps a reformed Egbo, is still caught in this great pool of time.

Henry James and Wole Soyinka deploy the same narrative techniques in their novels. James, however, is a more disciplined craftsman fighting to create a style different from that of his comperes in the nineteenth century. Soyinka, on the other hand, may be associated with the greater experimentation of the twentieth century which James helped to cultivate. In Soyinka, therefore, will be found greater liberty, which in some cases has been used to good effect. Soyinka, for example, shows greater manoeuvrability in the way he handles time while James's experiment fought shy of these possibilities. With regard to character, action and scene, there are many similarities: Soyinka probably borrowed from James some aspects of characterisation. In presentation of scene and action, however, Soyinka, the successful dramatist, does extremely well. Both writers also put dialogue to great use, both rely heavily on the way characters express themselves

as an important element in the story. All their characters seem to take over the story, leaving both writers, like good dramatic novelists, with the stage directions.

Their vision is essentially an ironic one. As Ronald Wallace shows with regard to James:

> Faced with a world in which the preposterous, the trivial and the monstrous seem to rule James ... marshals Comedy as a weapon against chaos and absurdity.
>
> 78

Soyinka harnesses the resources of African mythology to confront the chaos in his society. This is, perhaps, best seen in the way he handles time in the novels. But more important is the way both novelists create characters whose problem is themselves and the complex of their relations. The novelists considered in the next chapter offer a more 'inward' picture of the way individual characters handle this problem of the self.

Notes

1. Mark Kinkead-Weeks, _Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist_ (London: Methuen, 1973), p.413.

2. Edwin Muir, _The Structure of the Novel_ (London: Chatto and Windus, 1928, 1957), pp.59-60.

3. W.J. Harvey, _Character and the Novel_ (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), p.68.

4. _The Interpreters_ p.221.

5. _The Tragic Muse_ p.178.

6. Ibid. p.125.

7. _The Interpreters_, p.12.

8. Ibid. p.245.

9. Ibid. p.133.

10. _The Tragic Muse_ p.26

11. Eldred Jones, _The Writing of Wole Soyinka_ (London: Heinemann, 1983) pp.189-200.

12. _The Interpreters_, p.218.

13. Ibid. p.179.

14. _The Art of Fiction_ p.310.

15. _Season of Anomy_ p.43, a paraphrase of Soyinka's elaborate metaphors.

16. Ibid. p.44.

17. Ibid. p.262.

18. Ibid. p.308.

19. Some Observations on the Art of Narrative, (Home & Van Thal, 1946), p.12

20. Cited in Henry James and the Comic Form, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975) p.154.

21. Richardson: Dramatic Novelist op.cit.p.411.

22. Art of Fiction op.cit. p.171.

23. Cited in F.O. Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963) p.17.

24. R.W. Short, 'Some Critical Terms of Henry James' PMLA Vol. LXV (1950) p.675.

25. The Tragic Muse p.39.

26. Ibid. p.14.

27. Ibid. p.51.

28. Ibid. p.115

29. The Tragic Muse p.117.

30. Ibid. p.125.

31. Ibid. p.130.

32. The Air of Reality: New Essays on Henry James, ed. John Goode (London: Methuen, 1972) p.107.

33. The Tragic Muse p.285.

34. The Interpreters p.5.

35. Ibid. p.19.

36. 'The Interpreters: A Form of Criticism' in Critical Perspectives ed. J. Gibbs, (London, Heinemann 1982) p.229.

37. The Interpreters p.225.

38. Ibid. p.244.

39. Ibid. p.224.

40. The Ambassadors p.117.

41. Ibid. p.15.

42. Ibid. p.16.

43. Ibid. p.187.

44. Ibid. p.191.

45. Ibid. p.192.

46. Ibid. p.198.

47. Ibid. p.349.

48. Ibid. p.353.

49. Ibid. p.355.

50. Ibid. p.346.

51. Season of Anomy, p.171.

52. Ibid. p.28.

53. Ibid. p.56.

54. Ibid. p.93.

55. Ibid. p.232.

56. Miriam Allott, Novelists on the Novel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965) p.296.

57. The Tragic Muse p.9.

58. Ibid. p.464.

59. Ibid. p.359.

60. The Interpreters p.22.

61. Ibid. p.160 Sheikh is Sekoni's Islamic title acknowledged by his friends.

62. The Interpreters p.178.

63. The Ambassadors p.95.

64. Ibid.pp. 183-184.

65. Season of Anomy p.26.

66. Ibid. p.131.

67. Cited in Novelists on the Novel p.181.

68. Time and the Novel (New York: Humanities Press, 1972) p.63.

69. Myth, Literature and the African World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) p.10.

70. The Ambassadors, pp.346-7.

71. 'Simple Novels and Simplistic Criticism ...' Asemka No.5 (1979) p.32.

72. '<u>The Interpreters</u>: A Form of Criticism' in Gibbs op.cit. p.219.

73. <u>The Interpreters</u> p.10.

74. Ibid. p.225

75. <u>Season of Anomy</u> p.22.

76. Ibid. p.22.

77. <u>The Interpreters</u> p.86.

78. <u>Henry James and the Comic Vision</u> op.cit.p.156.

Chapter Three : The Inward Perspective

James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*

Kofi Awoonor, *This Earth, My Brother*

i

In locating his angle of vision in a specific consciousness as he does in The Ambassadors James anticipates the novelists deploying the inward perspective. In the novels of Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Awoonor the reader is exposed to the mind of the characters in such a way that he becomes committed to the character's point of view. The novels of James and Soyinka could be said to move from the outside to the inward while the reverse is the case with those of Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Awoonor. This is not to ignore the introspection of Strether in The Ambassadors. It must be remarked, however, that the concern with the 'windings' of the mind of the protagonists is the distinguishing characteristic of the novels examined in this chapter. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, The Waves and This Earth My Brother are novels about the self. They may be read as a series of soliloquies in which 'a cosmic communication' is discerned between the protagonist and his many selves or as in The Waves between the protagonist and several identical characters. In each case the reader is invited to share in the experience so that what begins as the internalization of another's unexpressed thoughts and experiences ends up as a dialogue of many selves. This is the tradition which Joyce and Virginia Woolf have established in the novel.

In a recent interview Kofi Awoonor acknowledged a kinship with this tradition when he admits that the African novelist has 'entered a new period of monologue in which the self-search is something that has to be made'.[1] To understand the nature of point of view in the novels is to analyse this self-search.

ii

Characterisation

Virginia Woolf's sexpartite characterisation in The Waves provides a useful bench-mark for a study of the way in which characters are portrayed in her novel and in A Portrait and This Earth:

> The flower ... that stood in the vase on the table of the restaurant when we dined together with Percival, is become a six-sided flower; made of six lives.
>
> 2

This puzzle of the major characters epitomises the nature of the characterisation in all three novels. We may be studying one character but that character is so many people that it becomes difficult to pin down his individual characteristics. Earlier in The Waves a way out is suggested:

> ... A single flower as we sat here waiting, but now a seven-sided flower, many petalled, red, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver tainted leaves. A whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution.
>
> 3

In these novels, though the reader's eye 'brings its own contribution', the myriad worlds of the novels as well as the host of sensations in the mind of the character provide further contributions and difficulties. It is a recurrent process renewed by character and reader throughout the novel.

In A Portrait Stephen Dedalus provides a classic example of the type of character described above. His numerous impressions sound incredible but this is because Stephen has many selves. There

are, however, two main features in his characterisation. On the one hand there is the outer Stephen whose tingling sensations react to father Dolan's cane. These sensations continue in other forms throughout the novel while on the other hand the reader finds the inward and thoughtful Stephen who listens and thinks so that he may understand. The latter is the mind that opens on the playgrounds in the early stages of the novel, 'the wide playgrounds swarming with boys', and which ends up seeing strange figures advancing from a cave, figures who peer at him and seem to ask him something. This latter, lonely, Stephen seems sometimes even to taste joy in loneliness. Between this inner and outer Stephen and the dilemma that confronts both 'characters' lies the essence of the novel's characterisation. Here is how the crisis is portrayed shortly after Stephen has spent his Prize money and is broke again:

> How foolish he had been! He had tried to build a breakwater of order and elegance against the sordid tide of life without him and to dam up by rules of conduct and active interests and new filial relations, the powerful recurrence of the tides within him. Useless. From without as from within the water had flowed over his barriers: their tides began once more to jostle fiercely above the crumbled mole.
>
> 4

The outer reality combines with the inner confusion to intensify Stephen's dilemma. At this point he seems to be a victim of circumstances and he is helpless. The bleak picture is nevertheless not entirely consistent with the character. Pleasant moments abound for the two Stephens. Both 'characters' have reliable friends who help them define themselves. The outward Stephen enters into relationships with women and with classmates which reveal another part of his nature. There is Mercedes, for instance, with her

alluring eyes which flatter, taunt, search and excite Stephen, as well as Eileen of the long, thin, cool, white hair, the tower of ivory, and many others. School friends, such as Cranly, provide a useful intellectual board upon which the budding artist-cum-philosopher practises his numerous theories, as do the teachers and supervisors who see talent in the young man, such as the English Dean who learns his own language from Stephen. Since Stephen also has kind and understanding uncles and an indulgent, though improvident father, he really cannot claim to be lonely.

Yet he is. The source of loneliness can be found in the other Stephen whose mind 'tends to wither up like a flower of the desert that feels the simoom coming from afar'.[5] Several events and people represent these simoom winds. Perhaps the closest and most touching is the poverty of the Dedalus household which creates disorder that nurtures a brooding mind:

> His silent watchful manner had grown upon him and he took little part in the games. The children danced and romped noisily and, though he tried to share their merriment, he felt a gloomy figure amid the gay-cocked hats and sunbonnets.
> 6

There are others: injustice in early school days, such as Father Dolan's wrongful punishment; sin with a woman; temptation to join the priesthood; hostile, perhaps jealous, school mates who all appear like wild beasts whose feet pass in 'pattering tumult' over Stephen's mind. It is against these 'enemies' that Stephen declares his rebellion:

> I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try

> to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use - silence, exile and cunning.
>
> 7

This is, however, only half the story. The rebellion apparently has limits as his diary entry of 11 April reveals:

> Would she like it? I think so. Then I should have to like it also.
>
> 8

She is no ordinary girl; we have met her before:

> She seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird ... Long, long, she suffered his gaze and then quietly withdrew her eyes from his and bent them towards the stream, gently stirring the water with her foot hither and thither ... 'Heavenly God!' cried Stephen's soul, in an outburst of profane joy.
>
> 9

The reader notices worship, not profanity, nor is Stephen contradicting himself. He is only being consistent with his many selves. His various selves confront the magical woman in several guises as Eileen, Emma, Mercedes and Mabel Hunter, but her essence, however, remains unchanged: in each case the reader is reminded of a holy encounter which provides moments of ecstasy for Stephen.

In order to understand Stephen, therefore, we need to look for several characters in one. The two Stephens described are only a tip of the iceberg: more characters lurk beneath. It is not by accident that the mind is described in metaphors that represent vast spaces: a brimming bowl, a house, a theatre, a playground, an ark, a stream, the desert, and the sea respectively.[10] Besides, the mind also reincarnates in human form, seeing and hearing voices,

making the word flesh in the virgin womb of its imagination, touching and feeling. The impression is one of a complex difficult both for Stephen and the reader to understand.

In The Waves, Virginia Woolf appears to have found ways of making complete knowledge of character possible. Some of the difficulty of understanding the multiple nature of Stephen's character could well be solved through the type of characterisation in The Waves. Bernard, Louis, Neville, Susan, Rhoda and Jinny melt into each other with phrases, share soliloquies, yet are different. Critics have described their relationship as 'magical' but Bernard, 'the phrase-maker', puts their case less modestly:

> We are creators. We too have made something that will join the innumerable congregations of past time. We too, as we put on our hats and push open the door, stride not into chaos, but into a world that our own force can subjugate and make part of the illumined and everlasting road.
> 11

Later he intones:

> In the beginning, there was the nursery, with windows opening on to a garden, and beyond that the sea.
> 12

The reader is called upon to witness a story of the Creation. This God has six, no, seven persons, and is also omnipotent. It is to his reincarnation, however, that the reader must turn for a better understanding of character.

The distinctiveness of all six major characters is never in doubt. A catalogue of their unique ways from childhood emerges as the story

unfolds and as they grow the distinctions between them become more glaring. These differences are created largely through a series of similes and metaphors. Susan is like the seasons; Jinny is a rolling stone; Rhoda is 'a mistress of her fleet of ships'; Neville is like a hound on the scent; Louis is like a worm that has eaten its way through the wood of a very old oak beam; and Bernard is not one and simple but many and complex. In Bernard's character lie some crucial clues to the nature of the characterisation in The Waves. Bernard tries to fuse the other six selves in himself but in spite of his brilliant analysis of character he is unable to answer several questions fundamental to their nature. Bernard, though, asks the right questions:

> Who am I? I have been talking of Bernard, Neville, Jinny, Susan, Rhoda and Louis. Am I all of them? Am I one and distinct? I do not know. We sat here together. But now Percival is dead, and Rhoda is dead; we are divided; we are not here. Yet I cannot find any obstacle separating us. There is no division between me and them ... This difference we make so much of, this identity we so feverishly cherish, was overcome. [13]

Bernard's questions and answers seem to be circular but they provide clues to the complexity of the novel's characterisation. Virginia Woolf's style tempts the reader to recall a scientific analogy. As in Democritus's atomic philosophy, the characters differ in form and in their relations with one another, as the similes and metaphors demonstrate, but are all indivisible particles of the same universe, as Bernard so ably shows. Science and mystery could be said to unite in what Bernard describes as the 'eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again.'[14]

The complexity in characterisation is perhaps best represented, not by Bernard, the all-knowing phrase-maker, but by Louis, the man for all seasons. Louis is portrayed as a cross between the excesses of Bernard and the inactivity of Rhoda. He has two distinct lives:

> Mr Prentice at four; Mr Eyres at four-thirty. I like to hear the soft rush of the lift and thud with which it stops on my landing and the heavy male tread of responsible feet down the corridors. The weight of the world is on our shoulders. This is life. If I press on I shall inherit a chair and a rug; a place in Surrey with glass houses, and some rare conifer, melon or flowering tree which other merchants will envy.
> 15

This humdrum, impressionistic existence is, for Louis, only a very minor part of his person. He claims:

> I find relics of myself in the sand that women made thousands of years ago, when I heard songs by the Nile and the chained beast stamping. What you see beside you, ... is only the cinders and the refuse of something once splendid. I was once an Arab prince; behold my free gestures. I was a great poet in the time of Elizabeth. I was a Duke at the Court of Louis the fourteenth.
> 16

Louis's first life represents that which may be described as 'accurately and as minutely as possible' but the second life stands for that which is seen in shadow and may be described only in 'a moment of vision and faith'.[17] Louis, like Bernard, believes that their friend Percival who died in India might be the missing bit in their puzzle but Percival, 'without whom there is no solidity', only complicates their lives. He is, as Bernard admits, 'the complete human being' whom they have failed to be but at the same time cannot be. The Waves is a fuller representation of character than A Portrait but it also ends on an indeterminate note:

> We have no ceremonies, only private dirges and no conclusions, only violent sensations, each separate.
>
> 18

It is ironical, but perhaps true, that the greater the attempt to understand character the greater the mystery. These novels present character from the inside yet, though more sympathetic to the character's perspective than the novels of James or Soyinka, they are full of complexities. At the end of both A Portrait and The Waves the reader may wonder if these complexities, and not the understanding of the character, are the prime concern of both novels. Both novels separate and delineate characters only to complicate them further.

> ... I knew him personally, he was a brilliant lawyer, but some of these things do happen. Most of the time we cannot understand.
>
> 19

There are two major stories in This Earth which run concurrently. The story which Amamu's doctor understands is simple and straightforward, prosaic. The one he cannot understand is symbolic and complex, poetic. Both are, however, stories of Amamu, the protagonist of the novel. His character is portrayed by means of this dual perspective. The outward Amamu is a familiar figure with readers of African fiction which deals with Colonial contact.[20] After a spell of education in his home country under Colonial rule he travels abroad where he qualifies as a lawyer. He sets up a very successful practice and is doing well by the standards of his country. He lives in a 'reservation' area away from the poverty represented by Nima and he is well-known, and outwardly he may be said to be a happy and successful man. The inward Amamu, however, is a complex

similar to Louis in The Waves. His success in the outside world also bears resemblance to Louis's success. Both are men who, by following the path of convention, reach the top of their career, are success stories. Yet they are unhappy. The inward Amamu is restless and depressed:

> His sleep was sold forever for a love that was within and outside his grasp. For a dream that was unclear. It was at times like this that his headaches would come on. His head would become large, wanting to explode, bells would be ringing in it and he would want to scream.
> 21

Home is described as a place of 'desolation and anguish'.[22] Unlike Louis, however, and more like Stephen in A Portrait, Amamu has prepared his mind for escape. There is so much to escape from: a frustrated marriage, a corrupt nation, uninspiring friends, and above all a wretched childhood in which the violent death of a mother has left the soul empty. This Earth invites the reader to share Amamu's soliloquies and understand the man's inner impulses which the doctor and his numerous friends fail to grasp. All his soliloquies are addressed to 'a brother' who is expected to share in his predominantly sad and angered moods:

> This frame, smashed against such deadly countenances chained to the final idea of the death and decay of this body.
>
> It is the only avenue of salvation, in this angered mood, self-denial, self-effacement become twin weapons to be worn into an equal and equally inconsequential battle. Hear their battle cry, my brother ... for you and me and all, a gathering must be proclaimed at our sacred grove, our worship must be renewed.
> 23

To understand Amamu, however, is to feel him; the inner man seems accessible only via intuition: in the novel only two characters achieve this. One of them is Yaro, his houseboy:

> He knew with that desperate instinct that transcends blood that something terrible had happened. [24]

Much closer, though, is the mistress Adisa, who, like Stephen's woman, transforms into many forms until she is indistinguishable from the divine woman of the sea. These two share Amamu's soliloquies. When he dies, the communion, as it were, is broken. Adisa reviews their relationship and highlights the complexity of the lonely Amamu:

> Their love was almost divine; its power was quiet and wordless. His loneliness and restlessness became part of her sacred responsibilities, for which she devised ritual acts of celebration and worship and sacrifice. This love was beyond the corporate confusion that hammered at his gates daily. [25]

A distinction is made between the humdrum nature of legal practice and a spiritual, mystical relationship with Adisa. These distinctions have been observed in A Portrait and The Waves. This Earth shares a kinship with the two novels in its presentation of character. Here is how Awoonor describes it:

> Somewhere in the true poem, the two dimensions of public and private attributes are unified. There occurs a deep relationship between the publicly owned linguistic landscape and the private esoteric magic land of the intimate poetic self. [26]

Awoonor's observation is similar to Virginia Woolf's concept of 'two faces to every situation'. In This Earth he resorts to a dual perspective in structure and theme in order to forge a link between 'the publicly owned linguistic landscape' and 'the private esoteric magic land of the poetic self'. One half of the novel is composed

of poetic chapters as in The Waves while the other half is a bald straightforward narrative of facts. This dichotomy reflects on the characterisation of the protagonist, Amamu, who, like Louis, is half real, half mystery.

Amamu's characterisation resembles Louis's in The Waves but it is to A Portrait and to Stephen Dedalus that the reader must turn for a fuller understanding of the character of the protagonist of This Earth. Both characters are iconoclasts. Amamu, like Stephen, has successfully dealt the blow to all the Gods that be. The nation is shown as rotten; his family is a sham; the ancestral gods are ineffectual, in his own words:

> A virtue shall elude mankind in spite of a
> million paschal lambs slaughtered and offered
> to greedy gods who will continue to doze in
> this millenium.
> 27

Thus, like Stephen, he emigrates to the sea in search of salvation in the hands of an apparently spotless goddess:

> I will get away into the shadow of my tree
> to await the epiphany of my woman of the sea
> with hard nipples rippling on the waves
> parted by moon splash. 28

When she appears, the ecstasy is similar to Stephen's excited moment:

> Here at last, he realised with a certain boyish
> joy, was the home of his salvation.
> 29

The differences between Amamu and Stephen are differences of temperament and intent. The former, choosing the path of death, goes on a journey that should lead him, through the woman of the sea, to meet his ancestors already gone beyond. The latter, in acquiring

weapons, is ready for another attempt, another form of adventure. One is middle-aged, negative, resigned; the other is young, positive, ambitious. Both journeys, however, represent a knowledge of self, especially of 'the waves' that move within. Like their counterparts in The Waves, for Stephen and Amamu, knowledge comes through search and pilgrimage and this process begins, and sometimes ends, in the mind. A detailed study of the symbolism will further reveal the nature and process of this voyage of discovery.

iii
Symbolism

Virginia Woolf's metaphor of a six or seven-sided flower is again an appropriate way of describing the process that unfolds the nature of the symbolism in the novels. From the parent flower there emerge several petals of different shapes and colours each of which contributes to the growth of the plant. The dominant symbol that emerges in these novels is that of life as a journey. We may thus see the journey as the parent flower from which all the others spring. Considering that all journeys have destinations, we may further distinguish three major categories of symbols in the novels: those symbols that represent the point of departure and those that stand for the homecoming while in between are the symbols that help to facilitate the journey. It is possible to envisage the journeys in symbolic terms because all three novelists only make a half-hearted effort to create the illusion of an actual journey taking place.

What goes on has been aptly described by Virginia Woolf in another comment on Sterne's novel:

> He was travelling in France indeed, but the road was often through his own mind, and his chief adventures were not with brigands and precipices but with the emotions of his own heart. [30]

It is useful to recall George Moore's observation that 'every man has a lake in his heart and must ungird his loins for the crossing' because the journey which is meticulously undertaken in the three novels is a journey that does not 'observe certain laws of proportion and perspective'. The perspective is an inward one which piles up so many images that the reader may be justified if he feels that the symbols have become an end in themselves.

In A Portrait Stephen's journey is presented as a race and an awareness of speed and competition dominates the story. Consciousness of this race, however, is displayed more by the inner than the outer Stephen though this distinction between levels of perception becomes apparent only as the story progresses and the reader becomes aware of it at significant stages throughout the novel. This early passage which describes Stephen's first days at school illustrates the salient features of the technique:

> The wide playgrounds were swarming with boys. All were shouting and the prefects urged them on with strong cries. The evening air was pale and chilly and after every charge and thud of the footballers the greasy leather orb flew like a heavy bird through the grey light. He kept on the fringe of his line, out of sight of his prefect; out of the rude feet, feigning to run now and then. He felt his body small and weak amid the throng of players, and his eyes were weak and watery ... He crept about from point to point on the fringe of his line making little runs now and then ... But his hands were bluish with cold. He kept his hands in the side pocket of his belted grey suit. That was a belt around his pocket. And belt was also to give a fellow a belt.
> 31

The boy's awareness of his body invites comparison with other boys who are stronger and he realises that the odds are against him. He thus withdraws, keeps 'on the fringe of his line out of the sight of the

prefect' and the 'rude feet' where he continues with a different exercise in which he thinks about words and begins to attempt making sense of them. The reader thus sees him from the outside when he is able to describe the playground and is conscious of himself before we move into his mind and see that he 'feigns to run now and then'. It is thus possible to delineate two playgrounds in the passage. One playground swarms with boys while the other is full of sensations and in it a different exercise with words takes place in contrast to the physical confrontation and competition in the first playground. A Portrait may be seen as a continuation of these exercises in the two playgrounds.

The prefects whose presence Stephen dodges are represented by the Jesuits, their religion, Stephen's family and his country and the rude feet stand for all those moments when he is jolted by incidents that seem to inhibit his exercise such as the retreat, the confession, the invitation to join the priesthood or the poverty of the Dedalus household. What strength the little frail, outside frame lacks as it confronts these obstacles is compensated for by an internal agility and sense of proportion which sometimes seems rather much for one of Stephen's age. Perhaps the consistency of tactics and purpose account for the eventual arrival at the point of destination. Here is how he describes another early stage in the journey:

> In the beginning he contented himself with circling timidly round the neighbouring square or, at most, going half way down one of the side streets: but when he had made a skeleton map of the city in his mind he followed boldly one of its central lines until he reached the Customs house.
>
> 32

The pace quickens after this stage and the images that describe it now

conjure speed.

> A side door of the theatre opened suddenly
> and a shaft of light flew across the grassplots.
> A sudden burst of music issued from the ark ...
> His unrest issued from him like a wave of sound:
> and on the tide of flowing music the ark was
> journeying, training her cables of lanterns
> in her wake.
>
> 33

'Sudden' appears in quick succession, and 'shafts' of light fly across and before long the movement is one of waves and tides.

Speed has so much become part of Stephen that when he attempts to construct a dam to stem the momentum, the effort proves inadequate, 'useless', 'the tides jostle fiercely above the crumbled mole'. Not even the sombre retreat of the Catholic priests can slow the momentum. The fiery words of the priest who conducts the retreat could well be Stephen's:

> The blood seethes and boils in the veins,
> the brains are boiling in the skull, the
> heart in the breast glowing and bursting,
> the bowels a red hot mass of burning pulp,
> the tender eyes flaming like molten balls.
>
> 34

The following response to the sermon illustrates the level of speed which Stephen's race may be said to have gathered:

> A wave of fire swept through his body: the
> first. Again a wave. His brain began to
> glow. Another. His brain was simmering
> and bubbling within the cracking tenement
> of the skull. Flames burst forth from his
> skull like a corolla, shrieking like voices
> ...
>
> 35

The language is sharp and urgent, a word becomes a sentence and

the flames which 'burst forth' from his skull are aided by 'waves'. There may be a retreat going on but the movement within Stephen is a mockery of the word. From the moment he picks up speed and the flames begin to roar the reader becomes aware of the inevitability of his subsequent exile. Stephen's mind is described as 'a cloister' through which gusts of wind blow. His mind has also been likened to other structures such as 'the theatre', 'an ark', 'a stream'[36]. In the end it is as if this curious combination of structures has all been washed towards the sea which clearly is the destination:

> He looked northward towards Howth. The sea had fallen below the line of seawrack on the shallow side of the breakwater and already the tide was running out fast along the foreshore.
> 37

We have come a long way from the stagnant pool at Clongowes. 'Where was his boyhood now?' he asks. The speed which Stephen gains surprises him as it does his peers and inevitably the reader. Not surprisingly the images now are of birds and of flight: 'When the soul of a man is born in this country, there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight'.[38] For Stephen the impression is given of a bird that soars high above the nets cast to catch it. The bird, as it were, survives the journey to the sea and not unexpectedly claims a prize in the woman of the sea 'whose bosom was as a bird's soft and slight, slight and soft as the breasts of some dark-plumaged dove'.[39]

So the journey or the race that begins rather playfully ends on a serious note. Stephen is presented as one able to combine the playful and the serious in order to cope with what turns out to be a difficult and complicated journey. The symbolism reveals the

various stages of this journey. There are false starts, as in the playground, unhelpful coaches such as Mike Flyn, as well as dubious techniques such as the retreat, but the assistance he receives is also tremendous and it leads him to his destination which turns out to be only a significant stop-over: 'I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience'.[40]

In The Waves as in A Portrait, life as a journey dominates the story. There is, however, a crucial difference in the nature of the movement. Each character in the novel represents a symbol of speed. Percival, for instance, is often described in images that reflect great speed. This is partly because he dies young and because Bernard together with Percival's other friends see death as 'the enemy' which terminates Percival's 'gallop' in India. Percival's death is depicted as a consequence of too much speed:

> His horse stumbled; he was thrown. The flashing trees and white rails went up in a shower. There was a singe; a drumming in his ears. Then the blow; the world crashed; he breathed heavily, he died where he fell.
> [41]

In the accompanying 'poetic' rendering of the incident the images are of waves and sprays reflecting tremendous momentum:

> The waves broke and spread their waters swiftly over the shore. One after the other they massed themselves and fell; the spray tossed itself back with the energy of their fall ... The waves fell; withdrew and fell again, like the thud of a great beast stamping.
> [42]

Waves are seen as an aid or a hindrance to life's journey. The title of the novel reflects their significance in the plot. Indeed half of the novel is an account of the movement of the waves and

they are often, as is the case with Percival, used as a complement to the action in the other half of the novel. There are moments when the waves 'pause and draw out again, sighing like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously'.[43] They may thus gather their own momentum or initiate and reflect the speed of the human characters.

Bernard, for instance, could be said to walk, in contrast to Percival's speed, but even he admits:

> And in me too the wave rises. It swells; it arches its back.
> 44

Bernard is aware of the 'eternal renewal' or what he also calls 'the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again'. But he is in many ways a routine person: Tuesday follows Monday, then comes Wednesday. He is never content, however, with being a mere walker. He talks about 'a rushing stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes and street cries'. Bernard lives long. He is the oldest of the major characters and this is put down to his 'precision'. He takes his time, he is preserved, as he claims, from the 'excesses' of his friends. His old age is thus seen as a mark of his control of the speeds (the waves) which control life.

Susan also symbolises the walking pace which Bernard so ably demonstrates. Like Bernard, she is married with children and since she has a farm and her 'stitching' to look after she can assume the leisure and easy pace which may not be harassed by waves:

> The brisk waves that slap my ribs rock more gently, and my heart rides at anchor, like a sailing-boat whose sails slide slowly down on the white deck.
> 45

Her routine-like manner is thus a result of harmony between her and the waves of life.

Louis symbolises a middle ground. He is used as if to bridge the gap between the routine, controlled pace of Bernard or Susan and the dizzy speed of Percival. He has developed an elaborate way of coping with the problems caused by 'waves' and conceives his role in complicated symbolic terms:

> My destiny has been that I remember and must weave together, must plait into one cable the many threads, the thin, the thick, the broken, the enduring of one long history, of our tumultuous and varied day.
> 46

Though Louis also hears 'the sullen thud of waves' he shows, as the passage indicates, that he can also take his time. Part of Louis's measured pace is derived from his idea that he has lived many thousand years but it is also a result of an almost identical harmonious relationship with nature as is the case with Susan. In him therefore may be found a bit of Bernard as well as a bit of Susan.

Jinny, however, 'rides like a gull on the waves',[47] and Rhoda is like 'a ribbon of weed flung far'.[48] Both women are 'rolled over' towards what seems to be an inevitable destination. They are not capable of running, not even of walking, and are quite satisfied to be part of a team and if possible enjoy the fruits of a communal victory, if any.

All the major characters thus become symbols which further throw light on the dominant symbol of life as a journey. Their journey as Bernard shows is fraught with dangers and death symbolises the end for each traveller:

> What enemy do we now perceive advancing against us, you whom I ride now as we stand pawing this stretch of pavement? It is death. Death is the enemy. It is death against whom I ride with my spear crouched and my hair flying back like a young man's, like Percival's when he galloped in India.
> 49

There is a significant difference here between Joyce and Virginia Woolf in their symbolic interpretation of the journey. For Virginia Woolf all the journeys, as Bernard describes them in the above passage, end in death. Percival's 'sprint', Louis's 'middle-distance', and Bernard's 'walk' all lead to an inevitable death. The picture is not as bright as Joyce's Stephen paints it in his own homecoming in A Portrait.

In This Earth, as in the other two novels, the journey dominates the plot and is again the major symbol:

> The long road begins here, begins from the foetal tunnel and winds serpentine through the grass, the river and the sun, for a covenant is drawn never to be broken, an oath is taken.
> 50

As in The Waves and A Portrait, levels of speed are crucial to an understanding of the nature of the novel's symbolism. Thus when Amamu is at 'the point of departure' elaborate preparations are made and even though the ritual is complete when the oath is taken it is clear from the following passage that there is no cause to hurry:

> Crawling, crawling picking up and eating tasteless chicken droppings, is there no one here and this child is eating chicken droppings ...
>
> Standing and falling scream scream into mother's bosom, little little goat Mother is not at home. Father is not at home ...
>
> Picking up sounds. Ghosts are real. Real. But they walk faster, erect, they run, they jump. The darkness deepens into light ...

> Bright bright days in the fields outside
> picking flowers, catching rainbow-coloured
> butterflies in a wild garden.
>
> 51

Awoonor's language here not only mimes the thoughts of the child in its relationship with the adult world but it also reflects the pace at which these stages in the journey through life move. The pace is slow. The present participles give this effect but as the child begins to grow these participles are replaced by more urgent figures of speech, ghosts 'walk faster', 'they run', 'they jump'. But the language symbolises a world view and a process. The chicken droppings, the goat and the butterflies in a wild garden reflect a very rustic life just opening up for a beginner, and, for the child, ghosts are real. But the language also shows the rudimentary, unsure stages in the journey so far. It is a stage of crawling, standing and falling.

But this slow pace is soon accelerated:

> Chasing after tangible ghosts in the fields I
> caught one. That was my first catch ... Then
> it flew away. It would not rest where I
> held it gently in my palm it would not stay.
> For days I searched the field looking for it.
>
> 52

Amamu's journey has now gathered momentum and the reader is reminded of the symbol of the butterfly whose elusive quality invites comparison with some of the other people which he encounters on his journey. It is possible to interpret his successful law practice as one butterfly he has caught. The Supreme Court Judge's daughter and his mistress Adisa could also be seen in this light. Amamu perhaps equates life's journey as a chase in the wild fields of butterflies.

Amamu also drives:

> Traffic was heavy ... He was patient. After a few minutes he saw the hill he was waiting for. But he had misjudged the speed of the taxi from the centre of the town. As he turned into the road, swinging left, tyres screeched, the taxi driver jammed on his brakes,eased opposite him, and said with venom or bitterness, 'Your mother's arse, don't you know how to drive?'
>
> 53

He is only clumsy. The man on the wheels who meticulously describes the scenery for the reader is not quite the same as the man with the habit of withdrawal. The drive defines the nature and quality of his journey. The road presents problems for the unwary driver. But, like Louis in The Waves, Amamu knows enough to avoid the collision for a while. He is quite capable, as Louis is, of applying the brakes.

This Earth, however, abounds in characters who are unable to drive, who collide headlong. There is Paul Dumenyo, the demented priest, almost Amamu's double who, as it were, falls by the wayside. Paul Dumenyo is always on the road and even when he becomes completely mad he is known more by his walk around the town than by his awful predicament. His favourite song is of a Christian Pilgrim:

> I am coming, Lord,
> Coming unto Thee.
> Wash me, cleanse me in Thy blood
> That flowed on Calvary.
>
> 54

Dumenyo's song reinforces and complements Amamu's evangelical journey:

> There's no discouragement
> Will make him once relent
> His first avowed intent
> To be a Pilgrim. 55

Ibrahim, the cousin of Amamu's faithful houseboy, also travels on this road and falls by the wayside. His movements from the north through the curious routes in Nima and his eventual death at the hands of his burglary victims are real but they can also be seen as symbols of a journey which proves too difficult for the traveller. The 'poetic' chapter preceding the description of Ibrahim's life recall the symbol of the journey and makes reference to 'touchstones, billboards, boardings carrying illuminated messages'.[56] It can be assumed that Ibrahim misreads the billboards. A character like Amamu's wife does not even seem to know where she is or whether she should travel at all. She simply vanishes into thin air, incapable of comprehending the quality of life's journey. Others take short cuts, like the two brothers who died fighting over a rat. When one is questioned he often replies that his brother had gone on 'a journey to Dahomey'. The soldiers who die in the Second World War also take a short-cut as does Amamu's mother who is cut down prematurely. Amamu's mother is one of those who hope, like Rhoda and Jinny in The Waves, that somehow the tide will carry them across. It does, and it is fair to say that This Earth is full of failed pilgrims.

As in The Waves, the Atlantic sea coast is perpetually battered by the tides from the ocean, washing away those who cannot drive. Amamu's tenacity, like Bernard's however, pays. But though his destination is similar to Bernard's he is more fortunate in a companion, not unlike Stephen's immaculate woman of the sea. Both Stephen and Amamu are presented as optimistic characters who use the sea as a special symbol of inspiration and courage. The characters in The Waves are equally tenacious but not as hopeful.

There are striking similarities in the dominant symbol used by all three novelists. It is useful to read Awoonor's novel with The Waves and A Portrait in mind. Amamu's journey, like Stephen's reaches its climax with the appearance of the watermaid, but, unlike Stepehn, Amamu's pilgrimage ends with the enemy, death, so well known to Bernard and his friends in The Waves. Even the 'touchstones' and the billboards are strikingly similar. Thus the reader encounters butterflies and moths in all three novels as he does birds, streams and waves. Each of these symbols aid the journey undertaken by the highly introspective characters. A closer analysis of the way in which these symbols that direct their 'inward journey' are created will throw more light on the symbolism discussed above.

iv

Use of Memory

Memory being 'a conditioning factor in all our mental processes', constitutes the essence of the novels deploying the inward perspective for here much of the activity takes place within the mind.[57] Memory is the link in the chain or, to continue our metaphor, memory serves as sign posts for the journey of the mind. The process may be described as one of fragmentation and assembly. A pattern emerges from the numerous pieces. The writer wedges the pieces to complete the jigsaw puzzle. Much of this process consists of a series of images which are linked with events. The minds of the characters in these three novels are warehouses stocked

with images of the past, the collection of which gives meaning to the events of the present and the future. But the novelist selects, and it is this selection that ensures a pattern. This may sound contradictory, since in the novels which deploy the inward perspective the images seem to 'roll in a laval flow'. But the novelists who deploy the technique are as capable of manipulating language as their realist or naturalist counterparts. They perhaps even do better than the realists whose fidelity to the difference between the 'Cathedral and the small girl' inhibits their perspective and selection.

In A Portrait Stephen's introspective nature is the perfect terrain for the mind's favourite activity, remembering. Always practising within his 'playground' he creates a pattern as the story unfolds. The mention of a word such as suck, for instance, leads first to a practice of its meaning, then to its association and inevitably to a memory of the night he had spent with his father at the hotel in Cork. This is the way Stephen operates throughout the novel. It is through this process whereby all the senses of his mind and body are engaged in a recording process that a full picture of the nature and destination of his journey emerges. Stephen's mind, as the narrator tells us, is a 'fantastic fabric' woven of all kinds of shapes and colours. His outer frame may be weak but the same cannot be said of his mind. Two contrasting images keep coming up within the storehouse of memories. On the one hand, the reader notices what Stephen calls 'monstrous images' best represented in the vivid recording of the sermon at the retreat. These images torture the lonely traveller, indeed, towards the end of the retreat, Stephen's soul could be said to be literally on fire. Only a mind capable of 'winding in and out' like a tape could reproduce so vividly those

sad moments when Stephen's sin 'oozes like a sore, a squalid stream of vice'. As he confesses, 'the last sins oozed forth, sluggish, filthy'.[58] This image of filth persists. The poverty of Stephen's parents, for instance, is demonstrated in the lice he squashes, poverty serves as a symbol of the hell to which Stephen's soul has been condemned. It is significant that this slimy life which he first experienced in the hands of the bully Wells never leaves him. It continues to appear in many forms. A pool of water is enough to remind Stephen of that faraway time when he shared a forced bath with a rat. Then there is the recurrence of the picture of the world as a dunghill, plunged perpetually into darkness from which there seems no escape. Here, monstrous reveries come thronging into his mind or more correctly, into the den. Darkness rules in this part and its meticulous recurrence in the mind of the protagonist serves as a reminder that here is a situation which calls for redemption. Stephen needs to reach for the light; he needs a lamp which will show him the way out of his cave and thus direct his steps properly to what must surely be the correct destiny: escape from those situations and people who seem bent on casting him back into damnation, into the sordid pool.

Just as Stephen's memory piles up sordid images by means of constant recurrence, so does the same memory serve him to fashion a path that will eventually lead him to light. The treachery of the other life is matched word for word by the fidelity of the images of hope. The most significant images and the most persistent are those that relate to women. Eileen virtually dominates the first chapter in spite of politics and religion. She reminds Stephen of lovely and precious objects, a tower of ivory, a house of gold; her hair

streams out like gold in the sun. Where in the other cluster there is darkness, here images of shining objects, represented by the sun, provide a strong antidote. Eileen's role is taken over by Mercedes in the second chapter. Her alluring eyes radiate and the constant repetition of her image reassures Stephen; the holy encounter continues in spite of the filth without. Both women are hand-maidens of the woman of the sea who is waiting patiently, as it were, for the success of Stephen's journey to her kingdom. They are complemented by several other women who hold the lamp for Stephen to see his way out. The two main sides of Stephen's character are thus represented by two obvious contrasting images: darkness and light. One inhibits the journey, the other propels the traveller and a tortured but yet alert memory keeps Stephen on course. Memory is similarly used to highlight the contrast between dark and bright sides of Stephen's life.

> The bubbles are rising like the silver bubbles from the floor of a saucepan; image on top of image. I cannot sit down to my book, like Louis, with ferocious tenacity. I must open the little trap-door and let out these linked phrases in which I run together whatever happens, so that instead of incoherence here is perceived a wandering thread lightly joining one thing to another.
>
> 59

Bernard's soliloquy describes very well the process at work in The Waves. In the novel there are, in fact, six trap doors all of which seem to open simultaneously and which give the coherence required for a composed story. Memory is locked within these doors and each time it is released it 'charges out' enjoying a certain freedom but aware also of the limitations of the freedom: there must be a wandering thread lightly joining one thing to another. What is

most remarkable about The Waves is this ability described by Susan Gorsky as 'Cosmic Communication'[60] which enables the characters in the story accurately to define what the memory of the other five consists in. Perhaps as people who grew up together it is not unusual after all that they should think alike, or for that matter, have similar memories. Virginia Woolf's innovation shows that birds of identical feather do indeed flock together. However, the shared soliloquies show that, though the memories are the same, the images which are used to express them are different. This device of varied images also ensures the differences in characterisation. Images in the first chapter, for instance, of a ring, a slab of pale yellow, bird song, a globe, a crimson tassel, a great beast's foot, and a spider's web accurately separate the major characters. Memory here more than in A Portrait serves as a crucial reference point. The six characters keep returning to the bench-mark from where they can properly survey the road which it seems they have to construct for themselves. Where Stephen had hand maidens, here the protagonists must be desperately looking for their own markers. Rhoda and Jinny could do with Stephen's luck but the nature of their journey requires that they must create their own signposts.

Such a signpost stands conspicuously in the figure of Percival. All roads lead to Percival. It is here that the traveller must return for his map. This is why Bernard continues to regret the day he refused to accompany Percival to Hampton Court. For once, the guide was prepared to take the traveller to the sites himself, but the poor traveller turned down an opportunity he lives to regret throughout his journey. Whenever Bernard is tormented by the 'horrible activity of the mind's eye' he experiences this 'pounce

of memory, not to be foretold, not to be warded off' - that he did not go to Hampton Court.[61] As with Bernard, so with the other five. Memories of Percival constitute for them the only meaningful way of interpreting their lives. Neville speaks for them:

> Into the wave that dashes upon the shore,
> into the wave that flings its white foam
> to the utmost corners of the earth, I throw
> my violets, my offering to Percival.
> 62

They 'yelp like jackals biting at each other's heels but assume the sober and confident air of soldiers in the presence of their captain'.[63] Memories of Percival unite their lives and give the story its unity. Without him and his inspiration the rest are incomplete, unprepared. The two moments in the story where we meet Percival are the most moving and revealing moments. It is also significant that Bernard's summary, which is a sketch of memories to end all memories, places Percival's invitation in a central position. It provides the 'pounce of memory' that he cannot forget. The italicised chapters show images of nature which also provide the signposts for all the characters. They determine the progress that each of the characters make. The first chapter sets the pattern:

> The sun had not yet risen. The sea was
> indistinguishable from the sky, except
> that the sea was slightly creased as if
> a cloth had wrinkles in it. Gradually as
> the sky whitened a dark line lay on the
> horizon dividing the sea from the sky
> and the grey cloth became barred with thick
> strokes moving, one after another, beneath
> the surface, following each other, pursuing
> each other, perpetually.
> 64

The evolutionary process which is described here is similarly reflected in the way the human characters are revealed to the reader.

We begin with sunrise and end with darkness and are, through repetition, reminded of the importance of nature in the lives of these characters. Nature stands for the all-conquering 'hero' which Percival and his followers have failed to become. The change in the sun's movement is revealed gradually by a skilful use of memory.

In Amamu we find yet another withdrawn character for whom memory constitutes the essence of being. Since the beginning of the story is also its end, memory becomes indispensable to the narration. All the 'A' chapters are exercises in memory and reflection - one, (chapter 6a) actually begins with the word remember. Amamu's memory also consists of a pattern of two opposing images. On the one hand there is the dunghill and on the other hand there is the butterfly. All the other images in the story may be grouped under these opposing categories. The dunghill is associated with darkness which in turn conjures the image of a cave. In this dark cave will be found all the filth of corruption in the country during and after Colonial rule: 'fart-filled respectable people toiling in moth-eaten files to continue where the colonialists and imperialists left'.[65] There is the unmistakable filth of Nima which lurks in the background. Nima provides Amamu with an opportunity to show that he is also quite capable of keeping the outer eye open. In what is clearly the best descriptive chapter in the novel, Amamu meticulously reminds the reader of the dunghill his country has become:

> Nima skirts the west central part of the city
> like a vulture. No river runs through Nima.
> Only a huge open gutter that stinks to heaven.
> The City itself grew with a vengeance.
> Nima grew alongside it like an ever growing
> and eternal dunghill.
> [66]

In all his travels a lot of what he comes across reminds him of this dunghill. Yet:

> In this dunghill we will search among the rubble for our talisman of hope.
> 67

And here a path similar to Stephen's is followed meticulously. The elusive butterfly continues to prove more difficult to find, and as in Joyce, a host of hand-maidens, also with a lamp, help the traveller to move on course. Here also the image of the dunghill is contrasted with shiny objects, sunflowers, shining flames, gold, and as the traveller moves nearer his destination, the sun begins to break through the clouds. The moment is bright and it sparkles:

> She rose slowly, head first, adorned with sapphires, corals and all the ancient beads her mother left for her pubertal rites. She rose slowly from a dream sea. The sea was real: the sun was beating down hard and cruel.
> 68

Adisa, the dominant hand-maiden, smells of fresh earth upturned for the millet season in her native home. This is a sharp contrast to Amamu's wife whose presence brings 'dark clouds straddling the sky's span'. [69]

Amamu's landscape is vast, stretching from Keta through London via Sweden to Moscow, yet memory serves him so well that his avowed intent is never shaken. In spite of the variety of people and circumstances that he encounters he has become such a master at puzzles that towards the end he joins all the pieces into a recognisable pattern. A chain of women lead him to the Watermaid and he displays an uncanny remembrance of friends and of the events

that initiated the contact in the first place. Memory in Amamu has the power of uniting the impossible. Everything flows in a certain pattern for the searcher and traveller who has developed skills to be able to sift butterflies out of dunghills. Memory may be said to be the strong point of Awoonor's novel. Where Joyce and Woolf have a smaller landscape, Dublin and London, only marginally including other areas, Awoonor's extends to cover the whole world. All three novelists, though, display 'a perpetual lengthening shadow of memories' over their present experience. In the process they blur the boundaries between the past, present, and future which forms the subject of the next section.

v

Use of Time

The mind which creates its spaces is equally capable of creating its time which may, as with space, not be the same as that provided by the guide-book. In novels which use the inward perspective, time, chronological time, is bent and broken to serve the psychological dispositions of the characters in the story. The multiple nature of the characterisation and the nature of the symbolism reflect the way time is also portrayed. Time is seen in different perspective - in its relation to nature, and in its relation to space. It may even be said that perspective on time conditions the flow of the narration. 'Glasses', Sterne had said, 'can make an inch seem a

mile. I leave it to future ages to invent a method for making a minute seem a year'.[70] Sterne went on to do in Tristram Shandy what he was going to leave to future ages but the novelists under discussion may be considered as his truest apostles. They all manipulate time as freely as possible in order to give the characters in the novels greater psychological perspective.

Thus chronological and mechanical time are often far from Stephen's mind in A Portrait. He changes the calendar days in anticipation of the Christmas vacation. He also carefully notes the lecture hours on his time-table and even compiles a diary toward the end of the story but all these exercises are subservient to the psychological time his mind creates. Because his mind creates vast spaces it is able to see chronological time as a minor element in its world. When he tears dates off his Calendar, for instance, he is aware that the Christmas vacation is still a long way but he adds confidently that 'one time it would come because the earth moved round always'.[71] The reader is then treated to a lesson in geography emphasising the superiority of space over time. When Stephen notices the lecture hours on his time-table he also remarks the unreliability of clock time: one clock tells him it is five minutes to five but there is another one near him beating eleven strokes. So he returns his mind to its introspective shell and considers his future role in the United States of Europe. These entries in his diary speak for themselves:

> 6 April: Certainly she remembers the past. Lynch says all women do. Then she remembers the time of her childhood - and mine if I was ever a child. The past is consumed in the present and the present is living only because it brings forth the future.[72]

The reader has already become used to his unique sense of time and how in this process the spatial dimension takes precedence over the temporal and a close connection is made with nature which, after all, provides the vast expanse upon which the mind works. Time is described mainly in relation to space and nature:

> Consciousness of place came ebbing back to him slowly over a vast tract of time unlit, unfelt, unlived.
>
> 73

Elsewhere his soul traversed:

> A period of desolation in which the sacraments themselves seemed to have turned into dried up sources.
>
> 74

Indeed nature, not time, is Stephen's main guide in life:

> So timeless seemed the grey warm air, so fluid and impersonal his own mood, that all ages were as one to him.
>
> 75

Nature cools the loathing and bitterness in Stephen. The moment may be depressing but the superior rhythm of nature assures the troubled soul that somehow all will be well. It is in the sea that Stephen recognises the presence of 'a new wild life singing in his veins'.[76] The sea and its waves continue beating while mechanical time operates its monotonous beat. The waves do soar and rage, have more flexibility, something deficient in the other time. The mermaid who resides in the sea is the custodian of this eternal ebb and flow of the waves and enough has been said about her significance in Stephen's consciousness. She represents the eternal renewal for Stephen. This view of time affects the plot of the novel.

In the first chapter, for instance, where the attention of the reader is focussed on the 'playground', past, present and future mingle with such fluidity that it is difficult to distinguish which is 'the moment'. In the first few pages of the chapter the reader is introduced to the thoughts of the child but not long after that Stephen is already established in school at Clongowes and is shown to be settling down to some rhythm when he finds himself in the infirmary. A long period is then taken to dramatize a Christmas dinner party which in the narration is as present as the events we witness in the school. Yet it might well be the story Stephen tells his fellow invalid at the infirmary. As soon as the dinner party is over we are returned to the 'story' once more. This ability to dramatize events in such a way that each becomes part of the present consciousness is the advantage the narrator gets from taking chronology into his own hands and thus challenging the reader's conventional ways of looking at time.

Stephen's race has been recorded in such a way that he may rewind and edit the tape if and when he chooses. The choice is usually conditioned by 'the moment' which, in several instances, may just be a mere word or gesture. Each time squalor or dirt comes up a whole array of past incidents swarm back. The movement from Clongowes through Belvedere, to University is a recurrent one. It is no wonder that even at University the first things he remembers are those tormenting moments at Clongowes. Rather than measure time chronologically, Stephen has devised his own time measurement: Clongowes, Mercedes, and the small whitewashed house in the garden where he measured 'distance on the homeward and outward journey'.[77] We have come to know that, for Stephen, distance is another way of talking about time.

> I have torn off the whole of May and June, and twenty days of July. I have torn them off and screwed them up so that they no longer exist, save as a weight in my side. They have been crippled days, like moths with shrivelled wings unable to fly.
>
> 78

Susan's desperate gesture is an indication of the outlook the characters in The Waves adopt towards time. If we add her soliloquy to Louis's which consistently emphasises an ageless life, we notice a group of people desperate to take control of a situation which seems beyond them. None of them wants to go to the top to live in the light of 'this great clock, yellow-faced, which ticks and ticks'. Like Susan, and very much like Stephen, all the characters in The Waves do not trust mechanical time and they all plot, like Rhoda, to destroy it:

> The two hands are convoys marching through a desert. The black bars on the clock face are green oases. The long hand has marched ahead to find water. The other, painfully stumbles among hot stones in the desert. It will die in the desert.
>
> 79

And it does. Here, as in A Portrait, nature is the ally of the mind. Nature destroys time so that the mind can create its own or simply just live on; that is why, apparently pleased at the conquest of time, Bernard claims that they are all creators. That time which they create is a replica of nature; it lets fall its drop on the roof of Bernard's mind; time for Bernard has become 'a sunny pasture covered with a dancing light, it is spread as a field at midday'. Here, as in Stephen's case, there is no past, no future, merely the moment in 'its ring of light'. Preoccupation with the moment dominates the narrative in The Waves. The story consists of the

desperate efforts of all six major characters to arrest the moment, if possible, make it stand still. A very clear distinction is made in this novel between the time of the mind - 'which stretches from Shakespeare to ourselves' - and that other clock which marks the approach of a particular person.[80]

Having destroyed that other clock, however, they need to create their own landmarks and here, as in A Portrait, memory and a dramatized perspective plays a crucial role. Each soliloquy seems to be tailored for the moment and the link between the soliloquies, which sometimes seems incredible, as in chapter one where Bernard and Susan seem to cue each other, ensures that the stream, the new mode of time is kept constantly in flow. The ability of the characters to know what the others are thinking enables them to maintain the link in their own time span; except for Louis, that is. Louis's sense of time, though also of the mind, covers all seasons in a way which makes even Susan's ambitions seem meaningless. Louis is a man of all seasons. There will always be Louis, his father a banker in Brisbane, not just a Louis. For him there is no particular meeting place between past and present in spite of the attempt to 'defraud human history of a moment's vision'.[81]

The others, though, have found a new benchmark for measuring time - Percival. Like Mercedes in A Portrait, Percival serves as a point for measuring time and distance. Bernard, for instance, is confused when he discovers that Percival's death and the birth of his own son occurred on the same day. Yet he must hold Percival's 'youth and beauty' since such an opportunity may never come again. In their pilgrimage Percival sets the pace and the time.

Percival's standard is, however, not the sole criterion for recording time. A good part of the narrative consists of the description of the rhythmic measurement of nature. The sun, the sea, waves, trees and birds operate a similar, though superior, rhythm from that provided by the other characters. Nature displays the variety which the characters stand for but which seems to elude them:

> The waves massed themselves, curved their backs and crashed. Up spurted stones and shingle. They swept round the rocks, and the spray, leaping high, spattered the walls of a cave that had been dug before, and left pools inland, where some fish stranded lashed its tail as the wave drew back.
>
> 82

Rhoda or Jinny might be that poor fish which missed the wave. Nothing seems to bother these waves, not even the plight of a poor fish going to perish on dry land. When Bernard contemplates his enemy, death, the waves are indifferent. They have the last word: 'the waves broke on the shore'.[83] Here, nature is the criterion of time.

This is, however, not to ignore the other time which begins at the nursery. The narrative also takes us through chronological time if only to smash it. We follow the six, later seven, characters from nursery to old age in the case of Bernard. Though this time itself sometimes flows as a stream it is nevertheless followed diligently. Perhaps that is why, besides Louis, the other characters seem particularly threatened by it. Time, here, as Percival's fate demonstrates, is a real enemy; its death merely produces ghosts which haunt the minds of the protagonists of the story.

Kofi Awoonor's intended title for his novel was The Leaves of Time,[84]

and this passage from his incomplete novel aptly describes what happens in This Earth:

> I have no proper sense of time; measuring time by any mechanical means destroys the depth and autonomy that time, real time, in all its mystery and magic, imposes on all things. Time is EVENTS, time is PLACE IMMEASURABLE, BEYOND RECALL. Time is the record of the mythic dimension of our interaction with our surroundings beyond the direct acts, beyond the IMMEDIATE recorded now. Time is the truth which is shattered, ungathered, unrecorded forever. (Emphasis mine) 85

Amamu, like Stephen and Bernard, refuses to measure time by mechanical means. Instead he records time in places and events and sees it as the mythic dimension of 'our interaction with our surroundings'. Amamu is sometimes, like Louis, ageless: 'Sometimes I rode on the back of one of the small ghosts ... rode through centuries I cannot recall'.[86] The relationship between time, space, and nature, is a constant refrain of Amamu. Here are a few examples:

> Yaro suddenly looked old; he wore for the first time an interminable age, an oldness that was not time's, an agedness of hills and rivers. 87

> A thousand raindrops shall dance in the fertile womb of time. 88

> Joe said time was a hermaphrodite offering the therapy of God and we must bend down, lie down and receive our divine medication at his/her hands. 89

> And the waves beat their eternal notes upon the shore as they washed against his body. 90

This last line recalls Virginia Woolf's waves breaking on the shore even as Amamu, like Bernard, embraces death. But the agelessness of the watermaid also recalls Stephen and his woman of all time. Like Stephen, this woman of the sea, and her eternal powers, reassures a wary Amamu and keeps his pilgrim dreams alive. To think about her is to forget about time:

> It seemed suddenly that the centuries and the years of pain of which he was the inheritor and the woes for which he was singled out to be carrier and the sacrifice, were being rolled away, were being faded in that emergence.
>
> 91

In This Earth the mermaid also reincarnates in Amamu's cousin who died years ago when he was a child. Her message is an old one, only delivered in a youthful voice. Here, as in the other two novels, nature through its visible contacts, the sea, its waves, the butterfly, the mermaid are the allies of the mind that cancels mechanical time.

As in the other two novels, a sense of drama and a vivid memory obliterates the distinction between past, present and future - all ages are one. The beginning of the story of This Earth is also its end. Memory provides the time scheme and makes disparate events fit into a pattern determined as it were by forces outside of time. Yet This Earth also displays a considerable record of mechanical time. In some cases actual dates are given, such as Amamu's early days at school and all the incidents that were associated with them. But, here too, the fidelity of recording the dates and times is just another way of refuting their claim to order and precision. Amamu is the type of character who it seems has seen everything. It is no wonder that as he moves closer to his death he takes us back to his

primer class. His journey takes him through paths familiar to the characters of A Portrait and The Waves:

> The road winds through tomorrow, for there are no yesterdays, and tomorrows, they are wiped away by tears in the eyes of orphans, in the eyes of widowed women in the eyes of husbands who lost their wives in childbirth in the convent where white sisters in long gowns administer ether and cut open wombs with a pair of sewing scissors. Touchstones, billboards, boardings carrying illuminated messages proclaiming the covenant. [92]

Here, too, the present, the moment, is lost in the ebb and flow, the tears of orphans and widows. The suffering becomes itself an aspect of time. It is a touchstone that proclaims the covenant between the dead and the living. Amamu uses his accumulated experience from books and from travel to emphasise the fluidity of time. For instance, he claims kinship with Jesus whose ordeal he seems to undergo concurrently.[93] It is as if he went to Golgotha. He also has an uncanny way of linking every event and person within his stream of consciousness. In chapter four 'a', for instance, he is able to draw a list of all the women he has met in his travels and in his youth and as the list unfolds it becomes obvious that each of these women is just another manifestation, an epiphany, of the primal woman of the sea who, as in A Portrait, represents the ultimate measurement of time and place. Her terrain and her patience condition the movement of the character and help to sustain him in his ordeal.

There is in this experience and breadth of coverage something striking about Amamu which it appears the characters of The Waves could do with. There is nothing of that desperation which was noticeable in the cases of Susan and Rhoda. Amamu is calm, he has seen it all, he is like

some older version of Percival only perhaps more dreamy. While Percival has no mermaid, Amamu, like Stephen, seeks solace in his woman of the sea. However, the similar features outweigh the differences. In each of the novels chronological time is manipulated to suit the temperament of the character. In this fragmentation new ways of assembly emerge. First the difference between time and space becomes blurred and time and events are indistinguishable. Each seeks a new mark upon which they can hang the disparate threads. In each case this new mark is found in nature which becomes a crucial ally in this war to obliterate the precision of the other time. With a new time dimension, confidence is engendered, only, in some cases, to be shaken by the monotonous but sometimes ominous, ticking of mechanical time. By singling out the watermaid as a source of inspiration and courage and as a benchmark from which they can look at other aspects of time, Joyce and Awoonor have found a way out of the intimidating presence of what Rhoda calls 'the great clock'. The minds of these characters having created symbols and space have added another element, time, to their long list of discoveries on their common journey.

The technique of the inward perspective reveals the novelist as an explorer into the inner recesses of the mind. For this voyage of exploration the novelist relies on memory and manipulates memory and time to show the complexity of the mind. The three writers under study utilise these devices and some striking similarities emerge in their use of technique and in their thematic concerns. All three put their protagonists on a symbolic journey. Awoonor's protagonist is a cross between Joyce's optimism and Virginia Woolf's despondency. Awoonor has acknowledged a debt to Joyce but he also

seems to have incorporated some of the devices that Virginia Woolf deploys in The waves. Indeed, in structure This Earth bears direct resemblance with The Waves with its separate poetic interludes and separate straightforward narrative. The last three chapters of This Earth serve a similar function to Bernard's summary in The Waves. However, while Bernard is analysing the lives of his other friends, Amamu looks back at his own journey and attempts to place himself somewhere in the recurrent stream of life, a job which the watermaid seems to simplify for him.

The images and symbols used by all these novelists are very revealing. They confirm the view that all are devices which work toward the dominant symbol of life as a journey. As a result of this common focus the differences in landscape between the three writers become blurred. All the symbols are deployed in an identical manner. For instance, the symbol of the mermaid appears in all three novels though it is given greater attention by Joyce and Awoonor. In an interview he gave in Texas in 1972 Awoonor had said of this mermaid:

> Right now in Keta there are magicians who cure all kinds of diseases and it is believed that they have spent years in the waters with this woman. She is a REAL woman. (My emphasis)
>
> 94

No one need doubt the authenticity of the statement. What Awoonor did not say, however, is the way the mermaid has, in This Earth, been adapted to fit the bigger canvas his novel paints. Amamu's watermaid is greater than a herbalist's tool. We have shown that she is closer to Joyce's maid than to the Keta coastline where she rightly resides. It is more likely that the inspiration which Amamu gets is from Stephen's woman. But this is not to say that Awoonor has not

written an original story. Indeed, his eclecticism, which draws from Joyce and possibly from Virginia Woolf, enhances his narrative technique. His novel deserves attention because it is a good story that blends the resources of poetry with a straightforward narrative of facts. Awoonor supports this view himself. 'Cultural purity', he says, 'is a dangerous myth that can arrest a people's growth and impose false ideas of superiority on them'.[95] He also admits that a large community of African artists do return to their roots in order to forge artistic patterns, through the 'newly acquired European instruments'.[96] Awoonor has, in fact, written a novel that is a cross between James Joyce's and Virginia Woolf's novels. If he has tried to compose an 'African dirge' it happily sounds similar to the 'private dirges' of the characters in The Waves. It is possible to argue, as Richard Priebe does, that This Earth is a truly African novel but the question is not one of identity but of devising useful ways by which criticism of novels across cultures may be conducted. The next chapter discusses yet another aspect of point of view as it is deployed by novelists who, though from different cultures, have devised similar ways of handling narrative.

Notes

1. Kofi Awoonor, 'Interview' in Kunapipi Vol.1 No.2 (1979) p.78.
2. The Waves, p.154.
3. Ibid. p.85.
4. A Portrait, p.90.
5. Ibid. p.100.
6. Ibid. p.63.
7. Ibid. p.222.
8. Ibid. p.227.
9. Ibid. p.155.
10. Ibid. pp.7-10, p.54, p.134, p.107.
11. The Waves, p.98.
12. Ibid. p.162.
13. Ibid. p.195.
14. Ibid. p.200.
15. Ibid. p.114.
16. Ibid. p.115.
17. Virginia Woolf on Proust in Reuben Brower, 'The Novel as a Poem', The Interpretation of Narrative: Theory and Practice ed. Morton W. Bloomfield (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p.244.

18. The Waves, p.105.

19. This Earth, p.183.

20. Achebe, Soyinka, Armah have among others depicted this type of character.

21. This Earth, p.81.

22. Ibid. p.29.

23. Ibid. p.143.

24. Ibid. p.176.

25. Ibid. p.176.

26. Kofi Awoonor, 'The Poem, the Poet and the Human Condition', Asemka No.5 (September 1979), p.21.

27. This Earth, p.135.

28. Ibid. p.179.

30. Virginia Woolf op. cit. p.80.

31. A Portrait, pp.8-9.

32. Ibid. p.61.

33. Ibid. p.69.

34. Ibid. p.112.

35. Ibid. p.115.

36. See note 10 above.

37. A Portrait, p.155.

38. Ibid. p.184.

39. Ibid. p.155.

40. Ibid. p.228.

41. The Waves, p.101.

42. Ibid. pp.101-2.

43. Ibid. p.5.

44. Ibid. p.198.

45. Ibid. p.31.

46. Ibid. p.112.

47. Ibid. p.71.

48. Ibid. p.72.

49. Ibid. p.200.

50. This Earth p.48.

51. Ibid. pp.14-15.

52. Ibid. p.15.

53. Ibid. p.17.

54. Ibid. p.103.

55. Ibid. p.183.

56. Ibid. p.48.

57. Shiv Kumar, Bergson and the Stream-of-Consciousness Novel (London: Blackie, 1962), p.25.

58. A Portrait, p.132.

59. The Waves, p.26.

60. Susan Gorsky, 'The Central Shadow: Characterisation in The Waves', Modern Fiction Studies, 18:3 (1977) p.450.

61. The Waves, p.179.

62. Ibid. p.111.

63. The Waves, p.83.

64. Ibid. p.5.

65. This Earth, p.28.

66. Ibid. p.151.

67. Ibid. p.92.

68. Ibid. p.179.

69. Ibid. p.123.

70. In A.A. Mendilow, Time and the Novel, (New York: Humanities Press, 1972), p.174.

71. A Portrait, p.14.

72. Ibid., p.226.

73. Ibid., p.129.

74. Ibid., p.138.

75. Ibid. p.153.

76. Ibid. p.155.

77. Ibid. p.58.

78. The Waves, p.36.

79. Ibid. p.14.

80. Ibid. p.185.

81. Ibid. p.45.

82. Ibid. p.112.

83. Ibid. p.200.

84. Palaver: Interview with Five African Writers, op.cit. p.61

85. Kofi Awoonor, 'Comes the Voyager at Last', Okike, 4(1975).

86. This Earth, p.14.

87. Ibid. p.175.

88. Ibid. p.133.

89. Ibid. p.105.

90. Ibid. p.179.

91. Ibid. p.179.

92. Ibid. p.48.

93. Ibid. p.48.

94. Palaver op. cit. p.60.

95. Kofi Awoonor, The Breast of the Earth (New York: Doubleday, 1975) p.347.

96. Ibid. p.352-353.

Chapter Four : The Multiple Perspective Part I

Joseph Conrad, Nostromo

Under Western Eyes

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, A Grain of Wheat

Petals of Blood

I

If the novels of Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Awoonor are about the self then those of Conrad and Ngugi may be said to be about ideas. This is not to imply that individual perceptions are insignificant in the novels. On the contrary, both novelists are very concerned with the individual but they both present him as certain ideas, such as truth and honour, for instance, affect him and how his own views about these concepts shape his relationship with his environment. A complex network of ideas and personalities determines point of view in their novels. The perspective is as multiple as the characters in the novels.

The novels examined in the previous chapter deal with introspective protagonists whose concern with themselves is such that the novels sometimes read as if the novelists had no reader in mind. The novels of Conrad and Ngugi, however, are novels for the reader. They are, to borrow Umberto Eco's terms, 'open texts', which actively involve the reader in their 'production'.[1] It is necessary to emphasise this point especially with regard to Ngugi because recent criticism of his novels has tended to suggest that they evoke a limited and predetermined response, namely, a scientific socialist orientation of society.[2] Such a view undermines the complexity of Ngugi's novels. Both A Grain of Wheat and Petals of Blood ask the reader to adopt more than one perspective. It is worth repeating here that it is Conrad's questioning technique which Ngugi most admired. Ngugi's wish to write a thesis on Conrad when he was a Postgraduate student at Leeds, at a time when he had already published two novels and was, in fact, writing A Grain of Wheat, is

further testimony of their kinship in method.[3] Discussion of point of view in his novels must account for this affinity.

ii

Characterisation

The individual histories of all the major characters in Nostromo and Petals of Blood offer perspectives from which other major characters may be viewed. The characters display a dramatic partnership which places them in intricate relationships with one another but one which still highlights their individual consciousness and their unique need to discover a purpose and a direction in life. Isolation and community thus define the nature of the characterisation and the management of point of view as in the novels of Faulkner and Armah but the major characters in the novels of Conrad and Ngugi are not the speculative, passive, and sympathetic observers who repeatedly probe into the lives and events around them; instead, they choose and act and face the full implications of their actions. The sympathetic observer, such as Captain Mitchell claims to be in Nostromo, is superfluous.[4] The actions of the characters speak for themselves; sympathy and judgement are left to the reader who soon discovers that 'truth' in these novels is the sum of many perceptions.

The scene involving Decoud and the Capataz of the Cargadores toward the end of the second part of Nostromo illustrates how well Conrad makes this technique work. Decoud and the Capataz of the Cargadores have been assigned the difficult and dangerous task of saving

several silver ingots from the greedy hands of the Monterists and predictably they get into very serious trouble. This is how the moment is depicted:

> The lighter was leaking like a sieve ... The Capataz put into Decoud's hands the handle of the pump which was fitted at the side aft, and at once, without question or remark, Decoud began to pump in utter forgetfulness of every desire but that of keeping the treasure afloat ... Decoud pumped without intermission. Nostromo steered without relaxing for a second the intense, peering effort of his stare. Each of them was as if utterly alone with his task. It did not occur to them to speak. There was nothing in common between them but the knowledge that the damaged lighter must be slowly but surely sinking. In that knowledge, which was like the crucial test of their desires, they seem to have become completely estranged, as if they had discovered in the very shock of the collision that the loss of the lighter would not mean the same thing to them both. THIS COMMON DANGER BROUGHT THEIR DIFFERENCES IN AIM, IN VIEW, IN CHARACTER, AND IN POSITION, INTO ABSOLUTE PROMINENCE IN THE PRIVATE VISION OF EACH. There was no bond of conviction, of common idea; they were merely two adventurers pursuing EACH HIS OWN ADVENTURE, involved in the same imminence of deadly peril. Therefore they had nothing to say to each other. But this peril, this only incontrovertible truth in which they shared, seemed to act as an inspiration to their mental and bodily powers. (My emphasis).
> 5

If we agree with Conrad that 'silver is the pivot of the moral and material events, affecting the lives of everybody in the tale,'[6] then this passage clearly describes the narrative strategy of the novel, for each character, not just Decoud and Nostromo, in Conrad's large canvas is his 'own adventurer', but is united nevertheless by the common perilous fact of the silver. The silver is 'the crucial test of their desires', and inspires their involvements in events which can only be appropriately seen as 'deadly peril'.

Perhaps the greatest 'adventurer' in this sense is Charles Gould; the undisputed, but uncrowned, 'King of Sulaco' whose history, on one level, could be seen as the story of Nostromo. His manifesto is a straightforward one:

> What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, security. Anyone can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist.
> 7

In pursuit of these otherwise plausible public and political goals, Charles Gould is 'decoyed' by these same material interests which had in an earlier period destroyed his father. However, his problem is not, as Decoud and Dr Monygham claim, 'romantic idealism'. On the contrary, he is a very practical man, perhaps consumed by his fixed idea of justice but certainly not a 'romantic idealist'. The reasons for his failure may be seen in the contrasting qualities displayed by his wife. She is 'highly gifted in the "art" of human intercourse', has a 'humanising influence' on people and in her, 'even the most legitimate touch of materialism was wanted'.[8] She goes out of her way to look after the interest of the old Garibaldino and her hospitals and schools, for all that Decoud may declaim, are a measure of her spiritual commitment. Charles Gould, in contrast, is active in a different but more disastrous way. He has become so occupied with the mine that he forgets even his own wife and their small circle of friends. As the narrative progresses, he speaks less and less, often making his decisions with the nod of his head, or a slight alteration of his facial expression:

> His silences, backed by the power of speech, had as many shades of significance as uttered words in the way of assent, of doubt, of negation -

> even of simple comment. Some seemed to say plainly, 'Think it over', others meant clearly 'Go·ahead', a simple low 'I see', with an affirmative nod, at the end of a patient listening half-hour was the equivalent of a verbal contract, which men had learned to trust implicitly.
> 9

Gould opts out of the joy and pain of life exemplified so well by his wife; he becomes, instead, nothing more than a statue. He fails to take a deep look at his own motives and his activities, which, before his father's death, seemed not only practicable but genuine and honest. Even when he makes obvious compromises, such as bribing Sulaco politicians, he does not see the larger human contact which such actions demand, and, because he is unable to understand his own nature, he naturally fails to understand other people. Through him Conrad demonstrates, as Eugene Boyle remarks, 'the tragedy of self-recognition not attained'.[10] His failure though should be seen in its broader context; the other major characters whose histories could also be said to be the subject of the novel provide a useful framework upon which the problems of self-knowledge and external demands can be assessed.

Dr Monygham's downright view of material interests, for instance, presents a sharp contrast to the faith which Charles Gould displays but Dr Monygham's observations also reflect a superficial view of what has happened to the owner of the San Tome mine:

> There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their law and their justice. But it is founded on expediency and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle.
> 11

It may be difficult to refute Dr Monygham's claim and because he seems to survive so many generations and the unpredictable governments of Coastaguana he could easily be taken to be the novel's authoritative voice. The strategy of the novel, however, allows no one character to enjoy such a role. Dr Monygham's distrust of material interests and of fellow human beings, honest though it may seem, hides some very fundamental things about him. His face, the narrator observes, 'had something vaguely unnatural, an exaggerated remorseful bitterness',[12] the result, perhaps, of the torture he underwent under Guzman Bento's rule. His experiences under this tyrant inflict a 'pain which makes truth, honour, self-respect, and life itself matters of a little moment'.[13] No wonder, then, that he has little regard for these ideals. His idolatrous relationship with Mrs Gould appears to be a way of exorcising himself of the demon that seems to haunt him but not even Mrs Gould's humanizing spirit can help the man who never recovers his self-respect. Toward the end he is no more than a bird of prey with 'a broken wing'. The history of his life highlights the predicament of a cynic who, though not fooled, as Charles Gould is, by any rationalised emotion, nevertheless has become the victim of self-abuse, obsessed with the idea that to be worthwhile life must be flawless. He gets his due 'reward' when Mrs Gould, his new found goddess, refuses to confirm his inveterate pessimism with regard to the character of Nostromo.

Martin Decoud, like Dr Monygham, also rejects Charles Gould's 'fairy tale'; he is skeptical about 'material interests' but he too is unable to achieve any proper realisation of self. Decoud serves a very useful purpose in the novel because his dramatic schemes, such as the establishment of the newspaper in Sulaco, his gun-running

and his eventual proclamation of independence for Sulaco, shape and direct the course of action in the novel. In place of Charles Gould's fascination with the treasure of the mine and of Dr Monygham's new-found idol, Decoud has has beautiful Antonia Avellanos under whose charm he undertakes all his adventures. He is convinced, in spite of the crucial role he plays in the affairs of the Republic, that he is 'not a patriot, but a lover'; his only illusion, he claims, 'is the supreme illusion of lover'. Unfortunately, however, he too fails to discover the joy of life. He commits suicide when faced with a deep sense of loneliness in the dark gulf. All three complement one another. Each of them seems to represent what the other might have been and what qualities they needed to reach the self-discovery they seek, but, somehow, their lonely and curious lives often contradict the 'plausible causes' which each of them seems determined to defend. 'Things seem to be worth nothing by what they are in themselves', the railway engineer once told Dr Monygham, 'the only solid thing about them is the spiritual value which everyone discovers in his own form of activity.'[14] The doctor would not hear such nonsense and it may be assumed that neither the 'dumb' Charles Gould, nor the 'dilettante' Decoud would appreciate such talk; all are fooled in one way or another.

The last word in this novel, if any, must belong simultaneously to Emilia Gould and 'the magnificent' Nostromo, the Capataz of the Cargadores who gives the story its title. It is not a coincidence that Nostromo specifically wishes to confess his crime to the woman who alone represents the spiritual values so absent in all the other major characters. He has scored several major triumphs. He is, as his 'ugly' nickname implies, 'the most indispensable member of

the crew'.[15] He is indispensable to the Europeans of Sulaco; indeed, as Decoud remarks, is the 'active usher in of the material implements for (our) progress'.[16] But Nostromo also falls prey to all the destructive passions that cause the failure of his European counterparts, such as Gould's dumb faith in material interests or Decoud's idealised sensual love or Dr Monygham's mistrust of self. The crucial difference between him and them, however, is the way he manages, in spite of all the set-backs and his naiveté, to salvage something from his failures. The reader must wonder what would happen had Decoud possessed the selflessness and courage which Nostromo displays. 'I have said the word', he says, 'the spell is broken',[17] in defiance of Dr Monygham's inveterate pessimism, in spite of Gould's ignorant piety, and of Decoud's skepticism and disillusion. Toward the end of the novel, Dr Monygham, who still seeks proof for his theory of the flawless man, hears a testimony of faith from Linda who, though betrayed, still loves her Gian Battista. 'It was another of Nostromo's triumphs', the narrator says:

> The greatest, the most enviable, the most sinister of all. In that true cry of undying passions that seemed to ring aloud from Punta Mala to Azuera and away to the bright line of the horizon, overhung by a big white cloud shining like a mass of solid silver, the genius of the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores dominated the dark gulf containing his conquests of treasure and love.[18]

Nostromo's triumph can also be seen in the way he serves, together with the silver, as the unifying force in a story whose numerous fragments are sometimes frustrating. It may be overstating the case to call him a hero. Conrad's detailed histories of the other characters make such a distinction impossible, but Nostromo brings the efforts

and the failures of the others into sharper focus. To understand him the reader must, however, also understand Charles and Emilia Gould, Decoud, Dr Monygham and even Captain Mitchell for whom all these people, and the drama they enact, are 'historic'. Nostromo is not a novel about one major character but many; its meaning must be seen in their collective struggle.

A similar approach is needed to read Petals of Blood where the events and changes caused by material interests are also seen as chaos inside and outside each of the major characters. Ilmorog is for them what the silver represents for the characters in Nostromo: it unites and divides them in the way silver does the characters in Nostromo; the village which, like Sulaco, starts as 'a kind of neglected outpost of the Republic' becomes suddenly 'a centre of numerous activities', which as in the other novel work 'in obedience to an invisible law'. This description of the early entry into the village by three of the major characters explains how the device works:

> They used Munira's bicycle. Sometimes all three would walk, one person pushing the bicycle. Sometimes all three would ride the bicycle with Munira on the saddle, Karega on the frame and Wanja on the carrier. But mostly THEY RODE IN A KIND OF RELAY. Karega would walk. Munira would take Wanja for a mile or so and leave her to walk on. He would come back for Karega and take him a mile or so past Wanja. Then Munira would walk. Karega would take the bicycle and go back for Wanja. Soon they looked like the earth on which they trod, enveloped by an enormous sky of white and blue. (My emphasis). [19]

The full complement of the team, in fact, includes Abdulla, an ex-Mau Mau fighter who has lost a leg in the struggle and whose shop in Ilmorog is the first rallying point of the events that unfold.

Their oddly contrived race takes them toward 'the kingdom of (self) knowledge' in which the reader is expected, like them, to find answers to the question also posed in Nostromo, namely: 'triumph and defeat; success and miserable failure ... which (was) which?'[20] All start, however, with their own private motives which they each idealise into public ones so that the novel becomes the elaborate drama of conflicting witnesses bringing forward evidence that remains in doubt until all of it is assembled. In their bicycle ride the major characters show the alternating and interdependent relationship between the individual and the group, which, as in Nostromo, is a way of introducing the reader to the way point of view alternates from the individual to the community. Here, too, each character behaves as if utterly alone with his task yet is entangled in a complex of relationships.

The story of Wanja, for instance, is told in such a way that the reader could easily take the novel to be mainly about her. She is the driving force of Ilmorog:

> Under her firm guidance, Ilmorog suddenly seemed to expand: new roads, influx of workers, banks, experts, dances and numerous small trades and crafts. [21]

Like Nostromo, she is also described as one in a thousand, and, like Nostromo, is more vibrantly alive than any other character in the novel. Her unique experiences dramatically link all the major characters in the story. She runs the village shop in partnership with Abdulla and is expecting his child at the end. She has affairs with Munira and Karega, and is the mistress of all three businessmen whose murder is ostensibly the subject of investigation

around which the story is built. All the chaos in the novel is, therefore, mirrored in her life which sometimes assumes mythic dimensions: 'Wanja has the beauty of a lioness', and, true to her Sphinx-like nature, she destroys anyone who cannot answer her 'riddle'. The real Wanja, however, is caught in 'the tension between the desire for active creation and a passive acceptance of her fate', her major dilemma being that she does not seem to know exactly what she could create: 'She wandered from place to place in search of IT or for a man who would show her IT'.[22] IT, is sometimes a child which eventually she is expecting, sometimes IT is money, which she seems to know how to make, but she is so muddled that in the end all these things become a burden:

> The wealth she had (so) accumulated weighed on her heavily, as if the jewelled, rubied cord around her neck was now pulling her and her very shadow to the ground.
>
> 23

There are 'such changing colours of blue and red and green' that 'she cannot see anything clearly'[24] but the reader who analyses her point of view in context with that of the other characters can discover the success or failure of her adventure and why.

Her major problem, if we excuse her ignorance and helplessness, is, like Abdulla's, her past from which she cannot escape. Abdulla's past, however, presents another dimension to the Ilmorog dilemma. His one leg should be a source of pride since it represents the freedom for which he fought but like his donkey, the leg is a mixed blessing. In one sense he gets the respect he expects, and deserves, but is lonely and unhappy. The reasons for his unhappy condition also make the story of <u>Petals of Blood</u>. He is regarded

as 'the best self of the community, symbol of Kenya's truest courage.'[25] Abdulla is central to the story because he exemplifies its public political theme. That theme centres on political betrayal and the way in which such betrayal has maimed people like him. His life from the time he enlists as a Mau Mau to the wretched existence after the struggle is a comment on the nature of the betrayal. But, like Wanja, he too is confused and at times his motives are suspect. Experience, however, seems to have clarified his ideas, indeed, if we must find a hero for this novel we must locate him in Abdulla's endurance, in his courage and his tragic daring. Of all the characters in Petals of Blood he alone triumphs against the odds; the child he is expecting from Wanja is his reward for a relentless struggle against material interests.

The same cannot be said of the two teachers, Karega and Munira, yet Ngugi, like Conrad, has so masterfully handled their characterisation that critics wrongly regard one or the other as the hero of the novel. Both Gerald Moore,[26] and Eustace Palmer,[27] declare Munira the hero of the novel while for Douglas Killam it is Karega who emerges in this role.[28] Yet the novel belongs to Munira, for instance, only in the sense that he is privileged to act the role of 'the narrator as participant observer'.[29] If he was not too keyed up with his new found evangelism he would, like Captain Mitchell, be no more than a tourist guide. Indeed as he strolls through the ruins of Ilmorog with Karega the third-person narrator describes him as a tourist guide and comments on the way he seems to enjoy the role. But, like Captain Mitchell, his testimony is doubtful, copious though it may be. The story is more dramatically enacted by the characters concerned. However, like Captain Mitchell, his important decision

to settle in Ilmorog for twelve years where others have come and fled, ushers in all the other characters and sets 'the inexorable law of the metal power' in motion. There is a crucial difference though between him and Captain Mitchell. Both have vague ideas about what their 'missions' are, but, while Captain Mitchell is pleased to watch the 'historic' events that take place and point to a doubtful contribution to such events, Munira, on the other hand, is tired of constantly being an outsider, 'fated to watch adrift'. He has struggled to liberate himself and as he watches the whorehouse he has set on fire burn, he kneels down to pray because, as he concludes, 'he was no longer an outsider, for he had finally affirmed his oneness with the Law'.[30] We do not know the law to which he refers because he dodged such a question when it was put to him by one of his innocent pupils. To call him a hero will be overstating the case, since it is clear that if he has acted he has done so out of an undefined sense of purpose. Because he fails as a hero in this moral sense and is thus unable to play a fuller part in the action as he would have liked he also fails to be the hero of the novel.

Karega is more difficult to handle. Since he is cast in the role of a socialist and since Ngugi has been identified with such socialist dogma, critics such as Douglas Killam have interpreted his role to come closest to Ngugi's aspirations and therefore have seen Karega as Ngugi's and the novel's hero.[31] Karega may be Ngugi's hero but he is not the hero of Petals of Blood. It is true that he is the most politically active of the major characters but the novel's logic persistently shows that his activity is a mere repetition of a predictable pattern. Like Munira, and Chui, and

the lawyer, he has been to Siriana secondary school and been expelled. He arrives in Ilmorog not for any public cause but to look for Munira whose sister he has driven to suicide - at least as far as Munira is concerned. The trip he organises to the city is eventually too much for him to handle and he inevitably falls on Abdulla's skill and experience to see them through. He may be a victim of material interests but so are the others, even though, unlike the others, youth and education are on his side. The reader can only wonder what such advantages would have done for Abdulla. The news he gets about the impending workers' strike cannot be compared to the highly symbolic import of Abdulla's child by Wanja; especially if it is remembered that even Abdulla's adopted child, Joseph, is already beginning to make an impact on his elders. This is not to ignore the intricate web of relationships that surround Karega, for indeed he seems to have the habit of dropping in at the most crucial moments in the history of Ilmorog but his stature in the novel must be measured against the contribution made by the other major characters. Such is the skill Conrad deploys in Nostromo. Ngugi's rendering of narrative perspective is similar to Conrad's in this regard.

In Nostromo and Petals of Blood the individual consciousnesses of all the major characters are examined in the context of their dramatic relationship with each other and with the outside world. While this is the case in Under Western Eyes and A Grain of Wheat there is nevertheless a minor distinction worth considering.[32] The characters in Nostromo seem to be better attuned for their contact with the outside world and are never at a loss about motivation and purpose. In Under Western Eyes and A Grain of Wheat, however, the inveterate isolation of the major characters poses

more problems because they have to be forced to seek a communal identity. Their minds thus become the theatres of the action and, unlike the active participants in Nostromo and Petals of Blood who choose and act, we have, instead, characters who have a greater need to reconcile with ghosts within than with what they encounter without. Each of the characters is a lonely person who wouldlove to continue to savour the taste of loneliness but who is forced to join the community. Mugo in A Grain of Wheat expresses it best:

> I wanted to live my life. I never wanted to be involved in anything. Then (he) came into my life, here, a night like this, and pulled me into the stream.
>
> 33

In Under Western Eyes, Razumov emerges 'as lonely in the world as a man swimming in the deep sea'.[34] Yet he is quite happy with himself; his loneliness is, as Haldin describes it in a letter to his sister, an 'unstained, lofty and solitary existence' and he would prefer not to join the stream. Rather, he is contemplating the silver medal he may win if he pursues his studies diligently because, to put it in his own words, 'unlike others who have fathers, mothers, relations, connexions to move heaven and earth on their behalf', he has none.[35] But this dubious status is not to last for long, for much sooner than he would wish, he reaches his room to find, as it were, somebody from another world, a fugitive from justice. Haldin belongs to the other world, however, only in the sense that he is another human being. Like Razumov, he too is alone and needs to make contact with one whom he expects will understand and help him. Unlike Razumov, Haldin has relations who live outside Russia, and it is to these that he may turn in his hour of need. Razumov betrays Haldin as his own way of refusing to join any community,

but the betrayal forces him further into a community amd more specifically into the hands of Haldin's sister to whom he eventually confesses his betrayal.

To get to Haldin's sister, Razumov's mind has travelled a great deal and throughout the journey he 'had the expression of a somnambulist struggling with the very dream which drives him forth to wander in dangerous places'. For the most part, he plays the part of 'a helpless spectator', because he keeps confronting the ghost of Haldin. Every word uttered by Haldin, it seems, 'lived in Razumov's memory', like haunting shapes that could not be exorcised. He must walk across Haldin's 'breast', across the hard ground of Russia, which for him, is inanimate, cold, inert, like a sullen and tragic mother hiding her face under a winding sheet, through treachery, before he finally arrives at his destination. It is a tortuous journey which leads to a 'moral discovery' that makes a great impact on the Russian community in Geneva on whose activities he had come to spy. As they all admit, 'there is character in such a discovery'.[36] But Razumov's characterisation is handled in such a way that to understand the psychological intensity of his mind and the full import of the discovery he has made is to know, not only the phantoms which he confronts, but requires also a further look at the other characters who represent the outside link, which he has fought so hard to evade but which he eventually encounters.

Here, the teacher of languages as participating observer becomes useful. He has made the acquaintance of the mother and the sister of the 'unfortunate' Haldin six months before Razumov arrives from

Russia and has become a good friend of the family. The languages teacher is also the link with the revolutionary Russian Community headed by Peter Ivanovitch; he is the Western eyes of the novel's title. His 'ignorance' of things Russian gives the characters a greater opportunity to tell their own story and his holier-than-thou attitude, though a useful one, exposes to us his own short-comings as well. Everything is so easily explained as a possible 'curse over the Russian character' that the reader begins to wonder if the teacher himself is not seeking an easy way out of a difficult situation. When he mentions the curse, for instance, Razumov remarks that 'the great problem is to understand thoroughly the nature of the curse.[37] For the teacher such a discovery is easy but in saying it so repetitively he undermines the complexity of the situation in which Razumov has found himself. It is indeed such blindness as the teacher of languages displays that enables Razumov to discover his own proper direction. As he confronts the Russian revolutionaries he is convinced that their ideals are only cleverly disguised forms of bitter egoism. For instance, for all his feminism and his love for equality, Peter Ivanovitch maltreats his secretary, Tekla, and is obviously only in league with Madame de S- because he needs her money to champion causes in which he does not believe. The old lady herself is clearly no socialist:

> There is only one class in Russia which must be extirpated. Only one. And that class consists of only one family. You understand me? That one family must be extirpated.
>
> 38

It is no wonder that Razumov leaves their 'prison' in disgust. He has been chased by the ghost of isolation yet has meanwhile only met more isolated and egotistic characters.

In order to get at the 'true' human community he must by-pass fellow-egoists including the languages teacher, and meet such selfless people as Tekla and Natalia Haldin whose humanity, especially that of the latter, invites him to a world which has eluded him for so long. Unfortunately, the experience takes everything: already made deaf by Nikita, he wanders purposelessly through the streets of Geneva and is literally crushed by a carriage which breaks both his legs. It is as if he has paid for his betrayal of Haldin, but as Eugene Boyle has observed, in paying, 'he has attested to the truth of human solidarity and has demonstrated that those who place their faith wholly in the self or the efficiency of political institutions are hopelessly blind to the very simple ideas which alone can save mankind from self-destruction.'[39] The examples of Tekla, of Natalia Haldin, and Razumov's sacrifice, have shown that happiness is a quality of the heart rather than an attribute, as the teacher would like us to believe,of political institutions. The novel makes the reader's job difficult since his perceptions of people and events continue to change as he experiences Conrad's 'peeling off' effects. No one character has a monopoly of truth and each character must be seen in the context of all other characters and events.

In A Grain of Wheat, Mugo is another good example of a lonely character with limited ambitions but one who is forced to enter into relationships that enable him to question the nature of his isolation and in the process arrive at a startling revelation which serves as a moral point of reference for the other characters. The novel, like Under Western Eyes, portrays a group of narcissists whose blindness leads one of them to a great insight into his and their own condition. Like Razumov, Mugo's cherished isolation is rudely intruded upon by

an assasin who describes Mugo in similar terms as Haldin did Razumov, as one of those people 'who induce hope and trust on the evidence of their looks'.[40] Like Haldin, Kihika has also made a serious error of judgement and is betrayed by Mugo who, like Razumov, is enraged by this outrageous intrusion into his privacy.

However, Mugo soon finds that this is no mere intrusion of one man into the heart of another. It is an offer to join the wider community. Kihika's invitation is explicit:

> We want a strong organisation. The whiteman knows this and fears ... He wants to shut us from the people, our only strength. But he will not succeed. We must keep the road between us and the people clear of obstacles. I often watched you in old Thabai. You are a self-made man. You are a man, you have suffered. We need such a man to organize an underground movement in the new village.[41]

At this point Mugo begins to 'walk in a nightmare'. Ngugi dramatises Mugo's predicament from that 'fatal day' until he has finally exorcised the demons that haunt him. The process of chasing his ghosts is enacted through his now exuberant concern with farming. The demon sometimes comes in the palpable shape of Kihika, the man he has betrayed, but it also appears in many other forms such as the voices from the party which ask him to make a speech on Independence day and even suggest that he should consider the possibility of becoming the village Chief. The numerous confessions which tumble out of the other major actors in endless succession are all part of Mugo's nightmare. As the pattern becomes familiar he admits that 'previously he liked to see events in his life as isolated',[42] but as the confessions simply multiply, he is numbed and literally begins to run 'without thinking of the road, its

origin or its end'. Then:

> He stopped in the middle of the main village street, surprised that he had been walking DEEPER and DEEPER into the village.
> (My emphasis)
> 43

But he need not have been surprised because he is merely responding to the invitation which came through Kihika, an offer that should draw him closer to his people.

The movement into the depths of the village and into Mugo's eventual discovery of the nature of his betrayal and its consequences is handled with great skill by Ngugi. Mugo is constantly kept on the verge of his discovery because each time he tries to reach it he simply strengthens his egoistic resolution by insisting that he was right and that Kihika, with all his kin behind him, only picks on him because he is an orphan. In one of his hallucinatory moments he even equates himself with Moses and raises his betrayal to an act of redemption for his people. The true significance of his betrayal, however, reaches him in a way he cannot know at the time. His confession, we learn, is his first contact with another man and it is the beginning of several other contacts.

The other characters he encounters are, however, as egocentric as he is. Their philosophy is expressed through Karanja: 'everyman in the world is alone, and fights alone to live'.[44] Karanja, perhaps, represents the worst of the egoists in the novel but there is good cause to conclude that Gikonyo, General R and Lt. Koinandu and even Kihika respect and adhere to their selfish goals. As each of them reveals his motivations thus breaking the walls that

have guarded his frustrated life, it becomes clear that none of them is any better than Mugo. Each of them has hidden motives and passions behind the battle he ostensibly fights. Karanja wants to marry Mumbi but sees his political involvement as a useful excuse for drawing even with his rival, Gikonyo. Gikonyo himself has no wish to fight in the forest nor participate in politics unless it brings him Mumbi. General R's earlier experiences with his family, in which he fought his father but found his persecuted mother turn against him, should have taught him the significance of the human bond between people but he goes out instead to repeat the same mistakes which have made him a fugitive.

Only Mumbi carries 'a flaming torch that dispels the darkness in front of her'.[45] Like Natalia Haldin, Mumbi provides Mugo with the light that he needs to see clearly what his betrayal means and what he must do to exorcise the demons that haunt him. In falling in love with the sister of the man he has betrayed, Mugo, discovers, like Razumov, that the act was a violation of the human fellowship without which all the political beliefs, such as those Kihika and General R stand for, will only be empty words. As he comes to this discovery 'a load of many years was lifted from his shoulders'.[46] Gikonyo's assessment of his conduct is accurate:

> He stood before much honour, praises were heaped on him. He would have become Chief. Tell me another person who would have exposed his soul for all the eyes to peck at ... Remember that few people in that meeting are fit to lift a stone against that man. Not unless I - we - too - in turn open our hearts naked for the world to look at.[47]

The Russian revolutionaries in Geneva would agree: 'there is character in such discovery'. To arrive at such perceptions is to take into account all the conflicting evidence in the novel.

Ngugi's management of point of view is similar to that of Conrad. The grain of wheat of the title, for instance, is an ideal which each of the characters strives to achieve. Both writers present several major characters each of which represents a point of view on the central concerns of the novels and in each of the novels 'truth' is neither self-evident, nor is it the monopoly of any given character; not even the shining examples of Mumbi or Natalia Haldin will show until the darkness within the other characters is properly penetrated and analysed. It is a complex process made possible by a dense metaphoric texture.

iii

Metaphor

The questioning spirit that characterises the novels of Conrad and Ngugi gives them a densely metaphoric texture which reveals characters who, like Inspector Godfrey in Petals of Blood, are constantly 'sifting words, storing phrases and looks and gestures, also looking for a line, a key, a thread, a connection, an image that would tie up everything together'.[48] As image presses upon image, the characters seem like Karega, 'to wrestle with each, fix it, make it yield the secret'[49] that appears to elude them. Indeed, metaphor is such a pervasive

feature of the style of these two novelists that it sometimes seems that a metaphorical reading is the only way of making sense of the novels: they constitute the conceptual constants of the novels and are consequently the reader's major vehicle for determining the point of view. However, as the examples of some of the characters will show, metaphor sometimes leads them into a 'linguistic mistake' which prevents them from seeing things in their substantial uniqueness, rather, they interpret events as signs. Only the reader is privileged to see through their mistakes and arrive at an interpretation that escapes all but a few of them.

In Nostromo Conrad presents a single dominant metaphor in the silver of the mine from which all the characters may be interpreted because the novel is about their insights into the nature of material interests. The novel's figurative language expands this metaphor by multiplying motifs which reinforce the centrality of silver in the course of events. Silver, as Emilia Gould observes, is 'not a mere fact, but something far-reaching and impalpable, like the true expression of an emotion or the emergence of a principle'.[50] But Silver is real in the novel as the property of the Gould Concession. It has provided jobs for thousands of people, and is 'the biggest thing in Sulaco and even in the whole of the Republic'.[51] Its 'palpable' form may also be seen, even before he is corrupted, in Nostromo's buttons, his whistle and his ring, even the colour of his horse is silver-grey; indeed, as Decoud observes, the man seems 'to disdain the use of any metal less precious than silver'. However, in spite of its dominant substantiality, the silver has a powerful 'shadow' which is responsible for the enormous metaphorical undercurrent of the novel. The gulf that separates the substance

from the shadow also has substance in the Placido where Decoud and Nostromo hide the silver entrusted to their care but there is also the moral gulf which separates the characters in the novel. All the characters seem to operate within a 'moral darkness' as do Decoud and Nostromo when they take the silver away. Only two characters see the 'light'.

Of these, the most conspicuous is Emilia Gould. Conrad has made light and Mrs Gould indistinguishable. Light as metaphor expresses the clarity of her vision and the remarkable difference between her perception and that of even her husband who, though close to her, is unable unfortunately to benefit from her radiance. When the chaos in Costaguana reaches Sulaco, all the streets are dark except the light from Mrs Gould's carriage, and as she 'passed in, all the lights went out in the street, which remained dark and empty from end to end'. It often appears that the more light she radiates, the greater the darkness around her. She radiates a light of her own:

> The half-light under the thick mass of leaves brought out the youthful prettiness of her face; made the clear, light fabrics and white lace of her dress luminous. Small and dainty, as if radiating a light of her own in the deep shade of the interlaced boughs, she resembled a good fairy, weary with a long career of well-doing, touched by the withering suspicion of the uselessness of her labours, the powerlessness of her magic.
> [52]

Nostromo also radiates light. Through him it can be said that Emilia Gould's labours were not useless after all. The Captain of the Cargadores had hitherto been satisfied with his 'reputation' but after what appears to be a 'long bout of intoxication' he wakes

up from a fourteen hour sleep into the full light of the day and like a 'man just born into the world' begins to feel his way about. As 'the darkness of the sky descends to the line of the horizon', he begins to ask questions and draw some useful conclusions. Now he feels the pinch of poverty for the first time in his life. His poverty is twofold. On the one level he is spiritually poor, not having, until now, any purpose in life, simply dreaming, but on another level he also discovers that he does not even possess anything tangible which he can call his own. The latter kind is, for him, a sign that he has been 'betrayed'. For all 'the Nostromo here and Nostromo there', the poor man discovers he has not even been paid for his labours. The truth is bitter:

> Kings, ministers, aristocrats, the rich in general, kept the people in poverty and subjection; they kept them as they kept dogs, to fight and hunt for their service.[53]

Nostromo's bright moments also yield some very useful insights into other characters: Captain Mitchell emerges almost accurately as a person 'fitted by education (perhaps) to sign papers in an office and to give orders, but otherwise of no use whatever, and something of a fool;'[54] and Dr Monygham bears a resemblance to the vulture he encountered as soon as he woke up. But even before the encounter with Dr Monygham in the large Customs building he is attracted by the 'unexpected sight of two lighted windows'.

The light enables him, as it were, to overcome the powerful cynicism (darkness?) of Dr Monygham; he reminds the doctor, as he did the vulture, 'I am not dead yet'. Nostromo's long swim across the gulf

is thus a metaphor which draws the reader's attention to the difference between the old Capataz of the Cargadores and Captain Fidanza. He has now washed himself, has come out of darkness and is no longer satisfied with a doubtful reputation. The confession he makes to Emilia Gould is the crowning point of his climb from darkness to light. Decoud on the other hand commits suicide because the darkness of the Gulf overwhelms him:

> When Nostromo put out the candle in their lighter, it was to Decoud as if his companion had destroyed by a single touch, the world of affairs, of loves, of revolution ... No intelligence could penetrate the darkness of the Placid Gulf.
>
> 55

Similarly, Dr Monygham, for all his wisdom and experience, has too many 'dark' sides to his character; his history is clothed in secrecy and in rumours.[56] His mind is so dark that not even Mrs Gould's light seems able to penetrate it. Charles Gould suffers the same predicament, his life 'was like being a prisoner in a cavern of bandits with the price of your ransom in your pocket, and buying your life from day to day.'[57]

Closely associated with darkness is the metaphor of weight. The 'blackness' whenever it is mentioned is shown as weighing heavily on the characters in question 'like a stone'. Everyone carries this weight, even Mrs Gould has it around her neck like an albatross. The test of character lies in the ability of the individual to throw away the burden. Mrs Gould and Nostromo manage but the result for the other major characters is disastrous. Silver is shown as a heavy 'lump of metal' but its weight is also a metaphorical comment on what happens to those like Decoud, who cannot handle it properly.

There is an ironic twist with regard to Decoud when he puts the four ingots of silver as a weight to help him sink quicker after his suicide. He is aware of the significance of the weight of the silver but alas only negatively.

The 'shrieking ghosts' that haunt the Azuera, which also seem to haunt most of the characters are a product of the real and metaphorical darkness depicted in the novel. Like the darkness, the ghosts serve as tests of character, they provide the ominous background against which the bizarre histories of the characters can be better understood. The ghosts take palpable shape in the form of the two gringos described as 'spectral and alive, and believed to be dwelling to this day among the rocks under the spell of their success'.[58] They are reminders of the crowd in Sulaco who, like the ghosts, are now 'rich and hungry and thirsty - a strange theory of tenacious gringo ghosts suffering in their starved and parched flesh of defiant heretics'. In his repentance Nostromo can be likened to the 'mozo', 'the poor four-footed beast', permitted to die because it was 'without sin'. The metaphoric terms Conrad uses are integrated into the thematic, descriptive and narrative structures of the novel so that with the silver, the darkness and light, ghosts and weights it is usually difficult to distinguish between metaphor and fact. Sometimes, a densely metaphoric sentence is enough to tell the reader what to expect from a character, such as this description of Mrs Gould:

> Coppery glints rippled to and fro on the wealth of her gold hair. Her smooth forehead had the soft, pure sheen of a priceless pearl in the splendour of the sunset, mingling the gloom of the starry spaces, the purple of the sea, and the crimson of the sky in a magnificent stillness.[59]

Apart from the light she radiates she also has colour in her life which she provides in contrast to the achromatic lives and views represented by the other characters in the story. Conrad's metaphors work in a chain-like fashion, one dominant metaphor linked to several other related metaphors all of which shape our interpretation.

In Petals of Blood Ngugi also operates a chain of related metaphors. There is, however, a significant departure, because though Ngugi, like Conrad, is concerned with material interests and the effect they exert on individuals, and though he also refers several times to 'the molten beast of Silver' and the results of its 'crushing weight' and its 'empty metallic promise', silver is not the dominant metaphor of the novel. Ngugi has kept Conrad's dense figurative language but has deployed the metaphors in the same fragmentary fashion as he has done for the characters. In the search for an image that would tie everything together he has used and dispensed with several images along the way.

The first of these pervasive metaphors is the metaphor of fire. Like the silver in Nostromo, the reality of fire is everywhere in the story. Arson and the death of the three businessmen trigger the investigation which is the novel's background plot. Fire has engulfed Wanja's abode three separate times and Munira seems always to be the agent or the victim of fire. But the fire image also yields to several interpretations. For Munira, who is the novel's greatest carrier of metaphor, 'man's life is God's sacred fire that had to remain lit all the way from the ancestor to the child yet unborn'.[60] Fire also purifies: when Munira burns the effigy of the girl who caused him to 'sin' in his youth he is

convinced that he has purified himself, that he has exorcised the demon and can now live a different and better life. Even when he burns the whorehouse it is with a view to 'save Karega'.

The fire in Petals of Blood engulfs almost every chapter. Even though Munira causes the big fire it is significant that each of the major characters has contemplated the use of fire as a way of solving their problem. All the characters, to use Munira's cliche, have been baptised by fire. Experience, especially if it is as bitter a one as all the characters seem to encounter, is usually seen as exemplification of the destructive fire of life. Wanja who is always at the centre of fire, is described as 'the bird periodically born out of the ashes and dust'.[61] The language is itself fiery; Karega's head is often 'ablaze', there are 'flames in Wanja's mind', sometimes 'embers of curiosity' are 'stoked to a growing intensity', 'the bright flames' of people's dreams usually die, 'leaving only ashes', there is a 'burning pool' in Nyakinyua's stomach.[62] There is thus a clear distinction between the destructive nature of fire, and the inherent fire in everyone which can also be put to very positive use. Karega's fire seems to be burning for the right purpose as Abdulla's before him, but Munira, unfortunately, is too obsessed with the fixed idea of purification to put it to any useful purpose. He has been an outsider and has not allowed the fire to burn. When he attempts to kindle it, the results are the opposite of what he expects. Wanja's fire usually is lit by other people, once by rivals, and once by accident, but when she chooses to make her kitchen 'the most important element in the drama' she unleashes forces she can no longer control. As 'the tongues of flame from the four corners

of her whorehouse form petals of blood', it is left to Abdulla who carries a different fire to save her and his child from destruction.

Blood and fire are closely related in the novel. As with fire, blood is seen as an inherent quality of man but it may also, like fire, acquire dangerous dimensions. It appears at its worst in the murder of the three businessmen, but murder also serves as a metaphor for the exploitation that the people of Ilmorog have experienced. The heavy tankers squelch tar on a long trail across the plains of Ilmorog to feed a 'thousand arteries' of thirsty machines and motors. What they carry is the blood of Ilmorog. The new tools divide homes and sever the blood bond as they complete their destructive journey. In contrast, there is a kind of 'blood-letting' which is seen as positive and creative. This is given poignancy in Abdulla's one leg which he has sacrificed so that his people may be free. All the Mau Mau fighters belong to this category of people whose activities are seen as a way of cleansing the land of 'bad' blood.

The image of the flower which has petals of blood becomes relevant in this latter context because flowers, like the fighters, are seen as the only beautiful aspect amidst the destruction. Munira's figurative mind establishes this curious link between flower, blood and murder:

> The security and the defences around my lifelong twilight slumber were being cut at the roots and I felt the pain of blood-sap trickling through hearts, veins and arteries awaking from years of numbness ... The very movement of her skirt was a razor-sharp knife in my inside. And yet the knife seemed to cut deeper and sharper when I did not see the skirt.
> 63

He is thinking about Wanja and his own relationship with her but it is all a mixture of her skirt, which seems to be beautiful, and razor-sharp knives, which are clearly dangerous. It is no wonder that he is unable to resolve this chaos within him and ends up a murderer himself.

The thengeta flower which also has petals of blood is yet another image used as a metaphor of harmony and chaos. It has healing powers and should, when turned into drink, 'be taken with faith and purity in one's heart'. When the quartet of Abdulla, Karega, Wanja and Munira take it, however, they start a series of confessions which leads to more conflict among them. Munira finally discovers, for instance, that Karega was responsible for the death of his sister and is determined to be avenged. But the severest consequences of the misuse of this beautiful flower are seen when the three businessmen buy the patent for brewing the alcohol from it and turn most of Ilmorog into a drunken and divided city. When they finally die in Munira's fire it is, to use a cliche, as if they have been playing with fire by toying with the thengeta plant. The thengeta is a central metaphor in the novel. Munira's early irritation and confusion when his pupils confront him about its petals anticipates the greater confusion which the flower engenders. It becomes a tool which shows the effects of the manipulation of the people by the businessmen who turn their favourite symbol into an 'opium' to enhance their exploitative designs.

Another pervasive metaphor which is used as a comment on the activities of the characters in the novel is that of a journey. Here too there are many 'real' journeys in the narrative. The

people of Ilmorog, for instance, march to the City of Nairobi to present their problem to their Member of Parliament. Munira makes several trips to and from Ilmorog; on one of them Wanja and Karega use his bicycle in a sort of relay until they reach their destination, but the journeys are also toward the kingdom of knowledge, 'toward Bethlehem'. After the journey, however, 'a devil (came) into their midst and things were never quite the same again', because as Karega and as all of them discover in stages, 'there were those who waited in shadowy corners' to trap travellers on the way. The epigraphs which introduce each part of the novel highlight the significance of the journey. Read together they become 'Walking toward Bethlehem to be born again ... La luta continua'. This invites comparison with Yeates's cycle and the cyclic nature of the story itself as it is revealed in the lives of the characters shows the importance Ngugi gives to the metaphor of the journey. Karega's situation, for instance, reveals its double metaphorical import. First he makes the journey through his mind, through memory and through the books sent to him by the lawyer, but he also considers his experiences in contact with other characters as manifestations of the journey and sees each of them as a stage in his own particular journey. This is why he pays so much attention to the Trans-Africa Highway which will link Ilmorog with many other parts of Africa and force the otherwise quiet village into a journey which all the other transformed villages have undertaken. As with the characters, so with the town. The journey usually emerges as a cyclic phenomenon, they all keep going round and round and consequently most of them are confused. Like Conrad, Ngugi uses colour to define the nature of their confusion. Both Munira and Wanja, who are more confused, find it difficult to separate colours. The only one which they seem to see clearly is

unfortunately red, itself an ambiguous colour.

Ngugi also uses silver as a metaphor of wealth and of corruption and like Conrad, deploys it as a way of differentiating characters. Morality is judged by the reaction of each character to the 'metal power'. As with Conrad it usually acts as a weight that brings down those who cannot use it properly. The fate of Chui, Mzigo and Kimeria is the result of the wrong use of material interests. Unlike Conrad, however, Ngugi though he also refers to 'an invisible law', seems to imply that the law could be changed if, as is the case with Abdulla, some daring is combined with selflessness. Abdulla emerges from Ngugi's novel as a conqueror of material interests, who, unlike Nostromo, has not been corrupted. These metaphors, however, do not fall into any neat pattern. To list and describe them as has been done here is not to undermine the complexity with which they are introduced to the reader. They are as much a problem to the reader as they are to the novels' main characters.

Under Western Eyes and A Grain of Wheat do not present such complex metaphors as Nostromo and Petals of Blood but to interpret these novels is to penetrate ambiguous metaphorical images which also pose problems for the major characters and prevent them from seeing things as they are. In this regard the dominant metaphor is darkness which, as in the other novels, acts as a stumbling block to one set of characters, while its opposite, light, provides the illumination for another set. However, because the main theatre of activity is in the minds of the characters, the darkness is also represented as a state of mind which for some characters, such as Razumov and Mugo, is an indication of their anguish and their confusion.

In Under Western Eyes darkness emanates from Razumov's intense loneliness which severs him from the rest of his world. It is at night, in his very dark room, that Haldin confronts him and when he agrees to go out on Haldin's behalf he encounters 'here and there a dim yellow light hung within the four square mass of darkness'. Closely associated with the darkness are the ghosts which seem to follow him everywhere he goes:

> Along the roadway sledges glided phantom-like and jingling through a fluttering whiteness on the black face of the night, looming up black in the snowflakes.
>
> 64

The phantoms haunt him in Russia and follow him to Geneva so that most of the time he cannot distinguish between what is a ghost and what is real. Haldin, for instance, comes in such an interchangeable manner that it is difficult to say:

> This body seemed to have less substance than its own phantom walked over by Razumov in the street ... it was more alarming in its shadowy, persistent reality than the distinct but vanishing illusion.
>
> 65

With Madame de S- too it is difficult to say whether what Razumov meets is a ghost, a corpse, or a woman. Razumov himself sometimes assumes a ghost-like posture, 'he glides up' to his room, he says, 'like a phantom'. The deliberate mix-up is a way of showing the disjointed state of the mind whose activity here always bears the confused quality of dream and hallucination.

In contrast the 'glare of light' acts as a means of exposing characters and events for better observation. The teacher of languages wrongly claims this metaphor as special to him:

> ... standing thus before each other in the glaring light, between the four bare walls, they seemed brought out from the confused immensity of the Eastern borders to be exposed cruelly to the observation of my western eyes.
>
> 65

This indeed is the method of the novel but the teacher of languages himself fails to see this 'confused immensity' and imagines, instead, that what he has before him is simply a group of people running away from what he describes as 'the ghost of autocracy'. The issues are more complicated. If he had observed more seriously he would have found that Natalia Haldin possesses the light that has eluded all of them and together with Tekla has 'opened the door' for all to join the human community of the novel. Razumov's eyes are open eventually and he can see clearly. Blindness and sight are used as interchangeable and ambiguous metaphors in the way riches and poverty, success and failure were used in the previous novels. Those who claim in this novel to have eyes are in fact blind. For some like Razumov experience opens their eyes but most of the so-called revolutionaries will never see beyond the labels they have made to protect their blindness, nor will the teacher of languages. 'To my Western eyes', he admits, 'she (Natalia Haldin) seemed to be getting farther and farther away from me, quite beyond my reach now'.[67]

In Under Western Eyes the characters also serve as metaphorical comments on each other's qualities. Razumov's betrayal shows his self-deception but it also exposes the equally self-deceptive Haldin, the 'criminal idealist' he has betrayed. Similarly his decision to spy on the revolutionaries in Geneva exposes his delusion but it also highlights the hollowness of their own plans. Tekla exposes the chicanery of Peter Ivanovitch, Natalia Haldin

makes Razumov confess his 'crime' and leads him to a useful discovery just as his own confession and his past expose the empty rhetoric of the teacher of languages.

In A Grain of Wheat Mugo's dilemma is expressed in the same metaphors as those used by Conrad to depict Razumov's predicament. Mugo is in complete darkness when the story opens; it is described as an atmosphere in which 'most objects lose their edges, one shape merging with another'.[68] His 'game' consists in trying to make out the various objects in the room. Most of the activities in this novel take place at night, the major characters count their time in nights, the Independence celebrations, for instance, are said to be only 'four nights away'. When Kihika comes into Mugo's hut it is dark and Mugo dare not even light a fire because it would give him away. The darkness depicted is also a state of mind into which all the major characters fall. Most of them are often, like Karanja, 'abstracted', simply staring into a blank abyss. Darkness holds terror for the people of Thabai because in the emergency in which they live all the dreadful things seem to take place at night. The Mau Mau fighters operate at night and so do the Colonial forces. But darkness is also the result of their intense isolation in which 'everyone was alone with God'.

As in Under Western Eyes the darkness 'invites' ghosts. All the major characters are haunted. Mugo is 'haunted by the image of his own inadequacy' but he is also haunted by a ghost not unlike Razumov's:

> After walking a few steps from where he had sat, Mugo saw a strange spectacle. He stared at

> the corrugated iron wall. His hair pulled away at the roots. He felt shocked pleasure in his belly. For Kihika's face was there, pinned-framed to the shop, becoming larger and more distorted the longer he gazed at it. The face, clear against a white surface, awakened the same excitement and terror he once experienced as a boy, the night he wanted to strangle his aunt.
> 69

Such is the nature of Mugo's hallucination that a photograph suddenly seems to leap into life on its own. His 'dazed head', the narrator notes, 'was a tumult of thoughts that acquired the concrete logic of a dream'.[70] Darkness, ghosts and dreams acquire in this novel, as in Under Western Eyes, a special metaphorical consistency which makes the activities of the characters sometimes look unreal. Like Conrad, Ngugi integrates these metaphors into the thematic, descriptive and narrative structure of the novel so that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between metaphor and fact. Darkness is pervasive in the novel but so is the confusion of the characters.

In this connection the metaphor of walls and prisons which did not feature much in Under Western Eyes is also used a great deal. There is the detention camp to which most of the men in the novel have been taken but there are also the metaphorical walls which guard the frustrated lives of all the characters. Within these walls will be found their hidden motives and passions. Mugo especially feels haunted because he considers himself an 'outsider' and must thus break into walls of the others. His confession breaks his own wall but though the others admire his courage, and Gikonyo understands the significance of their individual confessions,

no one is brave enough to take the step that Mugo has taken.

Images of doors also abound in the novel. When the 'voices from the party' visit Mugo he gets up to close the door which they have left open. Doors represent opportunities in the novel but they are also prison gates. Mugo's experiences especially when he first encounters Kihika give Ngugi a good chance to show the figurative significance of doors to his story:

> Mugo stood still in the middle of his new hut for a few minutes. The ground below his feet was not firm. Then he ran to the door, flung it open, half-hoping to shout for help. He gazed into the night. For the third time he bolted the door. But why bolt the door? Why should he? It was better to be without a door rather than that it should be there and yet bring in cold and danger. He unbolted the door and slowly walked to the bed, where he sat and held his face in his hands.
>
> 71

Mugo's gesture is more significant than he imagines, for it is precisely because he has unbolted his door that the rest of the people in Thabai begin to think highly of him and even wish to make him their chief. His fame mounts as he begins to open his door to others and the confession is the ultimate gesture that flings the gates open. Far from bringing cold and danger, he begins, for the first time, to feel the warmth and peace of the village, he begins at last to fall 'deeper and deeper' into their confidence. In spite of his betrayal of their hero the people find that he is someone they can trust. He is killed nevertheless because it is too late now to 'rub off' the tensions of the past.

As in Under Western Eyes, Mumbi, like Natalia Haldin, holds the flaming torch that dispels the darkness in front of her. Her torch

also helps Mugo, like Razumov, to find his bearing. With her, apparitions disappear and Mugo is able to see a real world. But, as with Conrad, it is almost impossible to exhaust the metaphors which are the dominant feature of the novels. Both Conrad and Ngugi reinforce the significance of figurative language through the repetition of a complex of motifs.

IV

Repetition

The recurrence of images in simple or cumulative repetition is one of the hallmarks of Conrad's and Ngugi's narrative method. All the characters in the novels are tortured by 'the repetition of past patterns'. Some of it is the product of their own mistakes which make them impose an interpretation on the things they encounter, implying in the process that their lives are a series of repetitions, in most cases 'a series of calamities'. The device, therefore, serves as a comment on the point of view of individual characters but it is also a tool for investing the metaphors in the novels with a greater variety of concepts than the local expressive image may grant. Through repetition, the image becomes an emblem of the particular notion that it carries but as the images multiply the notions also increase until it becomes impossible to make sense of the story without assembling its fragments. The questioning posture which the novels assume and the way they begin in mid-term or at the end also make repetition inevitable.

It is difficult, for instance, to make sense of Nostromo until the reader assembles the various ideas which are associated with Silver as well as the attitude each character brings to bear on the image. Conrad devotes the first large section of the novel to the 'Silver of the Mine' and, within this section much emerges about its history, but a lot is also known about the major characters as it seems their lives are 'tied to the mine'. It is a thing that could provoke a 'tumult of words and passions'. For Charles Gould

'the mine had been the cause of an absurd moral disaster, its working, he asserts, must be a serious and moral success'.[72] For the wife the essence of its history is the essence of her married life.[73] The horses in the story have silver trappings and everything about Nostromo is associated with silver. It is the novel's centre of dramatic interest; the silver mine becomes an institution, 'a rallying-point for everything in the province that needed order and stability to live'. Sometimes Conrad shows its significance through constant repetition within a sentence or in a very short passage:

> When the carriage moved on he took off his hat again, a grey sombrero with a SILVER cord of tassels. The bright colours of a Mexican serape twisted on the cantle, the enormous SILVER buttons on the embroidered leather jacket, the row of tiny SILVER buttons down the seam of the trousers, the snowy linen, a silk sash with embroidered ends, the SILVER plates on headstall and saddle ... (My emphasis)[74]

The novel literally 'jingles' with Silver, it is impossible to take count of the number of times the word and an accompanying idea are mentioned. The section ostensibly devoted to it ends with a very powerful and metaphoric gesture of Nostromo who cuts off all the silver buttons of his coat, reinforcing his poverty but also displaying how much he cherishes his reputation. The silver enslaves people, destroys some, or simply weighs others down; there are eighteen different times in which the motif of weight is used to add to one of the most oppressive attributes of the silver. On five different occasions, it is indicated that the silver is tied for safety around Nostromo's neck. The same image is also used for Mr Gould who also carries the silver, like Martin Decoud, as a heavy load. The load image eventually works literally when Decoud sinks under the weight of the silver ingots.

Events also seem to repeat themselves in the novel, sometimes with uncanny coincidence. Dr Monygham, for instance, dogs Nostromo so closely that Nostromo cannot help observing that he was the last person he met when he was heading for the Gulf and he is the first person he meets as soon as he comes out of his long swim across the Gulf. The doctor is on this, and on other occasions, something of a demon that seems to haunt people like Nostromo in the most unlikely places such as the large empty Customs House. He is twice depicted as a vulture, hunting for prey and is never far from scenes of disaster. Other images of ghosts also abound in the story: its background is fixed in the ominous Azuera 'gringos' whose plight the Costaguana people seem to be living all over again. Even the courageous Mrs Gould cannot help seeing the repetition of events:

> She saw clearly the San Tome mine possessing, consuming, burning up the life of the last of the Costaguana Goulds, mastering the energetic spirit of the son as it had mastered the lamentable weakness of the father. A terrible success for the last of the Goulds ...
>
> 75

The parrot in her house is a reminder of this unfortunate situation. It keeps chanting Viva Costaguana, as if to remind the so-called patriots of the numerous times they have shouted slogans without actually living up to their patriotic dreams.

Repetition is also used to pinpoint the ubiquitous nature of characters like Nostromo and Captain Mitchell, and Conrad usually accomplishes this by the use of stock phrases. Each time Nostromo is mentioned, he is referred to either as 'the incorruptible; or 'the indispensable'. He is also severally 'invaluable', 'one in a thousand', 'usher-in', 'trusty', 'a man absolutely above reproach'.[76]

These phrases are repeated so often that it is no longer necessary to mention Nostromo by name. Captain Mitchell writes his own curriculum vitae and he is so consistent that it is also not difficult to identify him; when the word 'historic' is mentioned, and it creeps in often, we know that he cannot be far away. Patterns of such verbal repetitions thus enable the reader to identify certain characters and they also serve as a way of determining the interpretation other characters and the reader may bring to bear on such a character. If we sometimes find them overdone it is because Conrad uses them to reinforce our view on the characters.

The resonance that silver invokes in Nostromo has a near equivalent in the image of fire in Ngugi's Petals of Blood. Fire begins and ends the story. All the major characters are connected in one way or the other with fire, indeed, besides Ilmorog, it is the other crucial unifying force in the novel. Wanja is constantly chased by fire, and she is a fiery woman herself. It is no coincidence that the big fire that constitutes the plot of the novel should emanate from her whorehouse. All the other characters are also fiery. Munira, for instance, has so made it a part of his life that he has managed to reduce fire to cliche. He only sees things when they are 'flaming' and it is not surprising that he is the one that sets Wanja's whorehouse on fire. Abdulla and Karega have all contemplated the possibility of cleansing the rot in their lives and in the world outside with fire; towards the end of the story Abdulla is in fact approaching Wanja's house with a box of matches. All the characters try to exorcise by fire but in vain.

However, Ngugi also gives considerable attention to the root causes of

the fire. Through these causes he is also able to differentiate between characters because their attitudes to fire usually is a comment about their outlook on their problems. Munira sees it as a purifier and he repeats this image several times, once even burning an effigy to prove his point and eventually burning three businessmen to 'save' Karega from Wanja. He has always carried fire and has felt inhibited from using it until he takes the momentous decision to obey the 'law'. Abdulla's fire burns in more positive directions, although he too, like Karega, does not forget the destructive aspect of fire.

Similarly all the characters seem to agree that money is the root cause of their problem and the motif of money whether as the 'molten beast' or as 'silver coins' or as 'the glittering metal' is pervasive throughout the story. Like the silver in Nostromo it constitutes a great burden, all the characters are 'weighed down' by money, an expression which is used on eight different occasions.

Events also repeat themselves very often in the novel as in Nostromo. The story of the series of expulsions from Siriana Secondary School is the most conspicuous but the past of each of the characters seems also to repeat very familiar patterns. Wanja, for instance, does not really seem to move forward. Her observation about her predicament is accurate:

> Maybe nobody could really escape his fate. Maybe life was a series of false starts, which, once discovered, called for more renewed efforts at yet another beginning.
>
> 77

She is right, as Abdulla also observes:

> You played your part, and then you left the arena, swept aside by the waves of a new step, a new movement in the dance ...
>
> 78

For all the characters in the novel, the dance is always the same, even the steps they take bear an uncanny resemblance. The coincidence of four people from the same village of Limuru caught in this new village of Ilmorog and all facing the same dilemma sometimes seems unconvincing but they are such different and lively people that Ngugi cannot be accused of forcing the pattern.

Ngugi, like Conrad, makes good use of patterns of verbal repetitions. They help, as in Conrad's novels, to differentiate between characters. Each time Munira is mentioned, for example, notice is drawn to the fact that he is an 'outsider', a 'strange-watchman', 'fated to watch adrift', he has an 'overwhelming sense of always being on the outside of things'[79]; there are at least fifteen different times when the reader's attention is drawn to this aspect of his life. It becomes his identity but it also prepares us for his culminating act which as he claims is done so that he too can become an insider. Patterns of 'blood', 'murder', 'arteries', 'red petals' reinforce the image of blood and the murder that takes place on two levels in the story: the murder of the people of Ilmorog by exploitation and the counter-murder by the Mau Mau fighters. As in Conrad, these patterns help to determine the attitude of each character and are therefore the reader's indispensable tool for discovering their point of view. We know them better through these constant reminders.

A similar pattern of repetition underlies Under Western Eyes and

A Grain of Wheat. Both novels are concerned with isolation and with the theme of betrayal and in both novels the device of repeating images intensifies this isolation and throws more light on the nature of the betrayal.

In Under Western Eyes the fact of Razumov's loneliness is repeated several times. Conrad achieves this by creating an ominous, dark background which seems to heighten Razumov's isolation. The fact that he has no known relations is also constantly brought to the attention of the reader. His thoughts also work in 'exclamatory repetitions' as he glides through his infinite darkness. Everything of significance in this novel takes place at night or in a dark room. This fact reinforces Razumov's confusion. His world is full of ghosts, he is a haunted man who at his hallucinatory worst cannot tell the difference between a phantom and a human being. Razumov encounters phantoms on at least fifteen different occasions. The fact of his 'solitary' and 'lofty' existence is constantly returned to as a way of reminding the reader of the nature of Razumov's anguish.

Events in Under Western Eyes do not carry the repetitive import of the two novels discussed above but verbal patterns are constantly repeated. Razumov as 'spectator' or 'outsider' is a pervasive expression. His 'solitary existences' are noted in a refrain fashion on at least six different occasions as are the expressions about his lack of 'ties'. Razumov is also always walking over people's 'chest'; he has done so several times to Haldin, so much so that it has become his ritual for exorcising the man's ghost from his own 'breast'. Also prevalent are the references to doors. When he is still in trouble, doors seem to instill a particular fear

in him but as he begins to progress on his journey toward 'moral discovery' doors such as those of Natalia Haldin's begin to be left open for him. Since he has suffered more from his thoughts than from his evil fortune, the doors may also be equated to his eyes - also mentioned several times - which remained closed for a very long time until they 'are opened at last' and his hands freed. As he searches for a 'word that could stand at the back of all the words covering the pages, a word which, if not truth itself, may perchance hold truth enough to help the moral discovery which should be the object of every tale', the reader cannot help but observe all the numerous words he has coined and have been coined through and for him to enable him to arrive at his cherished truth. His story, as he correctly remarks, is a 'Comedy of phantoms'. Repetition helps to bring this comedy into sharp focus.

Repetition plays a greater role in A Grain of Wheat where it also serves, as in Under Western Eyes, as a device to heighten the isolation of Mugo and show the nature of his betrayal. Consequently the fact of his loneliness receives considerable attention but, unlike the former novel, the loneliness of the other major characters also receives great attention. Each is described as a lone figure and they all are isolated from one another even if their activities seem to bring them together. Karanja's philosophy states categorically that 'everyman in the world is alone, and fights alone to live'. This is echoed by Gikonyo and Mugo who in fact considers his loneliness as ordained. This is why they all create walls around themselves. Walls are also a pervasive motif in the story. They are haunted by ghosts within these walls until Mugo is able to break ties and allow humanity to prevail. Another related motif

and one which is also repeated several times is that of a door. Here too only Mugo seems to understand the meaning of the image. Gikonyo comes close to a realisation but does not possess the courage to face the full implications of the philosophy of open doors.

Thematic motifs are also constantly repeated. The events in the lives of the characters in the novel seem to follow a predictable cyclic pattern. A very significant incident is the race which is recorded first as a weekly event in the life of the village but appears toward the end as a forum to test the true passions of the protagonists of the novel. For Gikonyo, for instance, the race is an opportunity for stock-taking, he reviews all that has happened to him and finds an uncomfortable coincidence in the fact that he and Karanja are rivals once again. Karanja also uses the race to review his own past as Mumbi, who is the centre of all the drama, also does. The repetition of the race thus highlights the various attitudes that each character brings to the events of his life and it is used thus to heighten the differences and the conflict between the characters. All of them discover, with Mugo, that 'life was only a constant repetition of what happened yesterday and the day before'. This movement is responsible for the complex pattern of the novel, because as the events multiply, the confusion in the minds of the characters also intensifies.

Like Conrad, Ngugi handles the repetitive use of images and events by employing recurrent verbal patterns which help to fix the image permanently for the characters and for the reader. Darkness, light, loneliness, ghosts, dreams, and walls recur incessantly. As in <u>Under Western Eyes</u> all the numerous events take place at night

and each time it is reinforced as a sharp contrast to the flaming torch which most of the characters cannot see. The unreality of many of the events at least as far as the major actors are concerned is reinforced by constant reference to a 'dream' world: 'everything remained like a misty dream'. Even when Mugo faces people in a bar he claims that all the people are 'unreal', they will soon 'vanish' and leave him alone. Gikonyo has also been 'walking in an unreal dream' since Gatu hanged himself as all the other characters, even including Mumbi, do. When she goes to meet Mugo in his hut, the first thing she asks him is whether he dreams. The whole novel is peopled with ghosts, even the scientist at the Forest Research Station flits about 'like a ghost'. Mugo especially has 'wrestled with demons in an endless nightmare'.

Both Conrad and Ngugi use repetition as a device to reinforce the potential of the metaphors they employ and to highlight further the psychological state of the characters but they have also deployed it through the use of highly figurative verbal patterns to differentiate between characters and their points of view. Because they seem to be more concerned with universals, they tend to construct their narratives with very little attention to time.

V

Time

The impression of time which the reader gets from a reading of the novels of Conrad and Ngugi is one of chaos. This is not only because the material of the novels is fragmented in time and distributed among many narrators, as is the case with Faulkner; it is because of an almost total absence of plot. Because the novels usually are the 'historical' accounts of individual characters they often seem to be engaged in 'rivalry' so that the baffled reader is faced with nuerous competing claims of credibility. Each of them 'behaves as if utterly alone' with his job, hence the novels do not pay attention to any sense of sequence. Time is not the unifier in these novels. The reader must look for dominant metaphors and for dramatic relationships but cannot expect to make sense of what is present and what is past in the novels. Time is the enemy, not in the Faulknerian sense in which an oppressive mythical time runs a cycle of doom, nor is it the overwhelming phenomenon which the characters of Joyce or Woolf seek to arrest; here, the characters in question act as if they are completely unaware of time.

Nostromo, for example, is full of 'immortal' people. Though the titular hero and Decoud die, they seem to remind the reader of the two gringos 'living' somewhere in the Azuera. Nostromo's activities are so stupendous that it is sometimes difficult to imagine that they were all accomplished in one lifetime; not even Captain Mitchell's rhetoric can find words completely to cover the activities of the magnificent Capataz. It is significant that Captain Mitchell is

unable to put a time on the achievements of Nostromo: he simply says 'years ago' he engaged a runaway Italian sailor. The novel is full of these generalisations about time and this is deliberate. The 'present' of the story is hardly noticeable - Captain Mitchell is 'explaining' the birth of the Republic of Sulaco to foreigners - and this is in fact after the death of Nostromo. Yet Nostromo and several of the characters take the story, as it were, from his mouth and live it before the reader.

Nostromo is a novel that relies on atmosphere for its power, rather than on its sequence of events. This is why when the novel opens great attention is paid to creating a mysterious background. 'The eye of God himself', the natives say, 'could not find out what work a man's hand is doing in there and you could be free to call the devil to your aid with impunity if even his malice were not defeated by such a blind darkness'. Soon after this the reader is introduced to the revolt which has resulted in the break-up of Sulaco from Costaguana after which the question is asked, 'Has anything ever happened here for a hundred years before today?' It is quite a while before the great impact that the silver has made on the area begins to show, then the reader is taken through 'brief' histories of all the major characters but must wait until the 'story' is one-third narrated before he encounters Martin Decoud who 'incidentally' is the founder of the Republic whose history is the subject of the novel.

All the present activities in the plot occur within three days but the number three has also become something of a fetish in the Republic's history. Everything connected with it is given in threes: the three Isabels, the three villages, the third of May,

everyone sees things in threes. Consequently, it is not possible to say that the number of days reflect a time sequence; they simply are part of the legend. In Nostromo the characters live forever, or outside of time, and this thematic ploy influences and shapes the narrative.

There is a greater semblance of order and sequence in Petals of Blood but even here the 'present' of the story is also very thin. Munira has, within a period of ten days, been able to narrate the history of Ilmorog. The story, however, runs away from him; the other characters take control of their lives and dramatise their own stories in a way which leaves him, like Captain Mitchell, a mere tourist guide. 'Time' he admits 'was a vast blankness without a beginning, middle and end'.[80] Petals of Blood begins from the end. When the novel opens the principal actors in the drama have already been rounded up for questioning in connection with the murder Munira's fire has caused. The novel should thus narrate a sequence of the events that lead up to the incident but it develops instead into the record of the individual histories of all the characters. When Munira begins his own version of history, he dates it back to the twelve years when he first came to Ilmorog but the story that unfolds is no longer a twelve-year history; it goes back to the time when Ilmorog was 'a small nineteenth century village' and traces its history to its modern industrial status. As the history of the village is inseparable from the characters, each of them ends up telling us everything about their past. However, it is almost halfway through the novel that the alcohol from thengeta releases their tongues and forces them to fill in the details that have been missing.

Ngugi also employs a time scheme that may be likened to the relay which Karega, Wanja and Munira conduct on the latter's old bicycle. The characters seem to pass their narratives from one to the other in the form of a relay. But it is a curious relay which merely ensures a questionable 'solidarity'. The total impression is more of a cyclic movement. The repetition of past patterns helps to create this cyclic nature of time. Even when all the characters concentrate on the twelve-year history, they do not seem to move very much. It is more than halfway through the narrative that the first five years are 'completed'. Movement is generally 'slow' and confusing but here, as in Conrad, technique and theme unite to emphasise the chaos inside and outside the characters.

In Under Western Eyes Razumov seems to be looking for 'some means of seizing upon time which seemed to have escaped him altogether'. This is because his world often looks unreal. As he struggles with his ghosts, he loses any sense of time. In the novel the teacher of languages is the more reliable time-keeper. The chaotic events of the night of Haldin's betrayal seem to have introduced a series of endless scenes but in the second part of the novel the teacher of languages is able to 'invent a transition' by reminding the reader that he made the acquaintance of the Haldin women six months before he met Razumov. The story moves forward in time in this regard. When Razumov arrives, however, the confusion and the dramatic turn of events obliterate time until toward the end when the teacher of languages again reminds the reader that he got his information within a period of two years.

It is only then, and in conversation with Sophia Antonova, that he

learns about Razumov's confession which had taken place as soon as Razumov had left Natalia and the teacher. Perhaps he might have been wiser if he had understood Razumov's earlier remark about the 'one thing more' he had to do. Because each of these characters lives in his own world, some of these events seem removed from them and are responsible for the chaos and misunderstandings in the novel.

A Grain of Wheat bears a resemblance to Nostromo in its manipulation of time. The present story, as in Nostromo, is also very thin covering only a period of 'four nights' in which the people of the village of Thabai prepare for the National Independence Day celebrations. Yet these four nights seem to offer the characters a chance to penetrate the darkness of their souls and produce a series of complicated confessional stories which range from their childhood to adulthood and in the process they recount the history of the nation whose independence they are about to celebrate. Though the novel deals with history and politics, the emphasis is shifted from specific periods and ideologies to a more private probe into the inner lives of the characters involved. And as the anguished minds show great signs of confusion, so does the novel's time-scheme.

When the story opens, Mugo is 'tortured' by a drop of water that is pointed at his heart but this little incident reminds him of his detention. The fact of his detention is, however, mentioned only in passing. He continues with his usual activities on a normal day, activities which remind him that 'the day ahead would be just like yesterday and the day before'. Later he makes mention of Kihika but this too is only in passing. At the end of the day people from the 'party' visit him and this again triggers further thoughts

on what the party is and what it has been. A chapter afterwards, the reader is returned to Mugo's hut to hear the voices from the party and when the message has been related, the story is stopped so that other details from the past can be filled in. This past consists of the Colonial experience out of which they have only recently been liberated. The story moves in these reminiscent leaps and bounds until it begins with Gikonyo to take the form of individual sketch histories. These go on for most of the novel leading up to Mugo's confession which takes place on the day of the Independence celebrations. In the last chapter titled 'Harambee' all the fragments are brought together but as Mumbi observes:

> People try to rub out things, but they cannot. Things are not so easy. What has passed between us is too much to be passed over in a sentence. We need to talk, to open our hearts to one another, examine them, and then together plan the future we want.
>
> 81

In effect the novel returns to its primary task, Mumbi's observation shows that in spite of the copious confessions not much has been achieved. In the attempt to reveal bits of themselves to each other, the characters have only succeeded in creating further problems.

Mugo explains the difficulty best when he is trying to understand the nature of his dilemma:

> ... things have been fated to happen at different moments. One had no choice in anything as surely as one had no choice in one's birth. He did not, then, tire his mind by trying to connect what went before with what followed after. Numbed, he ran without thinking of the road, its origin or its end.
>
> 82

This passage is another indication of Mugo's naive and confused state of mind.

In A Grain of Wheat, as in Nostromo, the chaos within the characters and the confused drama of their lives is reflected in the manipulation of the time-scheme.

The devices which Ngugi deploys in A Grain of Wheat and Petals of Blood bear great resemblances to those used by Conrad in Under Western Eyes and Nostromo. Ngugi's acknowledgement of a debt to Conrad does not, therefore, come as a surprise. Ngugi, however, has written novels which are more than mere derivations from those of his mentor. Both writers fragment their material and present it through the multiple perspectives of several major characters and both stretch the use of metaphor so that their novels demand interpretation through an understanding of the complex interfusion of metaphors. Their method is deployed with some variation by Faulkner and Armah whose novels are the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

1. Umberto Eco, The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts (London: Hutchinson, 1979), p.47.

2. Lewis Nkosi, for instance, begins a study of A Grain of Wheat by asking if it is a Socialist novel. His answer is in the affirmative. Other Marxist critics such as John Chileshe similarly seek to impose a single meaning on Ngugi's novels.

3. Information confirmed in discussions with Ngugi himself.

4. It is quite possible to dispense with Captain Mitchell's accounts as they do not add much to the reader's knowledge about the characters and the situations they describe.

5. Nostromo, p.247.

6. Eugene Ted Boyle, Symbol and Meaning in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad. (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), p.175.

7. Nostromo, p.81.

8. Ibid. p.50.

9. Ibid. p.60.

10. Symbol and Meaning op. cit., p.164.

11. Nostromo, p.419.

12. Ibid. p.308.

13. Ibid. p.310.

14. Ibid. p.266.

15. Symbol and Meaning op. cit. p.177.

16. Nostromo, p.161.

17. Ibid. p.456.

18. Ibid. p.463.

19. Petals of Blood, p.106.

20. This question is implied in much of the novel.

21. Petals of Blood, p.310.

22. Ibid. p.57.

23. Ibid. p.295.

24. Ibid. p.57.

25. Ibid. p.228.

26. Gerald Moore, Twelve African Writers (London: Hutchinson, 1980) p.285.

27. Eustace Palmer, The Growth of the African Novel (London: Heinemann, 1979), p.294.

28. Douglas Killam, An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi (London: Heinemann, 1980), p.100.

29. I am thinking here in Wayne Booth's terms in Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1961).

30. Petals of Blood, p.333.

31. An Introduction op. cit. p.107.

32. The affinities between the four novels are very close but it has been found that Under Western Eyes and A Grain of Wheat are as close to each other in technique as is Petals of Blood to Nostromo.

33. A Grain of Wheat, p.161.

34. Under Western Eyes, p.17.

35. Ibid. p.57.

36. Ibid. p.313.

37, Ibid. p.285.

38. Ibid. p.187.

39. Symbol and Meaning op. cit. p.216.

40. Under Western Eyes, p.56.

41. A Grain of Wheat, p.167.

42. Ibid. p.149.

43. Ibid. pp.149-150.

44. Ibid. p.131.

45. Ibid. p.158.

46. Ibid. p.204.

47. Ibid. p.202.

48. Petals of Blood p.299.

49. Ibid. p.214.

50. Nostromo p.99.

51. Ibid. p.98.

52. Ibid. p.428.

53. Ibid. p.443.

54. Ibid. p.454.

55. Ibid. p.237.

56. _Nostromo_ chapter eight.

57. _Nostromo_, p.263.

58. Ibid. p.18.

59. Ibid. p.437.

60. _Petals of Blood_ p.88.

61. Ibid. p.281.

62. Ibid. pp.53, 62, 65, 98.

63. Ibid. p.244.

64. _Under Western Eyes_ p.29.

65. Ibid. p.53.

66. Ibid. p.286.

67. Ibid. p.308.

68. _A Grain of Wheat_, p.3.

69. Ibid. p.171.

70. Ibid. p.171.

71. Ibid. p.168.

72. *Nostromo*, p.61.

73. Ibid., p.62.

74. Ibid., p.113

75. Ibid., p.428.

76. Ibid. pp.373, 434, 435, 165, 118.

77. *Petals of Blood*, pp. 337-338.

78. Ibid., p.340.

79. Ibid. pp. 23,24,25,49,52,54,91,114,139,212,226,227,270, 274, 297.

80. Ibid., p.191.

81. *A Grain of Wheat*, p.213.

82. Ibid. p.205.

Chapter Five : The Multiple Perspective Part II

William Faulkner, _As I Lay Dying_

Absalom, Absalom!

Ayi Kwei Armah, _Fragments_

Why Are We So Blest?

i

Speaking generally of Faulkner's narrative technique, Karl Zink describes it as 'the material under the lens of a microscope which', Zink observes, 'is examined at progressively increased powers of light or lens, so that the watcher enjoys a process of discovery as the material grows in complexity from simple outline and takes on breadth and depth'.[1] The reader of As I Lay Dying and Absalom, Absalom! would do well to bear Zink's metaphor in mind. Faulkner encourages the reader to make discoveries by making the characters in his novels initiate the process. Each character appears to have a special 'light' or 'lens' without which the novels cannot be interpreted. James's centres of consciousness, for instance, determine the point of view which pervades his novels but in the novels of Faulkner the reader is expected, as in the works of Conrad and Ngugi, to participate actively in the story. There is in these novels an imaginative sharing of experience in which the reader is invited as 'a secret sharer'.

The method probably influenced Ayi Kwei Armah; the reader of Fragments and Why Are We So Blest? notices a close affinity in method. Narrative perspective is distributed among several characters in the novels in a Faulknerian manner. Both writers display an acute sense of community and their awareness of a bigger environment affects the way they present character. The Healers and Two Thousand Seasons are experiments in this sense of community and both novels generate a communal perspective which is the subject of the next three chapters but Fragments and Why Are We So Blest? are best seen in the light of Faulkner's novels.

ii

Characterisation

One of the major themes of As I Lay Dying and Fragments - isolation and community - defines the nature of the characterisation in the novels and ultimately the management of point of view. Although the reader is committed to the experience and sensibility of one character who is seen from the inside and whose world is apprehended from his point of view, as in the novels of Joyce and Virginia Woolf, here, such a character is never allowed to savour the fruits of his isolation.[2] He is constantly forced back into the total perspective of the community which may sometimes be the immediate family and at other times the larger world to which the individual and his family belong. The method simultaneously invites sympathy and judgement: the reader enters into rapport with a character and sympathises with his point of view but is also able to judge objectively from the views of the other characters.

The method is seen working well in As I Lay Dying, where, through interior monologue, the characters reveal themselves individually; they are further revealed by other members of the same family who themselves are further revealed through the consciousnesses of neighbours whose point of view represents that of the wide community. The gain in this method is on the part of the reader whose task is simplified by this multiple variation in perspective. There are fifty-nine first-person segments in the novel and each provides a useful point of reference. Each member of the Bundren family has his or her own

private dreams and hopes which may, or may not, coincide with those of the other members of the family - a situation which breeds conflict and provides the substance for the dramatic action that unfolds. The most perceptive, hence the most widely represented member of the family, is Darl, through whom the reader first comes to know about the Bundren family. Darl reveals himself in the first monologue as a character the reader can trust, because of his precision and his clinical observation of what goes on around him. Here is how he describes his and Jewel's return from the field:

> Jewel, FIFTEEN FEET behind me, looking straight ahead, his pale eyes like wood set into his wooden face, he crosses the floor in FOUR strides with the rigid gravity of a cigar-store Indian dressed in patched overalls and endued with life from the hips down, and steps in a SINGLE stride through the opposite window and into the path again just as I come around the corner. In single file and FIVE FEET apart and Jewel now in front, we go on up that path toward the foot of the bluff. (My emphasis)
>
> 3

Only Cash, the Carpenter, matches this precision - giving the exact distance he fell off the church for instance - but Cash unfortunately is more at home with his tools than with words so we get to know more about the Bundren family through the 'artistic' detachment, and some may even say callousness, of Darl. Darl's nineteen segments are the reader's richest source of material, and his isolation is demonstrated paradoxically in the predominance of his monologues. The same isolation presents two benefits in the quality of his vision and in the great intuitive skills he exhibits: skills by means of which, as in the two cases where he is not even present at scenes, he is able to narrate vividly the events that take place in those scenes. The first occurs in section three, where Darl, although situated on the

porch, is able to describe what Jewel is doing in the barn and the second and more startling one occurs in section twelve in which he describes his mother's death even though he has gone away with Jewel to earn some money. Darl's way of seeing, however, is also responsible for his undoing as he runs into direct conflict with other members of his family who increasingly become afraid of him. He knows for instance, of his mother's infidelity, something which he finds very difficult to reconcile with her 'teaching':

> That Addie Bundren should be hiding anything she did, who had tried to teach us that deceit was such that, in a world where it was, nothing else could be very bad or very important, not even poverty.
> 4

Darl also knows about his sister's pregnancy, knows in fact, about all the private fears and hopes of the rest of the family; he can see through their pretences. Unlike the others he alone has no expectations from the journey the family undertakes to the city - Anse wants a set of new teeth and perhaps another wife; Cash wants a gramophone; Dewey Dell wants an abortion; Vardman would like to see a toy-train or at least eat some bananas; Jewel, the illegitimate son, feels he owes it to his mother to fulfil her dying wish or at least to ride his famous Snopes's horse. The problem with Darl, as Tull correctly observes, is that he 'thinks by himself too much;'[5] he is thus not motivated by the kind of material interests which inspire others. His isolation makes him the conscience and mirror of the family. Tull's assessment is again to the point:

> I always say it ain't never been what he does so much or said or anything so much as how he looks at you. Its like he had got into the inside of you, someway. Like somehow you was looking at yourself and your doings outen his eyes. 6

Unable to continue the uncomfortable task of watching their artless minds in Darl's mirror the family finally betrays him by handing him over to the authorities to be put into the asylum. Only Cash has his doubts:

> But I ain't so sho that ere a man has the right to say what is crazy and what ain't. Its like there was a fellow in every man that done a past the sanity or the insanity, that watches the sane and insane doings of that man with the same horror and the same astonishment. 7

Outside the Bundren family most people would agree with Cash's assessment of Darl, but, just as the man has been isolated and observed, and, just as each other member of the family is isolated and observed in turn, so also is the family, which is itself isolated and observed by various neighbours. The verdict is almost unanimous: everyone, even the sympathetic Tull, finds something queer about the Bundrens. Instead, it is Darl who emerges as the sane one. For the neighbours, and indeed for the reader, the truly insane world is that in which the banana eaters, heedless of the patient, suffering Cash, and joined by Anse, who is grinning with his new teeth, in the company of his new 'duck-shaped' wife, drive off in a wagon which, one imagines, still reeks of its late cargo. The one they leave behind, by condemning him to the asylum, is the one with the greatest insight. But this verdict cannot be arrived at through the single monologues of individuals within the family or outside it. Such a limited view would lead to this kind of observation from Moseley:

> They came from some place in Yoknapatawpha county, trying to get to Jefferson with (it). It must have been like a piece of rotten cheese coming into an ant-hill, in that ramshackle wagon that Albert said folks were scared would fall all to pieces before they could get it out

> of town, with that home-made box and another
> fellow with a broken leg lying on a quilt
> on top of it, and the father and a little boy
> sitting on the seat and the marshall trying
> to make them get out of the town.
>
> 8

As I Lay Dying is a novel which presents a biased and limited view of people who are themselves biased and limited. In spite of the predominance of his monologues Darl does not provide the comprehensiveness of vision with which nature seems to endow him. There is even a hint that he is indeed mad. Why else did he burn Armstid's barn and how can one explain his excessive laughter even over his mother's coffin? It is the reader who has this comprehensive point of view which is gained first through the isolated accounts of individual characters and then evaluated against the background of the community. The process is one of progressive enrichment and complexity. It is sometimes very simple when things are presented from the singular, isolated perspective of each character, but the story assumes greater complexity as the isolated fragments become, through the eyes of the community, and through 'the wiser', because more knowledgeable reader, a comprehensive story of the trials of the Bundren family. The community, its 'humanity', provides the background for the intricate ramifications of human action represented in this novel.

A similar process can be observed in Fragments where the individual characters are seen through their own consciousnesses which are in turn exposed by other members within the family who themselves are isolated and judged by a larger community, the community in turn being exposed to the reader for further judgement. Baako, the dominant consciousness in the novel, experiences two forms of isolation.

In the first instance, he is physically removed from his family and community by five years study abroad. The first two long segments of the novel, which run for fifty-four pages, are thus represented through the isolated consciousnesses of Naana and Juana, characters who, in spite of their telepathic link with Baako, are, for the moment, far removed from him. Naana's monologue isolates all the potential areas of crisis and puts them into perspective. First, she draws attention to the problem which constitutes a major aspect of point of view in the novel:

> A human being alone
> is a thing more sad than any lost animal
> and nothing destroys the soul
> like its aloneness.
> [9]

She also talks about dreams which will load Baako's spirit down, dreams from his mother and sister, dreams of richness and greatness for Baako; dreams which turn out to be the yardstick by which Baako will be judged by some members of his own family, such as Efua and Araba, by some neighbours, and eventually by the larger community. Juana's section also points to isolation. The metaphor of the circle of men tightened around a shivering dog and her own lone and aimless drives around the town in the attempt, she says, 'to forget that now the sum of her life was only that she was here in another defeated and defeating place, to forget all the reminders of futility',[10] emphasise this isolation.

When Baako returns, the question of isolation, defined so well by his two kindred spirits, is already a pervasive one. Indeed even before the journey home he already admits to 'an unsettling feeling that was not only one of loneliness, but a much more fearful emotion as if there never was going to be any way out of his giddying isolation'.[11]

Juxtaposed against this acute sense of isolation is the exuberance of Henry Robert Hudson Brempong BSc., who, even in the plane, 'had found an element that suited him completely, and needed to let everyone and everything around him know this'.[12] The cacophony of his welcome party contrasts sharply with Baako's solitary arrival. Brempong is 'at home' while Baako looks for a back-street hotel to spend the night alone. Here he hears a lean dog howling 'like a frightened beast', perhaps a kindred 'creature'.

Baako's dilemma, like Darl's, is that he is 'strange', an expression which invariably means that he sees, knows and thinks differently from too many people. His knowledge and isolation, like Darl's, is his own undoing. He can see through the pretensions of members of his family: their hurry to make money over a child who is not yet ready for 'outdooring', for instance. He can also see through the pretensions of his fellow workers who would scramble for television sets that were meant to be distributed for public use. The love of members of his family and many others of the larger community for 'shiny' things, akin to the petty desires of the Bundrens, runs counter to his own anti-materialist nature and a clash is unavoidable. Like Darl, he stands in the way of these pretences; his mother, in fact, says he is a wall, and must be broken down. And like Darl, he is condemned to the lunatic asylum, in both cases the last word coming from sisters, Dewey Dell and Araba respectively, who have a special axe to grind. Yet, here too, the insane ones are surely those who are in a hurry 'to consume things they have taken no trouble to produce';[13] who, afraid to look into the mirror provided by their kinsman, gang together and hand him over to others to be condemned. He is the one with foresight; who, like Naana, knows

that 'fruit is not a gathered gift of the instant but seed hidden in the earth and tended and waited for and allowed to grow.[14]

The nature of characterisation in the novel, however, is such that, like Darl, neither Baako, nor indeed any single character in the novel can come up with a clear judgement. Every segment - there are thirteen in this novel though there could easily have been more - represents a point of view. Baako's 'case', for instance, gains credibility not so much because of the persecution complex from which he seems to suffer but from the more detached assessments of his teacher Ocran, his grandmother Naana and his girlfriend Juana. The last two do sometimes sound biased, but Fragments, like As I Lay Dying, does present these biased accounts of people who are themselves biased and limited. Juana, for instance, has her own problems of isolation and frustration and Naana belongs to another generation and is blind. She naturally finds many things wrong with Baako's, but both Naana and Juana are useful narrators. These comments from the crowd concerning Baako's madness sound like Moseley's account of the Bundren journey:

> 'It was books, they say'. 'And he was clever at school'.
>
> A been-to, returned only a year ago. His mother waited a long time, and now this happens to her. 'He was very quiet'. 'Is it true that he was a graduate?' 'Yes, and a been-to'. We saw him walking to take the bus every morning so we were not so sure. 'A graduate all right. Hundred percent'. 'Strange, he didn't have a car'. 'They could at least have given him a bungalow'.
>
> 'Strange'.
>
> 'Strange'. 15

The more knowledgeable reader can see the inaccuracies of these remarks. Indeed the dialogue reveals more about the community than

the situation which they seek to explain. It is surely not books that have made Baako 'mad'. On the contrary it is a lack of understanding coupled with a failure of imagination on the part of both family and community. These are reflected in the easy answers which the crowd in the above passage propound - 'a bungalow', 'a car'. Baako, however, does not always emerge as the persecuted, misunderstood character that he would like us to think him. Like Darl, the reader sometimes has doubts about him - does he really not understand the language of expectations that both his mother and sister speak? Nevertheless, viewed against the moral atmosphere which both novels create, the balance shows the hard-thinking, far-sighted characters on the credit side. The reader is able to arrive at such a judgement because of the multiplicity of point of view which ensures the availability of material usually lacking in the more circumscribed forms of narration as is the case with novels deploying the inward perspective. The three main narrators in the novel complement one another. Juana, for example, does not know anything about Baako until he returns. Her account of his activities is thus not coloured by any past events. As she introduces the reader to the town and country in chapter two the impression is given of an objective account of the horror which Baako faces eventually. Her account follows Naana's 'sermons' which are also independent of Baako's views. The hallmark of the technique lies in the fact that these differing accounts are eventually integrated. Baako's thoughts illustrate the way the method works:

> Remembrance of words said and events that had happened far apart, now no longer separate but pushed into each other, a compressed reel entering him with a new, clear meaning. [16]

Here, there may be problems of communication among the characters, as is the case with Efua and her son Baako and between them and the larger world of the novel, but the sum total of their fragments communicates a great deal to the reader.

Absalom, Absalom! and Why Are We So Blest? are novels in which a variety of consciousnesses reflect on the central story of the novel but they are also novels where these consciousnesses that ponder over the story are as much the centre of focus as the story which their narratives seek to present. Because they are lost in their private obsessions, they are only able to view the stories through their distortion of vision; they tend to miss the true meanings of the tragedy in which they take part, and, as in Fragments and As I Lay Dying, the reader gains greater knowledge from their biased interpretations of the characters and events. In both novels, the objective existence of the story is the collective product of the working of the minds of the speculative narrators whose stories are verified by the reader who must make allowances for the interests and biases of the narrators. Both novels gain in complexity from this multiplicity in perspective. Here, too, a fair balance of sympathy and judgement emerges from the rapport between participant narrators and the subject of their narration; between the reader and the subject; between the reader and the participant narrators and finally between the reader and the story as a whole.

In Absalom, Absalom! two major narrators - Quentin and Shreve - collaborate with two others - Rosa Coldfield and Mr Compson - to tell the story of the rise and fall of Thomas Sutpen. Rosa Coldfield's

account - chapters one and five - is strange, almost bizarre; the Sutpen that emerges from her account is 'an ogre, some beast out of tales to frighten children with'.[17] Miss Coldfield has no good word for her subject whom she seems determined to see as diabolical and incomprehensible. Her frenzied account hardly seeks to explain the man's behaviour which, like Sutpen's refusal of the marriage between his daughter and Charles Bon, is, for her, 'without rhyme or reason'. The reader is to understand Sutpen as the man who came from 'nowhere', with 'no background', who 'tore violently' a plantation, married a wife and 'begot' two children. When Rosa is finished Sutpen remains a bewilderingly inexplicable phenomenon. It is not possible from her account to regard him as anything but a phenomenon, for Rosa Coldfield's Sutpen seems devoid of any human value. Rosa Coldfield, however, has a major contradiction to resolve because of her engagement to Sutpen. In her soliloquy in chapter five she tries very hard to resolve the contradiction. Here she mellows and begins to talk about her subject in human terms:

> If he was mad, it was only his compelling dream which was insane and not his methods: it was no madman who bargained and cajoled hard manual labour out of men like Jones. [18]

Sutpen is no longer the man who it seems 'was not articulated in this world'.[19] Miss Coldfield's contradictory story tells more about her own life than about Sutpen's. By her own admission the reader knows she was born into 'some curious disjoint of her father's life and left on his (now twice) widowed hands'.[20] With a background like that she remained a child 'living in a womb-like corridor where the world came not even as a living echo but as dead incomprehensible shadow'.[21] Her inability to understand Sutpen,

therefore, stems not so much from the fact that the latter is a demon, which in some respects he is, but rather from her inability to step out of her 'womb-like corridor'. There are human beings outside the corridor but to reach them Miss Rosa needs more effort than her 'devious intricate channels of decorous ordering'[22] can allow. The reader knows much about Miss Coldfield but must look elsewhere to find answers to fill the many holes she has left in the story of Thomas Sutpen.

Mr Compson attempts to go beyond the 'ogre' image and seeks to represent his subject differently. His early account describes Sutpen thus:

> A man with a big frame but gaunt now almost to emaciation, with a short reddish beard which resembled a disguise and above which his pale eyes had a quality at once visionary and alert.
> [23]

Mr Compson's Sutpen, though incomprehensible, is at least a human being: a man who, 'given the occasion and the need, could and would do anything'.[24] Mr Compson's story is a great advance from Rosa Coldfield's hysterics. Details of Sutpen's arrival, his turtuous task of settling down, his marriage and his children all fall within what Sutpen himself later describes as his 'design'. But it is not long before the reader discovers that, for all his detached narration, Mr Compson is not only biased but is himself unable to explain his 'subject' fully. In spite of his recognition of the intricacy of the story he is trying to tell, and of the complexity of the characters, he assumes a patronising tone and begins to separate Sutpen's generation from his and to pass it off as 'uncomplex':

> People too as we are, and victims too as we are, but victims of a different circumstance, simpler and therefore, integer for integer, larger, more heroic and the figures therefore more heroic too, not dwarfed and involved but distinct, UNCOMPLEX, who had the gift of living once and dying once instead of being diffused ... [25]

It turns out, in fact, that he has merely replaced Rosa Coldfield's religious interpretation with a more secular one; substituting her fiendish images with what he describes as 'a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs'.[26] His vagueness is partly the result of his ignorance of vital information - he does not know the full history of Charles Bon - and partly the product of a cynical and detached mind which is determined to absolve itself of the 'follies' of its past. The son notes this cynicism when he equates his room-mate's uninvolved remarks with those of his father: 'He sounds just like father' . Mr Compson's cynicism and superior airs make it difficult for him to probe for motive and rationale, and by the end of his narrative, the reader knows more about Sutpen but not enough. To accept Mr Compson's doctrine of Fate as the real ruler of the story is as unhelpful as Rosa Coldfield's fiendish account; in both cases, sadly, Sutpen is still a riddle. That is why Mr Compson resorts to metaphor when he is faced with contradiction:

> They are like a chemical formula exhumed along with the letters from that forgotten chest ... you bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens; you re-read, tedious and intent, posing, making sure that you have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation, you bring them together again and again nothing happens: just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene. [27]

But this sophistry reveals more about Mr Compson than the people

whose lives he is trying to describe. The reader can sympathise with him but must look further for better clues to solve the Sutpen puzzle.

Thomas Sutpen, by means of a conversation with General Compson, tells his own story in chapter seven. Unlike the other narrators, Sutpen's story is free of distortion, he is trying to probe objectively into his own past. He emerges as a man of action who has embarked on a quest to accomplish what he describes as his 'design'. In its essence the design is simple: to found a dynasty in which his son and the rest of his descendants shall have all that he lacked as a child; wealth, power, and untainted respectability. However, like Mr Compson, though with different motivation, Sutpen seems determined to disown his past. It is this desperate need to escape his past that complicates what he sees as a very simple design. The shame of his rejection at the door of a wealthy plantation owner by a 'monkey nigger' is compounded with that of his first marriage to a woman who has part negro blood. He tries to buy his way out of both dilemmas because, for him, 'the ingredients of morality were like the ingredients of pie or cake and once you had measured them and balanced them and mixed them and put them into the oven it was all finished and nothing but pie or cake could come out.'[28] Unfortunately, however, nothing ever turns out the way Sutpen expects; he merely moves from one 'mistake' to yet another mistake, committing the same 'crimes' which had triggered the design in the first place. His rejection of his Spanish wife and his subsequent refusal to acknowledge his son are as appalling as the action of the plantation owner who turned his father and the rest of his family into virtual slaves. The reader admires his courage and

his sense of duty and sympathises with his inability to understand, and hence modify, the pattern of the design he set out to accomplish, but his obduracy which in the end hinges around a desperate need for a boy leaves his life, and subsequently the lives of his sons, Charles and Henry, a puzzle.

All the versions of the story so far do not seem to 'pass' the 'inexplicable' death of Bon at the hands of his brother Henry. The enigma of this murder, which Rosa explains in terms of demonic powers and which Compson attributes to fatality, provides Quentin and Shreve with an excuse to embark upon a quest for identity. In order to accomplish this they both present a largely co-operative version of the Sutpen story, 'both thinking as one, the voice which happened to be speaking the thought only the thinking become audible, vocal; the two of them creating between them out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking'.[29] In tracing the history of Thomas Sutpen, Shreve sometimes sounds cynical - insisting for instance on referring to the man as Faustus, sometimes even reverting to Rosa Coldfield's images of demon and Beelzebub, but even Shreve makes a more committed effort to understand the character and to seek motives for the otherwise bizarre account which Rosa Coldfield and Mr Compson present. It is appropriate, as Donald Kartiganer suggests, that they both concentrate on the two sons, Charles and Henry, as this suits the condition of their own youth: sons still seeking their maturity, potential lovers still dreaming of passions they cannot admit are usually confined to books.[30] Their story is thus initially a story of love and youthful heroism, intensified because it is also a story, for Quentin especially, of potential

incest. However, because of their dynamism, they soon discover that to pursue the theory of incest as the possible motive for Charles Bon's murder would leave Bon a mere exploiter of Judith: Bon would thus be portrayed as one who would either have his heritage or his recognition. Quentin and Shreve reject this easy moral and instead 'invent' Bon's negro blood. In making this leap from the theme of incest to that of miscegenation, Quentin and Shreve separate themselves from Rosa Coldfield and Mr Compson. Their story, in contrast to Rosa Coldfield's and Mr Compson's, expands itself just at the moment of its apparent completion. Both Quentin and Shreve seek to understand the characters by immersion, by total identification; 'two, four, now two again, according to Quentin and Shreve, the two, the four, the two still talking'.[31] This is not to say that they do not have their own private interests and biases. For all his superficial cynicism, Shreve's growing interest in the story betrays his suspicion of the emptiness of his own life: 'I just want to understand it if I can and I don't know how to say it better. Because its something my people haven't got. Or if we have got it, it all happened long ago across the water and so now there aint anything to look at every day to remind us of it'.[32] For Quentin there is the haunting memory of the South out of which he seeks to find a meaning. What they have both achieved, through their own historical recreation, is a definition of the meaning of history for Shreve who has very little and for Quentin who has too much. In each case they have found strategies to relieve the pressures of their private anguish, something which Rosa Coldfield and Mr Compson also try to achieve but with very little success. Theirs is a triumph of the creative process in which creator and

subject unite.

In Why Are We So Blest? Modin Dofu's story is both a search for the meaning of his African past and a speculation about the present. In recreating the story, however, Solo Nkonam is conditioned by his own psychological and social past which gains additional light from the background provided by his 'double', so that, while Modin may be said to be the novel's centre of dramatic interest, providing much of its action, Solo's more speculative mind is the authority through which the reader experiences the multiple import of the novel. The 'uncanny complementarity' of their lives gives the novel its complexity which is further enhanced by the voice of a third narrator, Aimée. Here, too, the objective existence of the story is the collective product of the workings of the mind of the speculative narrator whose interest and biases the reader must take into account. Sympathy and judgement emerge from the rapport between the reader and Solo, between Solo and the pair of Modin and Aimée, and between the reader and the characters' search for meaning.

The structure of Why Are We So Blest? provides a further clue to the nature of its characterisation. Its thirty chapters are divided almost equally between Solo and Modin, eleven for Solo and thirteen for Modin, even though Modin's notebooks are meant to be the novel's major source of material. The parity in structure reflects the complementary nature of their relationship, a point which Solo takes care to emphasise:

> I see myself in the couple; I see them in me. The man in me: the African absolved into Europe, trying to escape death, eager to shed privilege. 33

But as Solo's research into Modin's notebooks continues it becomes obvious that there are, along with the similarities, differences of a very fundamental nature. By his own confession Solo is a 'failed revolutionary' watching what he would like the reader to believe is a stubborn, incorrigible idealist. Toward this end, Solo tries to portray himself as a compassionate and troubled observer: 'I wept for him, in impotent acknowledgement of a destiny shutting both him and me within its destructive limits'.[34] Pain and compassion drive him to 'help' the couple but it soon becomes obvious that he is not just impotent but is merely 'filling time, surviving emptiness'. Solo is like some younger Mr Compson, though not quite as open-minded as Quentin, trying to justify his inactivity and failure. His reaction to the notebooks is not surprisingly a mixture of 'curiosity, fear, suspicion and despair'.[35] His references to an impending doom, his acute sense of futility, of an 'ordained disease', of life as a 'vicious medium' in which he could only move against strong 'resisting forces' often remind one of Mr Compson's 'horrible and bloody mis-chancing of human affairs'. Solo identifies similarities between him and Modin merely to show how 'suicidal' the latter's actions are and to demonstrate how much better it would be to choose the path of inaction. For all his compassion and identification Solo sees himself as the wiser, older man, who has seen it all and is thus able to look at the futility of the efforts being made by the younger man. Modin of Solo's monologues, like Mr Compson's Sutpen, is one of those misguided people who do not seem to realise that the prize for action, no matter how plausible, is frustration because there is always the 'ordained destruction, the destiny held out to (us)'.[36] Solo's pessimism says it all:

> I read him, watching me, a spectre from an unwanted destiny, wondering how little time he had to go before his fire also went out and he too was reduced to me.
>
> 37

Modin's notebooks, however, do not reveal the kindred spirit which Solo seems at pains to discern. Like Solo, he is disgusted with some of his experiences abroad and, even more than Solo, is also conscious of the disadvantages, even dangers, of being African. Indeed, he has come close to death in one of his encounters with people Solo would describe as white slavers and it can be argued as Fraser does, that Modin is racist. But, for Modin, life is a 'revelatory process' and one set back is not enough reason to generalise as Solo is so often prone to do. His relationship with Aimée, for instance, shows his positive qualities, and is not, as Solo would imply, another trap into perdition. He tries to relate to Aimée as a fellow human being as her own notebooks confirm and their commitment to each other, even if their experiences seem to differ, is total. Things begin to worsen when Aimée, not Modin, falls back on cliche such as 'bourgeois hotels', or 'revolutionary hotels', when she begins to brand Modin 'racist', 'coward' and 'bourgeois', cliches which their previous experiences ought to have rendered meaningless. Modin's efforts should be seen as a genuine attempt to cancel generalisation not, as Solo implies, simply another example that there is a destiny 'shutting them within destructive limits'. There is a crucial difference in the ambiguous relationship between Modin and Solo. Both are idealistic in temperament, and in their awareness of the preponderant realities of human behaviour are pessimistic, but, while Modin channels his pessimism and melancholy into positive protest, Solo, like Mr Compson.

recoils into the kind of didactic protest whose only aim is to justify itself. Modin makes retreats but not as repudiation of principle, simply as signs of natural human weakness and weariness; his pendulum usually swings back into positive action. Quentin's reaction to a similar ambiguous situation is instructive: 'It's not when you realise that nothing can help you', Quentin says, 'It's when you realise that you don't need aid'.[38] Modin's refusal to surrender principle even when he seems overmatched by circumstances such as his experiences in America and his bitter experience at the hands of the French 'army' intensifies his melancholy but it also enhances his human dignity. He emerges, in spite of his seemingly passive posture in most of his Congheria experience, much larger, more heroic than Solo and in the process also exposes the shortcomings of Aimée whose experiences should have taught her the futility of stereotypes but who, when faced with the odds, returns unfortunately to the same problems, the emptiness of her life at Radcliffe, and perhaps to her frigidity, which Modin had helped her to overcome. Both Solo and Aimée could be accused of betrayal. Modin, unlike Solo and Aimée, is aware that there must be other exits out of the dilemma in which people such as Solo and himself find themselves. His analysis of the African past, which he defines as slavery and of the contemporary educated African whom he also sees as another kind of slave, is brutal, but it never ends in the same kind of 'solution' which Solo proffers. His retreat into Laccryville, if it had occurred, would have been one of his many efforts at bringing back pieces of his life which he tells us he is in the habit of 'flinging dangerously wide indeed'.[39]

The reader may thus sympathise with Solo's anguish which he graphically

portrays and may indeed note several similarities between his experiences and those of Modin but Modin's notebooks present, in spite of their uncanny complementarity, a completely different point of view from that of Solo. Modin's point of view gains its complexity through its convictions based on experience and through the collaborative notes of Aimée who serves as a third narrator and whose voice stands both as an indictment upon her own behaviour and proof of Modin's reliability. But, as in Absalom, Absalom!,only the reader has this comprehensive view of the stage. To understand the novel is to penetrate the ambiguities through which the three narrators try desperately to fight their way.

Ayi Kwei Armah's concept of character and the way he executes it in Fragments and Why Are We So Blest? is similar to that of William Faulkner. There are affinities between Fragments and As I Lay Dying as there are between Why Are We So Blest? and Absalom, Absalom! Both writers demonstrate the ways in which the technique of multiple perspective is deployed in a novel.

iii

Metaphor

Since the aim of the novels is to demonstrate the protean nature of perception and since each character brings his individual perspective to bear on the central concerns of the novels, each trying to catch a meaning, metaphor becomes a useful, almost indispensable, instrument for enriched meaning as well as a tool for defining and advancing narrative. Each metaphor aims at solving the problem of the individual and consequently the problem of the novel but just as it may easily penetrate ambiguity it may sometimes complicate meaning: the character may invent a metaphor to enable him to see but the same metaphor, because of its flexibility, may blur the intended meaning. Some metaphors are inadequate, while others are too elaborate and sophisticated depending on the level of perception of each character. Metaphor, here, serves the primary function of helping the reader to distinguish between characters: the more complex the metaphor, the more complex the character. Metaphor also defines and emphasises structural and thematic motifs; it is a code, sometimes a baffling one, which hides the 'true' meaning of the novels from the isolated consciousness of the character and sometimes even from the reader. In all four novels metaphor is the customary form of statement.

In As I Lay Dying this process is seen at work in the way each member of the Bundren family makes metaphors which enable them to see, or fail to see, their relationship with each other and with their common cause, the dying Addie. These perceptions through metaphor are

the novel's aid to meaning as well as the source for its dramatic conflicts. The death of Addie Bundren and the subsequent journey of the family to the city mean different things to each member of the family and to the other observer-narrators. Vardaman's metaphors represent a crude attempt to make sense of the incidents. For Vardaman, his mother is 'a dead fish' which he can smell and the journey to the city, for him, is justifiable only in terms of the toy train he hopes to see and in the prospect of the bananas he will eat. Vardaman's metamorphic vision is understandable; given his age, these items seem to be the only images he can conjure to make sense of what is going on around him, but, as the story progresses, the reader finds that the gestures and images employed by the rest of the family, with the exception of Darl, are not far removed from Vardaman's magic world. Jewel's horse though real is, for instance, like Vardaman's dead fish. The difference between them is the way Jewel is able to transfer his jealousy and rage regarding his mother to the horse. The horse, however, also enables him to control his grief and by trading it in for a mule it also acts as his own positive contribution to the journey; it is a kind of therapy for his often great drive for decisive action. If he had his way:

> It would just be (me) and (her) on a high hill and (me) rolling the rocks down the hill at their faces picking them up and throwing them down the hill.
> 40

Anse Bundren's 'cunning' makes him take more elaborate routes to explain his relationship with his dying wife and his responsibilities as a husband and father; and the true meaning of the journey for him. His major obstacle, he claims, is the road. 'It seems hard', he says, 'that a man in his need could be flouted by a road'; but Anse's

metaphor is not very helpful. When he says he expects the 'Old Marster' to take care of him, comparing himself to a sparrow, the reader discovers that in the end he is not any better than his youngest son in understanding the true nature of the problem that confronts him. It is no wonder then that, like his son Vardaman, and like Dewey Dell, and Cash to some extent, the only immediate way for him to explain and justify their journey is through mundane, almost ridiculous desires. Anse Bundren would like new teeth to 'eat God's own victuals as a man should', and this seems a better way to make himself intelligible than the vague promise he made to take his wife's corpse to Jefferson.

With Cash's box, however, we begin to enter an area of complexity. The box Cash makes for his mother is his own effective way of forming the limits of his grief, of relating in a meaningful way to his dead mother; he converts his grief into what for him as a carpenter is a far more comprehensible metaphor of the coffin which he handles with loving care. He is even able to explain the details of its structure. The box, however, often seems akin to Jewel's horse. Both the box and the horse are real but they also serve as metaphors for Jewel and Cash. Cash may be more careful and thoughtful but is sometimes too literal-minded, among his thirteen reasons for 'beveling' the box is, 6. 'Except -', so that the reader sometimes may wonder whether he still remembers that he is supposed to be in grief. Is he not, like the rest of the family, with the exception of Darl, putting too much into an image, unable to cross the very metaphors which are supposed to give meaning and substance to their predicament?

To move from Vardaman, through Anse, Jewel, Dewey Dell and Cash to

Darl, however, is to move from ignorance to knowledge and vision. This is reflected in the sophistication of Darl's metaphors. While the others seek after images upon which they can fasten a meaning, Darl's real search is for a meaning that is divided from image. His desire for a reunion with his mother goes beyond what, to him, is the insane structure of the journey that the family has chosen. If, for the rest of the family, the journey has become a metaphor which expresses itself in linear form and as social action, horses, fishes, boxes, false teeth, ceremony, Darl, unruffled by all that, is seeking for something deeper and in this lies the major point of difference between his outlook and that of the rest of the family: 'I don't know what I am. I don't know if I am or not'.[41] Darl's soul-searching reduces life as a whole to metaphor. The others cannot understand his position and he is soon in conflict with them. He is searching for a concrete sense of self - a task which Addie Bundren's only monologue seems to sanction - before he can begin to participate in any meaningful way with the world, but the others are in a hurry to serve self-interests which they can easily identify and which Darl cannot. Consequently, he contributes nothing to their journey, indeed in his efforts to come to concrete terms with himself he thwarts their efforts by burning Armstid's barn. His dream here, as Kartiganer correctly observes, 'is not the fulfilled image but the annihilation of image, the coffin and the body cremated and the narrative of the long internment stopped'.[42]

Thus, metaphor is used in As I Lay Dying to render and solve complexity and also as a means of differentiating between several forms of perception and consequently between characters. Each metaphor is

aimed at solving the problem of the individual even though for some like Anse, Jewel, Dewey Dell and Vardaman the task seems hopeless. Cash comes close to a 'true' meaning but lacks the essential vision. It is left to Darl, the detached, almost callous, 'artist' to inject greater significance into the dominant metaphor of the death of Addie. But even Darl's contribution could be seen as negative. It is the reader who must take the metaphors, (the fragments), and give them a meaning, (a pattern).

Fragments may also be read with the above process in mind. Baako's journey means different things to different people. For the mother and for the sister it should enable Baako to make them rich. Efua expects him to complete an 'extravagant' house and to buy a car so that 'her old bones can rest', while the sister believes that her child is a gift from Baako and is a sign that 'other blessings will follow'. The other blessings are 'shiny things' which as Naana points out stem from 'the softness and the greed of (our) bodies', which she says, 'makes (us) wish we could continue to cheat those who have gone before'.[43] In the novel these shiny things are given a most concrete form in the person of Henry Robert Hudson Brempong with his gold lighters, his 'complete freezers' and his shiny Mercedes Benz cars, in short, his cargo mentality. However, it is not everyone who conceives life's journey in these simple metaphors. Naana's metaphors represent a more complex and less materialistic outlook. Her spirit undergoes the kind of experience which Darl faces in As I Lay Dying; that desperate need to search for a meaning divorced, possibly, from image:

> My spirit ran with a haste not chosen by itself, making of itself a joining path between too many things forever changing shape and size and colour and above all unfixed in their meaning.
> 44

Naana seeks a fundamental significance which pomp, ceremony, and the gadgets so cherished by the Brempongs as metaphors of success and living cannot satisfy. Juana is also a 'spirit' in search of the true meaning of its existence. In Baako's presence she notices not any physical reality but:

> A kind of interior dome floating slowly somewhere in her head.
> 45

Baako's former art teacher, Ocran, also falls within this category, indeed, Fragments presents two separate worlds: the world of spirits in search of substance represented by Baako, Naana, Juana, Ocran, and the material world in search of spirit: Efua, Araba, Brempong, Fifi and the host of Ghanaians for whom life manifests itself only in the form of shiny kente cloths. The taxi-driver's favourite song, ironically, has more relevance than he can ever imagine:

> So many days I ask myself
> the sum of this my life
> What will it be?
> Ninety tangled threads I have
> to unravel to make this my life
> and all I have to help me
> is the darkness about me, ahhhh.
> 46

His lackadaisical attitude even as they face the imminent death of a baby shows that he does not understand the true significance of his favourite song. For him and for the others like him, life comes in black and white; there are no threads to unravel.

The reader must turn to Baako for a kaleidoscopic view of life's journey. It is not a coincidence that Baako's consciousness of colour is represented in great detail throughout the novel, colours of many shades can be spotted over two hundred times. This soon becomes obvious from his arrival:

> A red light, marking perhaps some high tower appeared, then after a while a couple of blue lights, and finally the slowly pulsing shaft of strong green light as the plane circled for its descent.
>
> 47

On the ground he is dazzled by 'the riot of blue and green and yellow and black and deep gold and purple in the different kente cloths'.[48] Baako's problem is how to separate these colours. Colour becomes for him a metaphor for the confusion into which his family and community have plunged and its separation and identification becomes a means of reaching an understanding, of coming to terms with his own journey and with his family and community. At the party for his sister's child, for instance, he is able in spite of the confusion to distinguish pink and blue tablecloths and the Cinema hall chairs are red, green and gold and the coal pots he remarks, 'stood ready with the coal beginning to glow a dark red, giving off barely perceptible little flames of blue and yellow'.[49] The crisis of the novel revolves around this metaphor and it is never resolved because Baako is not given a chance to perform this vital task. The atmosphere, as Baako notes, is one of 'a klieg intensity' which his eyes, in spite of their marked power and clarity are unable to penetrate. As with Darl, this very quality which should be an asset turns out to be a liability in the eyes of his family and the larger community. Like Darl, his alienation from the other members of

his family is the price he pays for his remarkable vision. The complexity of Fragments stems from the inability of the majority to separate the myriad colours, which entangle their lives, and the obstacles they present to the few who can separate these colours.[50]

Thus the motif of desperate, struggling creatures is maintained throughout the novel. The lean dog which Juana encounters at the beginning of the story is a metaphorical enactment of the predicament into which Baako eventually finds himself. 'There was something inside the dog', the narrator says ,'making him so cold he seemed to be searching for the whole feel of the road's warm tar under him'.[51] Later Baako himself encounters his 'double', the dog, 'howling like a frightened beast' and as he returns home from one of his outrageous experiences outside he hears the 'pained yelp of a dog'. When the crowd finally encircles him and ties him up, remarking that a bite from him would make the victim mad, metaphor and fact unite to give full poignancy to the tragedy of the man of vision.

But Baako is also the sudden child that came and went too soon. The birth of Araba's child which coincides with Baako's arrival is another metaphorical enactment of the predicament of the older one. As with Baako the family is in a hurry to display this new arrival. They do not heed Naana's warning and advice that 'fruit is not a gathered gift of the instant but seed hidden in the earth and tended and waited for and allowed to grow'. They turn the 'new confusing turbulence of wind', (the electric fan), on the child, in the same way they turn their 'cataract' on Baako; both are smothered young. Here,

as in As I Lay Dying, therefore, metaphor renders and attempts to solve complexity and emphasises the varying levels of perception thus helping to distinguish characters, but in Fragments metaphors are also used to emphasise thematic motifs such as the desperate lean dog and the child killed at birth, even Skido, the driver who could not deliver his cargo may be seen as another metaphorical enactment of the fate that befalls Baako.

It may not be too difficult to isolate and define the various functions that metaphor serves in As I Lay Dying and Fragments but in Absalom, Absalom! there is a great problem. The problem is compounded by the nature of the novel's characterisation and its manipulation of point of view whereby Sutpen, who is the novel's subject, is himself a metaphor to be explained while at the same time his 'design' is also a metaphor which presents obstacles for him and for those who seek to explain it. Each of these narrators also experiences this doubling in metaphor, each has his or her 'design' and each in turn fashions metaphors which illuminate or complicate their own story or the story they try so desperately to tell. It is, as one critic has remarked, like 'a Hall of Mirrors, repeating tableaux in a progressive magnification where echoes multiply into the dissonance of infinite overtones to unfold complex, mysterious, obscure and incomplete meaning;'[52] or, to use Quentin's words:

> Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripple maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, but this second pool contains a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky. [53]

Quentin's metaphor explains the way metaphor works in the novel. It is useful to single out an incident and identify it as 'the narrow umbilical water-cord' and see how metaphor works through doubling to render and complicate meaning. Such an incident is the murder of Charles Bon by Henry Sutpen. This incident 'ripples' throughout the novel; it is the culminating point of Sutpen's design and both Sutpen and those who seek to understand or explain him must 'pass' this incident. The response of each narrator to the incident shows their degree of perception and their imaginative skills. Rosa Coldfield's metaphors are inadequate to cope with this 'mystery'. For all her hysteria and for all her frightening Calvinistic images of demons and ogres she is unable to explain the incident which she is forced to admit is 'without rhyme or reason'.

Mr Compson is a greater maker of metaphor than Rosa Coldfield, even inventing appropriate ones to match the temperament of the characters he creates, like this very pertinent one for Judith Sutpen:

> You are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others all trying and they don't know why either except that the strings are all in one another's way like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only EACH ONE WANTS TO WEAVE HIS OWN PATTERN into the rug. (My emphasis)
> 64

The reader remembers Mr Compson for such metaphors and they help, perhaps, to reveal the sophistication of his mind but as he correctly

admits '(it) does not explain'. 'It' refers again to that murder of Charles Bon which, for all his detachment and expertise, he is unable to explain. But perhaps the metaphors he employs hinder his perception. Such metaphors as his 'Greek characters', his 'Cassandras', tell us more about him than about the subject he seems to handle with so much erudition.[55] Metaphor may thus be its own enemy as well as the characters' as it proves for Sutpen, Rosa Coldfield and Mr Compson.

However, Quentin and Shreve seem determined to make metaphor work. In doing so, they move more freely than the others from one metaphor to another. They move more freely between fact and metaphor and from one metaphor to another metaphor for it, a technique similar to the one they use in describing Sutpen's starts and false starts:

> He decided that maybe he was wrong in being free and so got into it again and then decided that he was wrong in being unfree and so got out of it again. 56

The roommates are able to do this because they combine the best elements of the material at their disposal. Whenever Shreve, for instance, finds Rosa Coldfield's 'demons' useful, merely perhaps to prod Quentin, he applies them but he can also revert to the detached tone of Quentin's father such as this poignant description of Charles Bon's son:

> With a face not old but without age, as if he had had no childhood, NOT IN THE SENSE THAT MISS ROSA COLDFIELD SAYS, she had no childhood, but as if he had not been human born but instead created without agony of man or agony of woman and orphaned by no human being. 57

Such metaphysics are typical of Mr Compson but the two Harvard undergraduates do usually go beyond such metaphors to create symbols in which they can believe more firmly, such as the lawyer they invent to 'calculate' 'assets' for Charles Bon's mother. Indeed in such cases they tend to believe more in their own metaphors as they do in the case of the lawyer than in the characters they have inherited from Rosa Coldfield and Mr Compson and in this way the metaphors such as the lawyer become characters. This ingenious technique finally leads them to the theory of miscegenation as a more plausible reason for Charles Bon's murder than the incest which all other accounts seem to suggest. Both Quentin and Shreve are still not satisfied - this is in the nature of the complicated use of metaphor in this novel - but they, more than the others, approach a meaning that makes sense.

Why Are We So Blest? though not so problematic, presents the same principle of doubling in its use of metaphor. Modin's life is the metaphor Solo is using to explain his own past. However, Modin himself needs 'a key to break into the code' [58] that will give meaning to his own life. The image that comes most readily to mind is the ananse design he notices in Dr Lynch's house:

> The design was a mask: a pained, human face,
> a huge head, huge, bulbous, all-seing eyes,
> pained, distorted ears open to all possible
> sounds, super-imposed on a shriveled mouth
> are nostrils cramped with hard control.
> The limbs - emaciated, reduced to spindly
> lines - were attached directly to the
> human spider head. [59]

In order to penetrate the mask, Solo seems to ask what to him is a very simple question: 'What is this love we suffer from, impelling

us to embrace our own destroyers?'[60] As this question relates to the third narrator it is useful to examine what she stands for and why Solo considers her crucial to the explanation of his and Modin's demise. Is she actually the obstacle they must surmount to reach the true meaning of their lives? Solo seems to think so but in this he faces the same kind of problem as Mr Compson; the problem of inventing inappropriate metaphors to explain 'phenomena'. In his anguish Solo sometimes even sounds like Rosa Coldfield with his 'destroyers', 'predators' and 'deserts'. But all these are, like Coldfield's,figments of his troubled imagination. His justification stems from his unsuccessful 'affair' with a white woman whom he manages to convince himself, in spite of all the dissimilarities, resembles Aimée. However, the diaries of Modin and Aimée reveal a relationship which is not congruent with Solo's destructive metaphors. This is how Modin reports it to his Afro-American woman, who, incidentally, he has turned into a metaphor of motherhood and source of inspiration:

> We would lie for hours, me in her, talking about her notes, my thesis, the pointlessness of the academic life in general and its particular childishness here. I did not feel lonely any more. We can't help serious involvement, Naita. I did not want to. I tried your normalising outlets. They almost killed me. I don't feel dissipated anymore. I am NOT dissipated anymore. It is so difficult to explain real things across distances, Naita, but that is not my fault.
> 61

From this it is clear that Solo's obstacle is himself, he is his own barrier and he complicates his predicament by raising more barriers to understanding. Here, too, metaphor is its and the character's enemy. In seeking to render meaning through it, the character complicates

the issues and ends up revealing more about his own problem than the one he or she set out to solve in the first place. In seeking to read Modin as a metaphorical enactment of himself Solo ignores all the facts against such a reading and for all his 'painstaking' reading of the notebooks continues to see people in the shadows that he has created and not as they really are.

Modin is different. He invents metaphors which he tests against experience and is willing to move from one to another. Thus, he explains his relationship with Mrs Jefferson as one with:

> The Western European damsel in distress, the valued prize after the conflict between dragon and knight. But the conflict now grows in complexity. There is no knowing who the knight may be, and who the dragon, for this is one of history's crossroads, and old values may or may not get changed. Standing at the crossroads, Sandra, the American youth, prize after the great cataclysm, from which she would be the only certain gainer.
>
> 62

But all this changes when he is confronted, not with 'Sandra', but with Aimée Reitsch, a real woman who has a problem and with whom he throws overboard all the metaphors of destruction with which Solo would agree so much. His melancholy and his withdrawal and his eventual death are not proof of the theory he has developed, they stem more from Solo's inflexible outlook and from Aimée's own sudden withdrawal from the real world which they had both known. By its nature metaphor ought to be flexible. It may thus be said to have failed if it does not possess its elementary quality of transference. Quentin and Shreve have shown how successfully this can work but Solo and Aimée, like Mr Compson and Rosa Coldfield, have also

shown how it may fail to serve that function for which it was invented, thus leading to further complexity. Though Absalom, Absalom! displays in greater detail the richness and complexity of metaphor, its technique of doubling is seen at work in Why Are We So Blest? where persistent images of sex and the eventual torture at the end of Modin by means of a ghastly sexual scene highlight Armah's skilful use of metaphor's doubling effect. The black man's 'skill' and 'pleasure' are also his bane, the novel seems to imply.

iv

Repetition

Repetition is implied in the very nature of novels that deploy multiple perspectives. Since the numerous consciousnesses reflect on one or more themes there are inevitably cases of recurrence. The novels are thus, more than other types of novels, complex tissues of repetitions, and of repetitions within repetitions, linked in chain fashion to other repetitions. Repetition is at the heart of Faulkner's conception of his task as a novelist:

> All the moving things are eternal in man's history and have been written before, and if a man writes hard enough, sincerely enough, humbly enough, and with the unalterable determination never, never, never, to be quite satisfied with it, he will repeat them, because art like poverty takes care of its own. [63]

The novels discussed here fulfil this task through their repeated probing into known details, examining and re-examining such details for valid interpretations and explanations. The process enriches the novels by creating a movement from simple outline to complexity and depth. Since the novels imply that life is metaphor that needs explanation, the process of arrangement and rearrangement provides the necessary device to create this meaning.

The fifty-nine first-person segments of As I Lay Dying illustrate how this process works through collaboration. Each character's thoughts often relate to what the other character has previously said or done. In the opening segments of the novel, for instance,

all eyes seem directed at the box that Cash is making. Darl's first monologue refers to the box which by his assessment is good. Cora, the neighbour, confirms this in the second monologue where she adds further information that Addie is in fact able to watch her son make the coffin in which she will be buried. Darl's next monologue again mentions the box and immediately afterward Jewel also talks about 'that goddam box'. No one ever forgets the box; it becomes a totem, not only for Cash who makes it, but for the family and the neighbours who now talk about it as if it had become synonymous with Addie: 'She was not cold in the coffin before they were carting her forty miles away.[64]

It is, however, in the revelatory comments which all the fifteen narrators make that repetition serves its best purpose. The fifty-nine segments are divided unevenly, but with purpose, among the fifteen narrators - Darl 19, Vardaman 10, Miscellaneous Neighbours 8, Addie 1, Tull 6, Cash 5, Dewey Dell 4, Cora 3 and Anse 3. The arithmetic works largely to the advantage of Darl who is the most perceptive of the narrators. Darl's clairvoyance makes it possible for him to confirm for the reader incidents at which he may not be directly present. His clairvoyance, however, is always confirmed by other narrators. There are two useful examples. On one occasion he imagines a conversation between Dewey Dell and Dr Peabody, being the only one who knows about her pregnancy. In Dewey Dell's next segment she confirms what Darl has already foreseen. Similarly, he records in detail the events surrounding the death of his mother including even the thoughts of his father, of Cash and the rest of the family. All that he says is confirmed by the others, such as Anse's ambition to get 'them

teeth'. Meaning is thus enhanced through these constant reminders and they are also a device for enhancing verisimilitude. The congruence of the details usually gives the character in question some degree of credibility.

This is why there seems to be consensus concerning Darl. In spite of the predominance of his monologues the reader often knows more about him from the repeated remarks of other narrators. Neighbours such as Tull and Cora give a precise account, based on years of observing the family, of their understanding of Darl and of the rest of the family whose consequent activities often confirm these views. It is Tull, for instance, who drops the hint that Anse might soon get married and it is the same Tull, with collaboration from his wife, who gives what turns out to be the correct assessment of Darl. Tull says that Darl is different in the way he looks at people but that he is the only sane one in the family. In a rather roundabout way Cash comes to agree that 'it ain't so much what a fellow does, but its the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it'.[65] What the majority of folks have done in As I Lay Dying is collaborate to give greater significance to the movement of the Bundren family.

In all their efforts, Addie's monologue stands out as the only one which uses flashback effectively. Through flashback Addie is able to relate some of the details the reader already knows, such as Anse's promise to bury her in Jefferson, but she also probes into her mind to relate some startling issues, such as the illegitimacy of Jewel which Darl later confirms. Since she is the one whose death provides the action, her flashback serves to enrich the meaning of the drama which the living members of the Bundren family enact. As I Lay Dying

emerges as a novel in which nothing is left out because the 'nails' are hammered over and over into place, the more the hammering (repetition), the richer (firmer) the story.

Fragments is also the product of constant repetition through collaboration from various narrators. Baako's consciousness dominates the story but what he says is often repeated with clarity by other narrators such as Naana and Juana. Naana's monologues begin and end the story and give it the cyclic structure that she personifies:

> My spirit is straining for another beginning in a place where there will be new eyes and where the farewells that will remain unsaid here will turn to a glad welcome and my ghost will find the beginning that will be known here as my end.[66]

Baako and Juana accept this view of life and in their activities they reiterate and confirm this view of the cyclic quality of life which Naana highlights. Juana's long, repeated drives around the country which Baako eventually joins are all instances of this accretive circular movement. In each of their visits they tumble over some startling incident that confirms their philosophy. Skido, the driver who dies because of his inability to deliver cargo, is one of many reminders of the fate that awaits Baako. Baako's scripts also refer to 'inhabitants of a circle'. The birth of his nephew is yet another reenactment of Baako's arrival, as Araba and Naana confirm. Baako confesses that he is 'somehow forced into a repetition of things with no meaning for his own life'.[67]

Recurrent motifs also emphasise the major themes of *Fragments*. The lean dog appears four different times in the novel until by the time Baako is trapped and sent to the asylum its fate is indistinguishable

from his. But the most commonly repeated motif is that of colour. Chapter 3 which records Baako's arrival reads like a kaleidoscope: there are a hundred different times in the chapter alone where colour of one shade or another is mentioned. This is significant because what awaits Baako is very complicated, it is not possible to see it plainly and Baako spends the rest of his 'sane' life fighting to identify and place the colours which do not always make much sense. To use Baako's word, they have all run 'riot'.

Fragments has been arranged in an order which is best described by using Baako's observation of the sculpture of his former teacher:

> The walls were lined with rows of black heads in dozens of different attitudes from sweet repose to extreme agony. They had been arranged in some kind of rough order, so that the tension captured in the heads seemed progressively to grow less and less bearable, till near the end of the whole series, when Baako had almost arrived back at the beginning, the inward torture actually broke the outer form of the human face, and the result, when Baako looked closer, was not any new work of his master but the old, anonymous sculpture of Africa.
>
> 68

Its circular movement, its 'rough order', its row of black heads in 'dozens' of different attitudes bear resemblance to the structure of the novel which is also arranged, like the sculpture, in dozens of different attitudes, one group, the materialists, are arranged in neat roles, their exuberance repeated constantly by the unmistakable presence of Brempong, and the other group appears through Naana, Baako, the child, Juana and Ocran. Each repetitive appearance adds more to the exuberance or the anguish of the two juxtaposed groups. In As I Lay Dying it is Darl against 'them'. In Fragments, Baako's

spirit repeatedly fights 'them' but with a few allies. The more the reader is exposed to these views the more complicated the novels become.

Absalom, Absalom! thrives on repetition. It is in the very nature of the story. The reader knows the whole story from page one and the rest of the book merely seeks valid explanation which will flesh the skeleton. Each new narrator goes over the ground covered by the previous one but the technique is such that repetition is not simply a twice-told tale, but reveals more to the reader. This is because of its double focus. Each narrator has a handicap which makes it impossible for him or her to know all the details of the story. Rosa's frenzy reveals a lot about Sutpen but because she never aims to see him as anything other than as demon the reader misses some of the details of his arrival in Jefferson which Mr Compson eventually fills in. Mr Compson delineates the technique very well, when he describes Charles Bon's letters: 'familiar in shape and sense ... You bring them together in the proportions called for ... you bring them together and together again.'[69]

Part of the reason and success of the technique is to be found in its subject which essentially is about the meaning of history. Each of the narrators repeatedly probes into the past - which in this case is dominated by one person - to find the meaning that suits their particular temperament.

Repetition is best seen at work in _Absalom, Absalom!_ in the use of metaphors. In order 'to catch all possible meaning' metaphors are

not easily disposed of in the novel; instead they contain the seed for further analysis. Even Miss Rosa's fiendish metaphors do have their value for Quentin and Shreve and Mr Compson's elaborate metaphors for Ellen Sutpen attract the young men a great deal. Her figure as a butterfly caught in a gale and 'blown against a wall and clinging there beating feebly' attracts the attention of Quentin and Shreve who want to sympathise with her predicament as her marriage to Sutpen seems clearly to have been just another adjunct to the 'design'. She never really features as a human being. Even more attractive are the metaphors which express the thoughts of her daughter Judith. Both narrators are interested in Judith's story because they are concerned with a story that speaks of love and heroism and Judith's desperate attempts to make her own 'pattern on the loom' of life fascinates the Harvard roommates and so they happily take over from where Mr Compson left off.

Total identification also enhances the accretive nature of the story:

> Yes, we are both father, maybe it took father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us.
> 70

Throughout the story, especially in the last four chapters where the young men take control of narrative, this process of complete identification is repeated, thus adding complexity to the drama that unfolds.

Why Are We So Blest? employs a similar accumulative device. Solo is seeking valid explanations for his and Modin's predicament and the search leads him to scrutinise the latter's notebooks: he has 'read

them, put them aside and returned to them'.[71] Solo elaborates on the technique and defines its purpose which is illustrated in a passage which has been used in section three to show how metaphor works. It repays quotation in full again:

> I try to fit my pieces of that life together, hoping - to understand? That hope too is dead in me. I arrange the pieces, rearrange them. My impotence simulates impotence. Often, what seems a reasonable arrangement I know is false. It is not understanding I am reaching for. I have time to kill - an infinity ahead of me, and these notes are reduced to something to help a defeated man survive empty time. I arrange them, re-arrange them.
>
> 72

Solo's desperation is evident in the repetitive way he keeps returning to expressions such as 'I could not have helped him'. A constant need for justification haunts him every way so that he keeps coming back to the same theme over and over again.

Total identification enables him to continue talking about Modin as if he were a second self. His anguish is not as convincing as Quentin's or Shreve's but his pretensions are the same: he wishes to see 'an uncanny complementarity' between himself and Modin. Whenever he speaks about him, therefore, he speaks as if his voice were a representative one on behalf of what he calls 'life's failures'. Like Quentin, he is a ghost wandering about the face of the earth in search of a double.

The structure of Why Are We So Blest? is also repetitive. Of the thirty 'fragments' only six are seen through the consciousness of the third narrator. This is meant to emphasise Solo's anguish as the

reader soon finds, that, in spite of his claims for the notebooks, the story is one of the troubled conscience of the speculative, 'guilty' Solo. Like Quentin, he makes the subject of the story subservient to his real desire to elucidate the meaning of history for himself. Modin, like Sutpen, is the excuse Solo uses to penetrate into himself by using his past. In doing so Solo repeats details by instalments. As he remarks:

> It is not merely the quantity of the notes.
> I could go through them, turn and return.
> They would hold new meaning every time.
> But they take their vengeance on me.
>
> 73

Repetition, here, as in Absalom, Absalom! points to a qualitative, rather than chronological, development. The first entry that Solo discloses from Modin's notebooks, for instance, reveals a desperate person on the verge of suicide, one who has given up everything: lectures, scholarships. This is the character that interests Solo. As he moves backwards and forwards in the notes he is only interested in arranging them in an order that will suit his temperament so that even though much of the positive Modin appears in the notebooks, the sad, dispirited character is the one with whom we are supposed to be familiar. Some parts of the notes have dates but dates do not interest Solo because he is seeking a development in qualitative, not chronological terms. In all the novels, this disregard for chronology is central and will be examined in detail as it throws more light on the novels' multiple shifts in focus.

V

Time

The novels of William Faulkner and Ayi Kwei Armah present obstacles to the reader seeking continuity because their material is fragmented in time and distributed among multiple narrators. The fact of broken chronology is, however, not new to the modern novelist. But, while time for Joyce and Virginia Woolf may be seen as something which the individual consciousness can 'arrest', Faulkner and Armah generate, instead, a reversible or circular time scheme through which the past is identified in the present and the present in the past. Thus, myth plays a central role in their conception of time: in their novels there is constant interplay between historical time and mythical timelessness. This is reflected in the structure of the novels and in the numerous voices of the narrators whose consciousnesses are agonisingly aware of the inconquerable and overwhelming nature of time. There is some sense of chronology - such as the nine days the Bundren family take to bury their relative - but the mythical dimension dominates the narratives. In discussing time in the novels, therefore, it is useful to consider three main aspects; the chronology which through flashback or through 'present' action influences and shapes the novels - and the historical and mythical time which are the dominant features of all the four novels examined.

The events of As I Lay Dying take place within nine days from the day Cash begins to build the box to the day Darl is despatched to the asylum but this fact pales into insignificance as a profounder element asserts itself. Dewey Dell - such is its predominance that

even the less perceptive seem aware of its essence - calls it 'the womb of time; the agony and the despair of spreading bones, the hard girdle in which lie the outraged entrails of events.'[74] Under such circumstances life becomes confusing, indeed while her thoughts are working this way she imagines that she has killed Darl since she couldn't even 'think of time'. These are moments outside the 'present' experiences that the family seems to be witnessing in the course of the journey, they are moments in which people seem to 'ravel out of time'.

It is Darl's consciousness and clairvoyance which emphasise the timelessness that dominates the story. For Darl, time is 'an irrevocable quality'. As he says:

> It is as though time, no longer running straight before us in a diminishing line, now runs parallel between us like a looping string, the distance being the doubling accretion of the thread and not the interval between.
> 75

Time is, therefore, the force that man must come to terms with or face constant insecurity. In the novel only Darl appears to have surrendered completely to time, ravelling out but unfortunately running the risk of insanity; the escape itself seems to be a trap.

In her death Addie fuses the necessary union between the time of history and the time of myth. Her flashback recalls the events of her life in detail and tries to make sense of its turbulence. But even Addie admits that 'there was no beginning nor ending to anything'.[76] The words of her father echo tirelessly in her now fading memory: 'the reason for living is getting ready to stay dead'.[77]

As I Lay Dying begins and ends with precision but this precision is deceptive. In spite of the relatively short duration of the action the reader is made aware of a timelessness that is, except for Darl, beyond the consciousness of the participant narrators. The story itself seems to be a struggle against time. This can be seen not only in the way each member of the Bundren family reacts to time but even in the symbolic significance Faulkner attaches to the flooded river over which the family must carry the coffin. The river represents the force of time in the way it seems to be a block to their progress. Perhaps this is why Darl who seeks to 'ravel out' refuses to have anything to do with it. The river, time, divorces him from members of his family who are on the opposite shore. In the dreadful flow of the river, human beings, for Darl, are mere static clots momentarily breaking the surface.

In this, Tull, usually accurate, acknowledges the path of sanity because Darl's withdrawal achieves for him the sense of reality for which he has been striving. The other members of the family do not see how futile their efforts are and in the process turn Darl's 'unco-operative' behaviour against him. Yet as they prepare to return to Jefferson the reader gets the impression of a complete absence of progress; Dewey Dell does not secure her abortion, and Anse's 'duck-shaped' wife and his false teeth are no replacements for what they have lost: they have all been reduced to mere gestures. Time is their enemy but only Darl knows this is any useful way. In this he is a kindred spirit with his mother who also knows that life is full of mere gestures; 'mere words to fill a lack'.

The events of Fragments take place within a year but the novel also displays the bleakness and timelessness which As I Lay Dying portrays. In Fragments this sense of timelessness which historical incidents seems to confirm is given powerful force in the monologues of Naana:

> I know of the screens of life you have left us: veils that rise in front of us, cutting into easy pieces eternity and the circle of the world, so that until we have grown tall enough to look behind the next veil we think the whole world and the whole of life is the little we are allowed to see, and this little we clutch at with such DESPERATION ... still clutching the useless shreds of a world worn out, we peep behind the veil just passed and find in wonder a more fantastic world ...
>
> 78

The desperation Naana talks about emphasises the fleeting moments of time but her circular imagery also shows how in her metaphorical world attempts to catch these moments are 'laughable'. Naana's two monologues are all about circles, of beginnings that are also ends, of circles that cannot be broken. Her death is the beginning, for her, of another life. Only Baako, and to some extent Juana, reach this understanding. Baako wishes that 'time could absorb him into itself and drive him along the edge of some endless, vertiginous cycle over and over again'.[79]

The symbolism in the novel works to fit this timelessness. Events keep recurring: the birth of another Baako, the endless journeys round the country, even Brempong's interminable journeys all make the year that has passed 'seem years and years'.

History plays a significant part in Fragments. This is why the novel consists of so many flashbacks; much of the 'present' story is recalled by Baako as he sits on the cold floor of the lunatic asylum. But history is used here only to re-emphasise hopelessness, what Baako describes as the 'flavour of despair'.

> When he tried to focus on some way out, the dance of memories turned into a wild, prolific multitude of leaping thoughts and leaping images that left not a moment's space for a different wish but drew him impotently back into the unending waste, the stupid stream against which he was powerless even to set his own mind.
> 80

Like Darl, Baako finds the stream standing between him and 'them' and what he achieves by refusing to swim in it is, like Darl, a sense of reality denied the others whose consciousnesses are not even capable of knowing the difference between reality and the shadow. For the others the 'useless shreds' which they clutch are all that matter.

The structure of Fragments, even more than that of As I Lay Dying, indicates the link between chronology, history and myth. Chapter one and chapter thirteen which deal with the mythical world of Naana envelope the time of history which is represented by Baako's arrival and his first year in his country after five years sojourn abroad. Chronological time is absorbed into the time of history and the time of myth so that the day-to-day events pale into insignificance in Baako's eyes; the actual progress from one moment to the other, as Baako shows, is not important because the impression is given of events that have happened over and over again. 'It is', Baako says, 'as though in life the games played

in children's schools had never found a way to end'.[81]

Absalom, Absalom! is all about time because its subject is the meaning of history. Yet the narrators themselves are continually frustrated by the paucity of historical details to which they must assign temporal intelligibility before they can link the past with the present. The novel is an exercise in this frustrating task which even the most knowledgeable narrators, Quentin and Shreve, find daunting. Quentin and Shreve are trapped by what, to them, is purely myth but they both realise that they must turn it into history. In their world the present hardly exists since their cold undergraduate study and a short letter from Quentin's father are all that constitutes the present. Yet in another sense the present is 'absent' because there has always been too much of the past; it has become impossible to distinguish between, say, 1833 and 1909 because Quentin feels he is still breathing the same air and can even hear the church bells that rang in 1833.

Part of their dilemma stems from the historical figure they are trying to recreate. The movement of Sutpen's family gives an indication of the nature of the problem:

> He didn't remember whether it was that winter and then spring and then summer that overtook and passed them on the road, or whether they overtook and passed in slow succession the seasons as they descended, or whether it was the descent itself that did it and they not progressing parallel in time but descending perpendicularly through temperature and climate ... it didn't have either a DEFINITE BEGINNING OR A DEFINITE ENDING. (My emphasis). [82]

All the narrators build their story upon this timelessness. Rosa

Coldfield is simply overwhelmed and can only fall back on her religious background to help her fit the pieces together. She fails because time and history are against her. She is an ageing woman who is aware she has little time left. Perhaps this explains the frenzy with which she narrates her story. And in her frenzy she leaves many events unexplained. History is distorted through her vision and it is left to the others to reconstruct it. Mr Compson tries to manipulate history to suit his temperament by removing Sutpen as far away, psychologically at least, as he can. Even he, with all his detachment, curiously concludes that he is probably dealing with a phantom. According to him Charles Bon is 'born of no woman' and is 'impervious to time'. So, even though he starts off recreating history, he ends with a myth which is as ambiguous as the events he had sought so much to make real. His great stumbling block, Charles Bon, does not explain.

Quentin, the most inventive of the narrators, is 'older at twenty than a lot of people who have died'. But the greatest feat the two roommates perform is to break the barrier, at least metaphorically, between past and present:

> Four of them there, in that room in New Orleans in 1860, just as in a sense there were four of them here in this tomblike room in Massachusetts in 1910.
>
> 83

This crucial link helps their recreative task and opens them to interpretations which the distorted accounts of the previous narrators were unable to arrive at. Absalom, Absalom! treats history as a riddle which time alone cannot solve, indeed time

provides the obstacle to any solution. Its fragmentariness underlines the disorderly nature of historical fact but the attempts of Quentin and Shreve point to possible uses of time and history.

> 'For a moment I saw something elemental in that look, something so old. The face itself was young, but the expression on it could have come from the depths of ages and ages of sadness.' [84]

In Why Are We So Blest? the same philosophy of timelessness features not only in the cyclic vision which Solo presents but in Modin's own accounts of history. Modin links his past - communal - racial - with his present and declares both as forms of slavery. In his obsession with the past, the future, as in Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! ceases to mean anything: 'I want to think of future things' he writes, 'but these memories are strong. They will not leave me'.[85] Later he reflects:

> For me now, things happening again in retrospect happen slowly. Not the single events themselves - they do not take so long. But whatever I see again gets immediately connected to events in the past, so that what took a minute happening now spends fifteen passing through my mind. [86]

Modin also links past with present in such a way that they become indistinguishable. Slavery, for instance, is, for him, not a thing of the past.

This is the Modin that Solo wishes to study and with whom he identifies. When he refers to Modin's young face bathing in generations of sadness he is perhaps reading his own face through a mirror but he has tried so much to link their two fates that the

reader must assume that, in time, they belong to the same 'timelessness' which is responsible for their mutual destruction. Solo is killing time, filling emptiness. Time may be 'a revelatory process' for some but Solo is merely turning in circles again and again.

Chronological time undergoes a lot of manipulation in Why Are We So Blest? Some items in Modin's notebooks do bear dates but most do not. Consequently, Solo arranges them to fit his own requirements. Since, in fact, he is only interested in proving the resemblance between himself and Modin the events and the dates are not important. What matters is the significance Solo attaches to them. Thus, Aimée's transcript is first released - chapter 3 - showing her 'impatience' and her 'exploitative' tendencies long before the reader knows who the woman actually is and what is her connection with the other narrators. Meanwhile Modin appears in the second chapter as a desperate lonely man even though the reader discovers that this has not always been his way of life. All this happens before it is revealed that he has come to study on a scholarship but has forfeited it, hence his desperation and frustration. The narration of Why Are We So Blest? is controlled by means of a qualitative rather than chronological development. This is the method of Absalom, Absalom! as well. Both novels seek to find a meaning for history but both end up as puzzles or perhaps as pointers that history is what the individual makes of it. This is the position of all the narrators in the two novels. Consequently chronological time is immaterial to the demands of the style whose main purpose seems to point to a time

which knows no limits and which may not be arrested in the manner the psychological novelist suggests.

There are striking similarities in theme and method between the novels of Faulkner and Armah. Both novelists show great variation in their use of point of view. The similarities, however, only apply to Armah's two novels examined above. In *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*, Armah changes his perspective to a unified communal one and community becomes protagonist in the novels. It is a method which Armah may have learned from Achebe whose two novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, are the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

1. Karl Zink, 'William Faulkner: Form as Experience', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol.LIII (1954) p.382

2. A distinction must, however, be made with regard to *As I Lay Dying*, where this is true of all the characters.

3. *As I Lay Dying* p.7.

4. Ibid., p.101.

5. Ibid., p.58.

6. Ibid., p.96.

7. Ibid., p.189.

8. Ibid., p.161.

9. *Fragments*, p.6.

10. Ibid., p.17.

11. Ibid., p.71.

12. Ibid., p.61.

13. Ibid., p.284.

14. Ibid., p.283.

15. Ibid., p.248.

16. Ibid., p.251.

17, *Absalom, Absalom!* p.130.

18. Ibid., p.137.

19. Ibid., p.112.

20. Ibid., p.120.

21. Ibid., p.133.

22. Ibid., p.115.

23. Ibid., p.26.

24. Ibid., p.38.

25. Ibid., p.73.

26. Ibid., p.83.

27. Ibid., p.83.

28. Ibid., p.212.

29. Ibid., p.249.

30. Donald Kartiganer, The Fragile Thread: Form in Faulkner's Novels, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1979),p.147.

31. Absalom, Absalom! p.285.

32. Ibid., p.269.

33. Why Are We So Blest? p.232.

34. Ibid., p.247.

35. Ibid., p.267.

36. Ibid., p.83.

37. Ibid., p.257.

38. Absalom, Absalom! p.307.

39. Why Are We So Blest? p.158.

40. As I Lay Dying, p.15.

41. Ibid., p.65.

42. Fragile Thread op. cit. p.149.

43. Fragments, p.9.

44. Ibid., p.281.

45. Ibid., p.173.

46. Ibid., pp.104-105.

47. Ibid., p.83.

48. Ibid., p.84.

49. Ibid., p.135.

50. The crowd in Fragments always appears in confusing colours which Baako keeps trying to sort out. See chapter three especially.

51. Fragments, p.24.

52. Warren Beck, op.cit. p.157.

53. Absalom, Absalom! p.215.

54. Ibid., p.105.

55. Ibid.,

56. Ibid., p.149.

57. Ibid., p.161.

58. Why Are We So Blest? p.26.

59. Ibid., p.32.

60. Ibid., p.181.

61. Ibid., p.157.

62. Ibid., p.157.

63. In Malcolm Cowley, The Faulkner-Cowley File: Letters and Memoirs 1944-62. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), p.141.

64. As I Lay Dying, p.21.

65. Ibid., p.184.

66. Fragments, p.280.

67. Ibid., p.188.

68. Ibid., p.111.

69. Absalom, Absalom! p.83.

70. Ibid., p.215.

71. Why Are We So Blest? p.149.

72. Ibid., pp.231-232.

73. Ibid., p.149.

74. As I Lay Dying, p.93.

75. Ibid., p.115.

76. Ibid., p.139.

77. Ibid., p.134.

78. Fragments, pp. 286-287.

79. Ibid., p.112.

80. Ibid., p.187.

81. Ibid., p.188.

82. Absalom, Absalom! p.184.

83. Ibid., p.290.

84. Why Are We So Blest? p.59.

85. Ibid., p.153.

86. Ibid., p.154.

Chapter Six : The Communal Perspective Part I

Chinua Achebe: <u>Things Fall Part</u>

<u>Arrow of God</u>

i

The protagonist of Things Fall Apart is not Okonkwo, but Umuofia. The same can also be said of Arrow of God whose main character is not Ezeulu, impressive as he is, but the community of Umuaro. Both communities, to use Achebe's terse proverb, are like the lizard; if it loses its tail it soon grows another. Okonkwo and Ezeulu are tails of the lizards, Umuofia and Umuaro. Achebe has redistributed the elements of character to reflect this shift in emphasis and though critics acknowledge 'the strength and stability' of the communities, few have paid attention to this significant feature of the African novel.[1] Nelson Wattie's article, 'The Community as Protagonist in the Novels of Chinua Achebe and Witi Ihimaera', points the way to this innovation. Wattie observes that:

> the world which is being described and discussed in (this) novel - the complex gossamer network of contacts and relationships which bind the community together - is its true protagonist. As the discussion progresses, the tensions which strain and stretch this network toward breaking point are revealed to the reader, and this, MORE THAN THE PROGRESS OF OKONKWO'S LIFE, IS THE CENTRAL ACTION OF THE NOVEL. Okonkwo, in fact, is an anomaly within this pattern, because he acts against the true values of the community by taking part in the ritual murder of his foster-son Ikemefuna. (My emphasis) 2

Because critics have gone in search of individuals whose 'traits' they can identify, they have ignored the central characters of the novels and have placed emphasis on the progress of both Okonkwo and Ezeulu. Both Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, however, oppose such a reading. It is true that Okonkwo and Ezeulu are major characters in the respective novels but it is equally true that they are presented in contrast to more fascinating protagonists. Achebe sets out to

discover his own tradition and the reasons for its collapse; both Okonkwo and Ezeulu are to be seen as tools for the realisation of his goal. Both characters suffer from an ignorance of context and the reader sympathises with their inability to penetrate the minds of their communities and, through their characterisations is able, as both Okonkwo and Ezeulu are not, to understand the moral codes that govern their communities.

The communities of Umuofia and Umuaro hover above all other named characters in the novels. Achebe achieves his aim of giving his people dignity by capturing the flavour of the life and speech of communities whose ways were threatened by the forces of 'civilization'. It is tempting to link his portrayal of these communities with a similar picture by William Faulkner of the folk of Yoknapatawpha County but Faulkner's community acts in his novels as a chorus, akin to the impression created by Hardy and other nineteenth and early twentieth century novelists. Of more interest, perhaps, are the novels of the Scottish writer Lewis Grassic Gibbon (Leslie Mitchell) whose portrayal of the setting and people of the Mearns by means of a 'sharply and poetically recreated impression of folk speech rhythms partly Scots partly English,' is similar to Achebe's method.[3] The communal perspective deployed by Achebe, Armah and Okara enables the novelists to get as close as possible to their people's ways and to try to see things from their point of view. The method demands a review of our ideas on character in the novel.

ii

Characterisation

In Things Fall Apart Umuofia emerges with its own space and time, its own ideological system and its own standards of behaviour. The reader is invited to enter into the mind of this community and to become familiar with it through its voices and to perceive it as if from within and consequently to assume a point of view internal to it. If, as Roger Fowler has shown, characters may be put together from a stock of physical, behavioural, psychological and verbal attributes, then in Umuofia, more than in Okonkwo, may be found the true protagonist of Things Fall Apart.[4] The community is a 'round' character whose development the reader can follow in great detail. Its role in the structure of the plot is crucial, indeed, the point needs repetition that the community, and not Okonkwo, plays the most significant role in the plot. Things fall apart for Okonkwo but the complete breakdown of values in the community forms the core of the novel.

An 'assemblage of traits' could be put together for Umuofia. The community, as critics never tire of pointing out, is 'proud, dignified and stable'. It has been castigated for its 'brutality' and 'savagery' and critics have drawn attention to its 'competitive' and 'materialistic' tendencies. Umuofia has been praised for its resilience and for its shrewdness and humanity.[5] These positive and negative qualities give it character, but those who enumerate them are quick to withdraw such status and to invest it instead in

Okonkwo and in other minor characters in the novel. Yet only when we understand Umuofia can we appreciate the role played by these other characters in the novel.

The personification of Umuofia enables us to interpret the community as we do characters in a novel. When Ezeudu goes to warn Okonkwo of the impending death of Ikemefuna he announces that 'Umuofia has decided to kill him' and when Ezeudu himself dies the narrator observes that:

> The first cock had not crowed, and Umuofia was still swallowed up in sleep and silence when the ekwe began to talk, and the cannon shattered the silence.
>
> 6

Often the narrator breaks the character into manageable and more easily identifiable components and attributes. Here is a typical portrait of Umuofia at one of its moments of crisis:

> It was the time of the full moon. But that night the voice of children was not heard. The village ILO where they always gathered for a moon-play was empty. The women of Iguedo did not meet in their secret enclosure to learn a new dance to be displayed later in the village. Young men who were always abroad in the moonlight kept their huts that night. Their manly voices were not heard on the village paths as they went to visit their friends and lovers. Umuofia was like a startled animal with ears erect, sniffing the silent, ominous air and not knowing which way to turn.
>
> 7

The portrait reveals children, women and young men but these soon merge into a single unit whose predicament is likened to that of an animal sniffing the silent, ominous air. In peace or in crisis

the community emerges as a single force. The bond of kinship and the need to speak with one voice surpass all other needs. When they celebrate, the entire neighbourhood 'wears a festive air' and one man's behaviour is often interpreted in terms of the larger group. When Okonkwo beats his wife in the Week of Peace the priest reminds him that the evil he has done can 'ruin the whole clan'. 'If one finger brought oil', the elders say, 'it soiled the others'.

Umuofia is a collective individual. Achebe creates the character out of a clear understanding of the meaning of the GEMEINSCHAFT. The existence of this collective individual, as Schmitz has observed, 'rests upon ties of blood and kinship, upon associations with the land and ties of place, and upon ties of friendship, shared feeling and common belief'.[8] This feeling is never lost in the novel. Moreover the reader comes across a character who is at once violent and even evil but one who is equally humane, lively and unforgettable. As he follows this character from the festivals, through the bad moments or simply enjoys the day-to-day banter, he seems to keep the company of a friend, a shrewd and understanding friend who is capable of laughing at himself but who is confident enough to point out the follies of other friends and enemies.

The disaster which befalls Umuofia is terrifying and Achebe portrays it, not through the downfall of Okonkwo, whose career often goes against the grain of the community, but through the unmasking of an egwugwu, which is the essence of the group:

> That night the Mother of Spirits walked the length and breadth of the clan, weeping for her murdered son. It was a terrible night. Not even the oldest

> man in Umuofia had ever heard such a strange and fearful sound, and it was never to be heard again. It seemed as if the very soul of the tribe wept for a great evil that was coming - its own death. On the next day all the masked egwugwu of Umuofia assembled in the market-place. They came from all the quarters of the clan and even from the neighbouring villages. The dreaded Otakagu came from Imo, and Ekwensu, dangling a white cock, arrived from Uli. It was a terrible gathering. The eerie voices of countless spirits, the bells that clattered behind some of them, and the clash of matchets as they ran forwards and backwards and saluted one another, sent tremors of fear into every heart. For the first time in living memory the sacred bull-roarer was heard in broad day-light.
>
> 9

The awesomeness of this episode cannot be compared to Okonkwo's pathetic death and it is simplistic to equate his suicide with the death of the clan.[10] Indeed the community watches Okonkwo sometimes with amused detachment: 'Looking at a king's mouth', says one elder, 'one would think that he never sucked at his mother's breast'.[11] The contempt with which elders such as Uchendu treat him shows his real standing, not only in the community, but in the novel as well. His poor imagination makes him see issues only in black and white. 'If a man comes into my hut and defaecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No! I take a stick and break his head. That is what a man does.'[12] Achebe uses his kind of mentality to underline the complexity of Umuofia.

Okonkwo pursues his ambitions in defiance of a reproachful community. He ignores its codes and customs and displays a complete insensitivity to human feelings. That is why he kills his foster-son and treats his own son with such disdain. He reminds one of

Thomas Sutpen in Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! Both men may be said to have a bad 'chi' and Okonkwo, like Sutpen, suffers from that innocence which sees the ingredients of 'success' as those of a pie or cake: 'Once you measure them and balance them and put them into the oven it was all finished and nothing but pie or cake could come out.'[13]

Thus he imagines that all his community requires of a man is that he should acquire titles, wives and barns full of yams. These material things are indeed the controlling fibres of the community but he ignores the fundamental ingredient of discipline and consequently makes the worst of what someone like Uchendu or his own good friend Obierika would have assimilated into the accepted order of things. Here, for example, is part of Uchendu's and the community's philosophy:

> You think you are the greatest sufferer in the world? Do you know that men are sometimes banished for life? Do you know that men sometimes lose all their yams and even their children? I had six wives once. I have none now except that young girl who knows not her right from her left. Do you know how many children I have buried - children I begot in my youth and strength? Twenty-two. I did not hang myself, and I am still alive. If you think you are the greatest sufferer in the world ask my daughter, Akueni, how many twins she has borne and thrown away. Have you not heard the song they sing when a woman dies?
>
> 'For whom is it well, for whom is it well? There is no one for whom it is well.'
>
> [14]

Uchendu may sound like an incurable optimist but he is prepared at least to place the events in his life into their context and to view them with less passion than Okonkwo, 'the roaring flame'. Most other

people in the community share the point of view put forward by Uchendu:

> There were many men and women in Umuofia who did not feel as strongly as Okonkwo about the new dispensation. The white man had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he had also built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price.
> 15

This sense of accommodation affects their relationship with outsiders.

In Things Fall Apart the outside world is represented by the Christian missionaries, who convert Okonkwo's son, and by George Allen who imprisons Okonkwo and others for burning down a church. Both the missionaries and the Colonial establishment display an arrogant superiority over the people of Umuofia but their assumed superiority is not any more dangerous than Okonkwo's ignorant and dangerously individualistic point of view. Okonkwo invalidates the habits and customs of the community and is as much a threat to it as are the missionaries and George Allen. Gerald Moore is right to assert that Okonkwo 'is not a typical Igboman'.[16] He merely abstracts, as Sutpen does in Absalom, Absalom!, those evil tendencies from the controlling fibre of the community and exploits them without caution for the purposes of his own ambition: 'to become one of the lords of the clan'.[17]

Okonkwo has wrongly been interpreted as a true representative of his clan. He has thus been shown as a powerful person, which he undeniably is, whose ambitions are thwarted by a confused clan. But if we look closely at other characters in the novel it is easy to see that the issues are not as simple as Okonkwo often makes them

seem. It can be argued that the community is not strong enough to control its Okonkwos and that its ways have become vulnerable but this argument becomes suspect when the views of a cross-section of the community are taken into account. Obierika, for instance, questions some of the strictures of the community but admits that there is 'complexity'. Other elders question the customs constantly and some of these customs are shown to be dynamic. Achebe's method makes each character in the novel appear as if to prove or invalidate a custom. Such is the role, for instance, of the couple that die on the same day, enacting in death their rapport in life. In reviewing their relationship Okonkwo cannot understand why any man would consult a woman before carrying out a project but this is only one of many things about Umuofia he cannot understand, to his cost. His failure to understand these things affects his son Nwoye who sees Umuofia through his father's eyes. Since his father has misread the community it is to be expected that Nwoye's reading is equally wrong. Achebe's method asks the reader to see individuals in the novel only in their relationship with the community whose standards, though faulty at times, provide a commanding perspective.

'The world', says Ezeulu, 'is like a mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place'.[18] The Chief Priest's metaphor is useful in reading Arrow of God, for, though he exerts great authority in the novel, his character, like that of Okonkwo, cannot be understood fully until we unravel the protagonist of the novel, the clan of Umuaro. Like Umuofia, Umuaro is personified throughout the novel thus enabling the reader to interpret the community as a character. Metaphors that describe individual conduct are used to portray Umuaro:

> Umuaro had grown wise and strong in its own conceit and had become like the little bird, nza, who ate and drank and challenged his personal god to single combat.
> 19

The same metaphor is used later to depict Ezeulu's behaviour and the strained relationship between him and the community is often presented as a confrontation between two difficult individuals. As the Chief Priest himself ruminates:

> His quarrel with the whiteman was insignificant beside the matter he must settle with his own people. For years he had been warning Umuaro not to allow a few jealous men to lead them into the bush. BUT THEY HAD STOPPED BOTH EARS WITH FINGERS. They had gone on taking one dangerous step after another and now they had gone too far. They had taken away too much for the owner not to notice. Now the fight must take place, for until a man wrestles with one of those who make a path across his homestead the others will not stop. Ezeulu's muscles tingled for the fight. Let the white man detain him not for one day but one year so that his deity not seeing him in his place would ask Umuaro questions.
> (My emphasis) 20

Ezeulu views the community as an individual with 'ears and fingers' but also highlights its collective nature when he sometimes refers to 'them'. When the 'fight' approaches he imagines a multitude of voices and the stamping of countless feet but often returns to the one person who is neither Nwaka, his 'arch rival', nor Captain Winterbottom, his friend and enemy. The 'person' in question is Umuaro. David Carroll is right to observe that the dilemma in the novel is 'a matter of personalities'.[21] Carroll, however, fails to point out that the personalities are Umuaro and its Chief Priest. All the other characters, to use Ezeulu's own word, are 'insignificant'.

They may all be portrayed in great detail, indeed Nwaka is an unforgettable character, as are Winterbottom and the missionaries, but the centre stage belongs to Umuaro. The 'major' characters in the novel are only means by which the reader may get to the complex nature of the community.

Arrow of God records Ezeulu's fruitless attempts to become a hero of his people. His failure denies him similar status in the novel. As he well knows:

> His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his. As long as the goat was alive it was his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered he would know who the real owner was. [22]

The Chief Priest seeks to augment his power but eventually concedes defeat to the community. It is common among critics to regard Ezeulu as the hero of the novel and thus to read it as a clash between his individualism and the claims of society.[23] Such a reading is justifiable but as has been shown in a similar case regarding Okolo in Gabriel Okara's The Voice,[24] Ezeulu's characterisation provides a perspective on Umuaro; it leads the reader to a fuller understanding of the community which is the novel's centre of dramatic interest and its major character. The reader is able to take over where Ezeulu's sanity ends and may sympathise with his predicament without failing to observe the vibrant community which has upstaged him.

Umuaro, through Nwaka, defies Ezeulu's bumptiousness. Nwaka is not just a surrogate for a jealous Idemili as Ezeulu would have us believe, he is a man of many titles who knows and speaks the

mind of the community. No wonder that he often beats the Chief Priest at debates. Nwaka knows the nature and origin of Ulu, a god carved by the community to protect it from marauders, and will not be fooled by Ezeulu's arrogance. The elders of Umuaro agree with him. It is not that Umuaro is always right, indeed part of its story which Achebe reconstructs is a record of confusion and a near absence of values. But what attracts the reader is not their incessant quarrels, it is their ability to live life to the full in spite of all the difficulties that confront them. Perhaps this explains why Achebe devotes much attention to festivals which cannot be explained away as 'sociological passages'.[25] They are an attempt by the author to present a comprehensive picture of traditional life. They give a full picture of the character of Umuaro which is often ignored because critics look to Ezeulu, Nwaka, Akuebue and Ofoka as the main characters in the novel. It can be argued, however, that these other named characters are traits of Umuaro, aspects of a very complicated character.

There is plenty of evidence in the novel to support the argument. Even Ezeulu cannot release himself from the strong grip of the clan. Nwaka's resplendent wives often exhibit the brighter, ceremonial side of the community. 'Their walk', the narrator comments, 'was perforce slow and deliberate, like the walk of an Ijele Mask lifting and lowering each foot with weighty ceremony'.[26] Nwaka himself exhibits those qualities most admired by the clan, he has taken many titles and is 'owner of words'. A gathering of Umuaro elders calls itself Umuaro because they believe their wisdom is conferred by the community. Discreet voices such as those of Ezeulu's friend Akuebue and of the forthright elder Ofoka merely

reinforce the communal voice. Akuebue is the first to remind Ezeulu that no one wins judgement over his clan. The clan speaks in all these voices in the story.

The exceptions of course are Captain Winterbottom, his deputy, Clarke, and the missionaries who convert Umuaro to the Christian faith. Captain Winterbottom may appear to stand poles apart from Ezeulu but they have a lot in common. Like George Allen and Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart, both Winterbottom and Ezeulu are enemies of the clan. They are both dangerously individualistic and Achebe uses them to show the limitations of seeing things from one perspective. One of the great ironies of Arrow of God must be Ezeulu's inability to heed his own philosophy which conceives the world as a mask dancing. Ezeulu unfortunately stands in one place and is thus unable to see the mask well. Captain Winterbottom similarly suffers from this fixed perspective, indeed in other matters, as when he sends Oduche to school, Ezeulu does better than his 'ally', Captain Winterbottom. The missionaries in their zeal to win over converts are even worse than either Ezeulu or Winterbottom. The narrator presents them in an ironic vein:

> Mr Goodcountry not knowing the deviousness of the heathen mind behind the growth of his school and church put it down to his effective evangelization. He wrote a report on the amazing success of the Gospel in Umuaro for the West African Church magazine, although as was the custom in such reports he allowed the credit to go to the Holy Spirit. [27]

They do not deserve their harvest; it is clear that their god reaps where it has not sown. Each of these characters is used by Achebe

to build a case for his community, a case which in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God the communities ably demonstrate through the skilful use of proverbs, songs and tales.

iii

Language : Proverbs, Songs and Tales

The language of Things Fall Apart more than any other aspect of its technique determines the novel's point of view. This is because Achebe allows the characters to speak in their own idiom. 'Among the Ibo' the narrator asserts, 'the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten'.[28] The language of the novel is one of proverbs, songs and tales. Its essence lies in 'skirting round the subject before hitting it finally'. The playfulness is a mark of the confidence of a narrator sure of his subject as it is a reflection of the ease and assuredness with which the people of Umuofia conduct their business. In the novel, the line between this confident narrator and a self-assured community can be very thin as in this description:

> The night was very quiet, It was always quiet except on moonlight nights. Darkness held a vague terror for THESE PEOPLE, even the bravest among them. Children were warned not to whistle at night for fear of evil spirits. Dangerous animals became even more sinister and uncanny in the dark. A snake was never called by its name at night, because it would hear. It was called a string. And so on this particular night as the crier's voice was gradually swallowed up in the distance, silence returned to the world, a vibrant silence made more intense by the universal trill of a million million forest insects. 29
> (My emphasis)

The swift movement from the detached narrator who records the fears of 'these people' to the participant narrator who reports the 'vibrant silence' of the night is typical of the novel's method. Umuofia is

simultaneously 'they' and 'we' and this subtle combination of detachment and participation helps Achebe to manipulate point of view. The reader would do well, however, to bear in mind that the main interest of the novel is communal and that 'the impression of village reminiscence, anecdote, gossip, and formal 'tales of Okonkwo', mixed with folk-tales, songs and sayings'[30] which Neil McEwan observes in it are aimed at giving a full picture of the character of Umuofia.

The devices which McEwan outlines are crucial in the story because the community speaks through them. Perhaps Achebe is right and the novel is a process of education because the tales and sayings are indispensable instruments toward an understanding of the novel's purpose. As 'teaching aids' they are couched in simple language, the mark, perhaps, of a good teacher. Part one of the novel, for instance, records several lessons on the bond of kinship most of which appear in the form of tales told by 'foolish' women and children. These tales skirt around the subject and it is left to the reader (hearer) to deduce their meaning. Their greatest asset is simplicity as the beginning of the famous Tortoise tale demonstrates:

> 'Once upon a time', she began, 'all the birds were invited to a feast in the sky. They were very happy and began to prepare themselves for the great day. They painted their bodies with red camwood and drew beautiful patterns on them with uli.'
>
> 'Tortoise saw all these preparations and soon discovered what it all meant. Nothing that happened in the world of animals ever escaped his notice; he was full of cunning. As soon as he heard of the great feast in the sky his throat began to itch at the very thought. There was famine in those days and Tortoise had not eaten a good meal for two moons. His body rattled like a piece of dry stick in his empty shell. So he began to plan how he would go to the sky.'[31]

It is tempting to ask what a simple tale about Tortoise is doing in a novel which treats the downfall of a community. By the end of the story, however, the connection between Tortoise and Okonkwo becomes evident. Both characters stand out from the rest. As with Okonkwo's relationship with his community, Tortoise is of the birds and yet not of them and when the moment of truth comes both he and Okonkwo are shown the way out. In seeking to become 'all of you' they pervert the meaning of community and both are clipped of their borrowed wings.[32] Similar simple tales, such as the one even Okonkwo himself can remember, about Mosquito and Ear, reflect a world view.[33] These animal stories carry the virtues which Umuofia esteems, such as the magnanimity of the birds in giving Tortoise wings, but they also contain the vices which the community condemns, such as Tortoise's greed. Moreover the manner in which they are told captures the flavour of the life and speech of the community. The feast in the sky, for instance, is consistent with the festive atmosphere that marks much of the novel and the attendant preparations made by the animals who painted their bodies with camwood and made beautiful patterns on them with uli will all be familiar to both women and children in the community. The reader also recognises that Tortoise's starvation which went on 'for two moons' reflects a manner of speaking and a way of calculating time which is consistent with the cosmology of the people of Umuofia.

Besides the tales and the inevitable songs which accompany them Achebe also uses quoted speeches to capture the flavour of the people's thoughts:

> 'Tell the white man that we will not do him any harm', he said to the interpreter. 'Tell him to go back to his house and leave us alone.

> We liked his brother who was with us before. He was foolish but we liked him, and for his sake we shall not harm his brother. But this shrine which he built must be destroyed. We shall no longer allow it in our midst. It has bred untold abominations and we have come to put an end to it'. He turned to his comrades, 'Fathers of Umuofia, I salute you', and they replied with one guttural voice. He turned again to the missionary. 'You can stay with us if you like our ways. You can worship your own god. It is good that a man should worship the gods and the spirits of his fathers. Go back to your house so that you may not be hurt. Our anger is great but we have held it down so that we can talk to you.'
> [34]

The third-person omniscient narrator introduces the parties involved, interpreter, missionary, and elders, but allows the people to speak for themselves with no further comment. Thus the church becomes a shrine and when the spokesman pauses he seeks authority and support from 'Fathers of Umuofia' who would understand 'abominations'. The reader may wonder if the church or the abandonment of twins, or an outcast system qualify for the term but the self-assurance of the elder which makes him speak patronisingly to Rev. Smith whose 'brother was foolish' but whom they 'liked' nevertheless, encourages the reader to re-examine the abominations. 'The world has no end' says Uchendu, 'and what is good among one people is an abomination with others'.[35] The Priestess of Agbala calls the converts the excrement of the clan and sees the new church as 'the dog that (had) come to eat it up'.[36] Such confidence derives from the fact that these characters are linguistically at home. Achebe makes them feel at home. The tales, songs, proverbs and other wise sayings provide the community with a solid base from which to view their 'enemies;' the devices enable them to state their case. Bernth Lindfors is right to observe with

regard to the proverbs that they provide them with 'a grammar of values'.[37]

Achebe does not insist that the community is always right, indeed it is sometimes woefully wrong. The impersonal narrator, who often gives way to a participant observer, emerges to laugh occasionally at Umuofia, as when he depicts the role of the rain maker:

> And now the rains had really come, so heavy and persistent that even the village rain-maker no longer claimed to be able to intervene. He could not stop the rain now, just as he would not attempt to start it in the heart of the dry season, without serious danger to his own health. The personal dynamism required to counter the forces of these extremes of weather would be far too great for the human frame.[38]

In this passage the religious fervour of the people gives way to the scientific consciousness of a sceptical narrator. This doubting narrator who unobtrusively surprises the reader is the same one who tries in the court scene in chapter ten to explain Okonkwo's absence in the crowd to his wives, but, as often happens, he is upstaged by the efficiency with which the Egwugwu despatch their case. The community's 'terrifying' masks are meant to frighten the sceptic. What the novel reveals is a rich and complicated community.

Arrow of God is studded in communal lore. The reader may be justified if he feels that the language is too rich and that the novel reads more like an anthology of wise sayings than as a serious story about the break-up of a community. It can be argued, however, that the novel depicts a serious battle of words in which the best speaker wins. Umuaro is blest with good speakers, indeed, it has bestowed

the title of owner of words on Nwaka whose debates with Ezeulu represent the clash between the community and its Chief Priest. Their debates are often a rich source of communal tradition. Ezeulu is even able at times to include a short tale to enhance his argument:

> Once there was a great wrestler whose back had never known the ground. He wrestled from village to village until he had thrown every man in the world. Then he decided that he must go and wrestle in the land of the spirits and become champion there as well. He went and beat every spirit that came forward. Some had seven heads, some ten; but he beat them all. His companion who sang his praise on the flute begged him to come away, but he would not, his blood was roused, his ear nailed up. Rather than heed the call to go home he gave a challenge to the spirits to bring out their best and strongest wrestler. So they sent him his personal god, a little wiry spirit who seized him with one hand and smashed him on the stony earth.
> 39

Umuaro's love of wrestling which features at some festivals provides the Chief Priest with a useful motif for his tale. The link between the world of men and the world of spirits which is sometimes manifested in his physique and which he so graphically relates is familiar to his audience and to the reader who is never allowed to forget the centrality of religious belief in the novel. Ezeulu ends his tale with two wise sayings: 'The fly that has no one to advise it follows the corpse into the grave'; 'let the slave who sees another cast into a shallow grave know that he will be buried in the same way when his day comes'.[40] Such cryptic messages seem to come as a matter of course to Ezeulu and he assumes that his audience knows what he is talking about. The reader, however, cannot help noticing the irony in this and other numerous lessons the Chief Priest delivers to his community. Ezeulu surely must be that stubborn

wrestler whose back never touched the ground. Indeed when he reenacts his rise to the 'throne' of Chief Priest he recounts his experiences through the wrestling image; the personal god who seizes the wrestler with one hand and throws him on the stony earth must be Umuaro with whom Ezeulu admits he is enaged in a wrestling combat. The Chief Priest can thus be likened to the poor fly that has no one to advise it as well as to the slave who sees another cast in a grave.

The equivocal nature of these tales, proverbs and wise sayings thus heightens the reader's interest in them. Their ambiguity is a literary device which enables Achebe to let the characters speak for themselves but by so doing provide the reader with valuable tools with which to assess them. When Ofoka tries to analyse the nature of the confusion in which Umuaro is enmeshed he likens it to the predicament of 'the puppy in the proverb which attempted to answer two calls at once and broke its jaw'.[41] The novel keeps displaying these sayings as if to challenge the reader to test their validity; they make Arrow of God read sometimes like a bad dictionary, introducing more words rather than defining the world of the novel. It is possible, however, to sift through the multiloquence and emerge with meaning. Nwaka's speech is a useful benchmark:

> The white man is Ezeulu's friend and has sent for him. What is so strange about that? He did not send for me ... Did not our elders tell us that as soon as we shake hands with a leper he will want an embrace? ... What I say is this, a man who brings ant-ridden faggots into his hut should expect the visit of lizards. But if Ezeulu is now telling us that he is tired of the white man's friendship our advice to him should be: You tied the knot, you should also know how to undo it. You passed the shit that is smelling; you should carry it away. Fortunately the evil charm brought in at

> the end of a pole is not too difficult to take outside again.
>
> 42

Nwaka is not one to say anything good about the Chief Priest but his rhetoric often persuades Umuaro against Ezeulu. When the reader has decoded the vague references to lepers, lizards, ant-ridden faggots, knots and charms all of which must be familiar to Nwaka's audience, he must ask if there is any substance in any of these copious images. To answer in the affirmative is to compare Nwaka's position with that of other characters in the novel because Nwaka's value is in spite of himself. He can be taken seriously not because he is any more genuine than Ezeulu, for instance, but because he often brings out the worst and the best in people. He is one of several compilers albeit the most versatile, of the Umuaro dictionary of values. Another useful contributor is a minor character, Nweke Ukpaka, whose verbal skills speak volumes for Umuaro. 'The white man;'he says:

> 'is like a hot soup and we must take him slowly - slowly from the edges of the bowl. Umuaro was here before the white man came from his own land to seek us out. We did not ask him to visit us; he is neither our kinsman nor our in-law. We did not steal his goat or his fowl; we did not take his land or his wife. In no way whatsoever have we done him wrong. And yet he has come to make trouble for us. All we know is that our Ofo is held high between us and him. The stranger will not kill his host with his visit; when he goes may he not go with a swollen back. I know that the white man does not wish Umuaro well. That is why we must hold our Ofo by him and give him no cause to say that we did this or failed to do that. For if we give him cause he will rejoice. Why? Because the very house he has been seeking ways of pulling down will have caught fire of its own will ...'
>
> 43

Nweke Ukpaka's song-like philosophy endears him to the reader and to the community whose values he puts forward with such a disarming touch. It sounds naive but its essential argument about the need for unity and the efficacy of dialogue with Umuaro's enemies is consistent with the world view expressed by other members of the community such as the forthright Ofoka. Nweke Ukpaka's speech is similar to the one made by one of the elders in Things Fall Apart to Rev. Smith. Such a speech provides an occasion for Achebe to allow the character to speak for himself. With his wise sayings and rich metaphors Nweke Ukpaka demonstrates how verbal skills constitute the power of the community. Each of the characters in the novel uses these skills to present a case for the composite group. Gareth Griffiths is only partially right to insist that:

> Proverbial language is not a static repository of wisdom to which Achebe subscribes unquestionably and against which he measures the actions of his novels in an uncritical way. Rather it is one of a range of rhetorical devices which serve to define response in a world in which increasingly all response is relative and inadequate. [44]

It is true that the language is not 'a static repository of wisdom', indeed Achebe in this novel, as in Things Fall Apart, uses proverbial language to censure his community. He neither spares the community, nor does he claim for it a monopoly of virtue or wisdom. But 'relativity and inadequacy of response' need qualification in any discussion of his two novels of Igbo cultural heritage. The process of extracting value from the legacy of his ancestors makes Achebe, like Faulkner, demonstrate love and indeed bias toward his community. If the task is so absorbing and sometimes very difficult it never makes the writers shirk their loyalty to a specific, likeable people and

locale. Faulkner created Yoknapatawpha and provided his readers with a map of the County. Achebe similarly creates a convincing world through speech and a skilful use of locale.

iv

Setting

The world which evolves in *Things Fall Apart* is a convincing one and it provides an authentic background for the characters. The setting is presented through a series of unfolding scenes which are depicted with a clear perception of history and milieu. Achebe views Umuofia on its own terms and allows the community its sense of place and time so that even if the reader is able to recognise, as Achebe himself does, that the distances being talked about in grandiose terms are only a matter of a few miles, they nevertheless represent the world for 'these people'. The reader is expected to take Uchendu seriously when he lectures Obierika and Okonkwo on the virtues of travel:

> People travelled more in those days. There is not a single clan in these parts that I do not know very well. Aninta, Umuazu, Ikeocha, Elumelu, Abame - I know them all. 45

Uchendu delivers his homily in a village called Mbanta, 'just beyond the borders of Mbaino'. There are also 'very distant places' such as Umuru on the bank of the Great River where the white man has his government and soldiers who have earlier 'wiped out' Abame, another distant place.

More fascinating, however, is the clan itself which Achebe creates with an uncanny intimacy as this early description in the novel demonstrates:

> Umuofia was feared by all its neighbours. It was powerful in war and in magic, and

> its priests and medicine-men were feared in all the surrounding country. Its most potent war-medicine was as old as the clan itself. Nobody knew how old. But on one point there was general agreement - the active principle in that medicine had been an old woman with one leg. In fact, the medicine itself was called agadi-nwayi, or old woman. It had its shrine in the centre of Umuofia, in a cleared spot. And if anybody was so fool-hardy as to pass the shrine after dusk he was sure to see the old woman hopping about.
> 46

Myth and reality become indistinguishable. It is impossible to consider the cleared spot in the centre of Umuofia without thinking of the old woman and the passage is not one of those depicted by a sceptical narrator; here he gives the people's sense of place full play as he does with Evil Forest, that dreaded place 'alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness'. To know Umuofia is to be aware of this background of unknown forces represented convincingly by the Masks whose chief not coincidentally is called Evil Forest. Even the dead are not far away:

> The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. There was coming and going between them, especially at festivals and also when an old man died, because an old man was very close to the ancestors.
> 47

Portraits of Umuofia are sometimes drawn by a detached observer who begins with straightforward details, such as the numerous descriptions of the market place and of the ilo, but these soon merge into the observations of an insider whose knowledge of the facts defies any questions. The beginning of chapter six is perhaps the best example:

> The whole village turned out on the ilo, men, women, and children. They stood round in a huge circle leaving the centre

> of the playground free. The elders and grandees of the village sat on their own stools brought there by their young sons or slaves. Okonkwo was among them. All others stood except those who came early enough to secure places on the few stands which had been built by placing smooth logs in forked pillars.
>
> The wrestlers were not there yet and the drummers held the field. They too sat just in front of the huge circle of spectators, facing the elders. Behind them was the big and ancient silk-cotton tree which was sacred. Spirits of good children lived in that tree waiting to be born. On ordinary days young women who desired children came to sit under its shade.
>
> 48

The realistic camera view which focusses on the participants and on their places in the scene soon gives way to an observer who is aware of custom and of the legend behind the silk-cotton tree where the eye of the camera stops suddenly. The symbolic function of the setting takes over from the authentic. The reader of Things Fall Apart is asked to make this shift in order to understand Umuofia for which all these scenes and their significance are very real. It is possible for the reader to make this shift because the narrator convinces him that he knows his terrain very well, as this description of the place of Okonkwo's suicide demonstrates:

> There was a small bush behind Okonkwo's compound. The only opening into this bush from the compound was a little round hole in the red-earth wall through which fowls went in and out in their endless search for food. The hole would not let a man through. It was to this bush that Obierika led the Commissioner and his men. They skirted round the compound, keeping close to the wall. The only sound they made was with their feet as they crushed dry leaves. 49

This passage can be compared with an earlier one where the narrator sets the scene or clears the pathway to Ikemefuna's tragic rendez-vous:

> The footway had now become a narrow line in the heart of the forest. The short trees and sparse undergrowth which surrounded the men's village began to give way to giant trees and climbers which perhaps had stood from the beginning of things, untouched by the axe and the bush-fire. The sun breaking through their leaves threw a pattern of light and shade on the sandy footway.
>
> 50

Both passages reveal an informed and sensitive narrator whose topographic awareness is clearly one of an insider. The world is realistically portrayed through such passages. The narrator and ultimately the reader know Umuofia intimately.

The subtlety that reveals the community to the reader is also reflected in the way Achebe deploys time in the novel. Things Fall Apart sometimes reads like a timeless novel. The people trace their beginnings to a mythical past, to the time 'the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights'.[51] But the narrator soon brings the reader down to earth by counting the years of the story proper. Thus it is possible to calculate Okonkwo's age which by the time the story opens must be about thirty-eight. We are later unobtrusively reminded that the white people have a queen. It is also revealed that Okonkwo has spent seven years in exile but for a people who hardly make any distinctions between the living and the dead such a detailed chronological count is not helpful. Okonkwo's exile from Umuofia, for instance, is a technical device which highlights his alienation from his community. His

absence from the village allows the people a breather. It is a moment of stock-taking for both characters but if the community has learned a few things Okonkwo unfortunately hasn't. The change of place and time develops Umuofia but not Okonkwo who returns to the village as fiery and as misguided as he left it. His thoughts when he returns are still about 'those days when men were men'. Umuofia on the other hand 'has grown another tail' more attuned to the prevailing circumstances. The community lives.

Arrow of God presents an even more vibrant community for, though Ezeulu often seems to paint a gloomy picture, the dominant setting of the novel is that of a festival. Not surprisingly, some of these festivals such as the festival of purification defy spoilers and as Chief Priest who must supervise the activities Ezeulu cannot, as Okonkwo is able to do, remain in the background where he may commit an indiscretion. This is how the narrator describes the atmosphere at one festival:

> A stranger to this year's festival might go away thinking that Umuaro had never been more united in all its history. In the atmosphere of the present gathering the great hostility between Umunneora and Umuachala seemed, momentarily, to lack significance. Yesterday if two men from the two villages had met they would have watched each other's movement with caution and suspicion; tomorrow they would do so again. But today they drank palm wine freely together because no man in his right mind would carry poison to a ceremony of purification; he might as well go out into the rain carrying potent, destructive medicines on his person.
>
> 52

There is much unity and conviviality because the gods have a lot to do with these occasions. One festival, the reader learns:

> brought gods and men together in one crowd. It was the only assembly in Umuaro in which a man might look to his right and find his neighbour and look to his left and see a god standing there - perhaps Agwu whose mother also gave birth to madness or Ngene, owner of a stream.
> 53

The narrator of Arrow of God identifies with these views which clearly belong to a member of the community. However, as in Things Fall Apart, a delicate shift can be recognised between the viewpoint of a careful but detached observer who records his surroundings in great detail and a participating narrator who transmutes these details into symbol.

One of the most impressive scenes of the novel occurs in chapter seven. The setting is the market place which the narrator says hums with people 'as though all the bees in the world were passing overhead'. But attention is focussed on Ezeulu at his best. The scene is set to demonstrate the link between him and his people and it also establishes the connection between the Chief Priest and his god. The narrator is a participant observer, a reliable witness of the events. His eye records details of the Chief Priest's appearance.

> He wore smoked raffia which descended from his waist to the knee. The left half of his body - from forehead to toes was painted with white chalk. Around his head was a leather band from which an eagle's feather pointed backwards. On his right hand he carried Nne Ofo, the mother of all staffs of authority in Umuaro, and in his left he held a long iron staff which kept up a quivering rattle whenever he stuck its pointed end into the earth. He took a few long strides, pausing on each foot. Then he ran forward again as though he had seen a comrade in the vacant air; he stretched his arm and waved his staff to the right and to the left. And those who were near enough heard the knocking together of Ezeulu's staff and another - which no one saw. At this many fled in terror before the priest and the unseen presences around him.
> 54

Achebe uses this scene to define Ezeulu's personality and to emphasise the social role which he plays in Umuaro. It is a comment on the nature of his authority and on the respect which is attached to his high office. His link with 'unseen presences' strikes terror, and the reader is told that 'those who were near to him were able to hear the knocking together of Ezeulu's staff and another which no one saw'. This is reminiscent of the scenes in Things Fall Apart where the power of myth and the effect of reality is often indistinguishable.

Umuaro, however, is often presented as a real world. The myth perhaps is even meant to add to the grandeur. The people have a sense of place which is similar to that which was observed in Things Fall Apart. Indeed their map is much bigger than that of Umuofia. It is a smaller clan comprising six villages where Umuofia had nine but its contacts with the outside world have, not surprisingly, been expanded and even the Chief Priest who is prohibited by custom to travel outside his village answers the call of the white man to 'visit' him in Okperi. They talk about places in the same grandiose phrases as the Umuofians do but it all sounds credible since at this time even the 'iron horse' is for them not yet a mode of transport.

Changes in setting have a great influence on the plot of the novel. Ezeulu's imprisonment for two months is the straw that breaks the back of Umuaro. His absence, like Okonkwo's, gives the two warring factions time to take stock but as with Okonkwo's growth the Chief Priest does not change while Umuaro on its part has taken a hard look at its predicament and decided to alter the rules to suit the

changing scene. The Chief Priest who initiated the change by sending his son to the missionaries regresses into conservatism.

Sometimes changes of scene enable the narrator to shift his perspective. Chapter two, for instance, ends with the war between Umuaro and Okperi. The war is presented from the point of view of the community and the mention of the breaking of guns triggers the introduction in chapter three of the views of Captain Winterbottom on the same war:

> This war started because a man from Umuaro went to visit a friend in Okperi one fine morning and after he'd had one or two gallons of Palm wine - its quite incredible how much of that dreadful stuff they can tuck away - anyhow, this man from Umuaro having drunk his friend's palm wine reached for his ikenga and split it in two.
>
> 55

Akukalia and his companions have a different view of the causes of the war which may have been unnecessary and perhaps absurd but was surely not a result of the man's drunkenness. This view tells more about Captain Winterbottom than the people he describes in such paternalistic terms.

Change of setting in Arrow of God often means a change in perspective. It works, to quote Ezeulu again, like a mask dancing. The movement from the festive market place to the fractious compound of the Chief Priest represents a change of point of view. The people celebrate while Ezeulu quarrels with his sons, Edogo and Obika, who in his eyes are still children. When the scene changes to the Government house, as demonstrated above, it also reflects a change in perspective. The differences between Captain Winterbottom and his superiors and even the quarrel between him and Clarke

testify to the Umuaro wise saying that both sides 'cut grass': they should thus not call each other names. This equally applies to the missionaries who, like the Government officials, have their problems. The novel handles all these points of view through the rhythmic changes of setting. For some, like the composite of Umuaro, these changes represent growth but for others such as Ezeulu and Captain Winterbottom changes in scene merely highlight their limited perspective.

The time of the novel is both a time of myth and of history. The myth of origin identifies the Umuaro people who came to being in 'the very distant past, when lizards were still few and far between'. Because of their link with their ancestors who, as in Things Fall Apart are ever present, it often seems as if the novel is also timeless. But the world of Umuaro is real and is specified and history plays a significant partin the development of the plot. The reader recognises the breaking of guns by Captain Winterbottom and is able to place it as Charles Nnolim confirms, within a specific historical moment.[56] Even Ezeulu's otherwise timeless ritual of eating the yams to enable him declare the New Yam Feast has developed a sense of urgency. When he is arrested time literally stops. His inability to correct his 'clock' spells doom for him and for his god. The Umuaro calendar is marked by feasts and by market days. The numerous feasts, therefore, heighten their consciousness of time. Each provides something to which the people can look forward. Ezeulu's individualism makes him try to interrupt this rhythm. Umuaro people can relate with the new religion in time because it also talks about a feast. When they take their yams, therefore, they recognise that

they are still taking part in a harvest festival. It can be assumed that many elders would have found it difficult to comprehend the new way without their reference to the time-honoured tradition of Umuaro. The novel begins with Ezeulu's meticulous concern with the new moon and ends when he eats his twelfth yam. When the ritual is over he announces that 'the New Yam feast would be eaten in twenty-eight days' but unfortunately he has got it all wrong. The demise of the community and its Chief Priest could be said to have been enacted through the skilful manipulation of time. It is a question of the difference between the precision of the ritual of the yams and the manoeuvres of the new time represented by Captain Winterbottom which coincidentally is precise, even more precise. By a curious paradox it is Ezeulu's love of precision that ruins him.

Both Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God are intimate and sympathetic accounts of the communities which Achebe describes. The novels demand that we see them not as studies of individuals but as the careful analysis of the heritage of the author. Achebe has deployed devices that make such a task possible. One of them, for example, is his skilful characterisation in which the community is clearly personified so that it is impossible for the reader to see it as mere background. This is a revolutionary innovation which Achebe introduces to the African novel. It is a method that has been used with mixed success by Armah and Gabriel Okara.

Notes

1. The Critical Perspectives volume edited by Bernth Lindfors and Lynette Innes is a record of some of the best studies of Achebe's novels but none of the writers included in the book mentions Achebe's innovation. It is more fashionable to see Okonkwo and Ezeulu as tragic heroes with flaws.

2. Nelson Wattie, 'The Community as Protagonist in the Novels of Chinua Achebe and Witi Ihimaera', in Individual and Community in Commonwealth Literature ed. Daniel Massa, Malta, The University Press, 1979. p.70

3. Lewis Grassic Gibbon, Sunset Song (London: Longman, 1971),p.275. I am grateful to Grahame Smith for drawing my attention to the possible links between Sunset Song and Achebe's novels.

4. Roger Fowler, Linguistics and the Novel, (London: Methuen, 1977) p.35.

5. See Lindfors and L. Innes op. cit. for a detailed analysis of these traits.

6. Chinua Achebe Things Fall Apart, (London: Heinemann, 1958, 1976) p.84. All further references are to the 1976 reset edition.

7. Things Fall Apart, p.139.

8. Kenneth L. Schmitz, 'Community: The Elusive Unity', in The Review of Metaphysics vol. XXXVII No.2 (December 1983) p.243.

9. Things Fall Apart p.132.

10. Most studies of the novel see Okonkwo as representative of his clan and thus read his end as equivalent to the downfall of Umuofia. See, for example, Eustace Palmer, An Introduction to African Literature (London: Heinemann, 1971), p.54.

11. Things Fall Apart p.19.

12. Ibid., p.113.

13. See Chapter V for a discussion of Sutpen's character.

14. Things Fall Apart p.95.

15. Ibid., p.126.

16. Gerald Moore, Twelve African Writers (London: Hutchinson, 1980), p.127.

17. Things Fall Apart p.92.

18. Chinua Achebe, Arrow of God (London: Heinemann, 1964, 1974) p.46. All references are to the Second Edition.

19. Arrow of God p.14.

20. Ibid., p.160.

21. David Caroll, Chinua Achebe (London: Macmillan, 1980) p.94.

22. Arrow of God p.3.

23. See Lindfors and Innes op. cit. pp. 170-245.

24. See chapter eight.

25. Eustace Palmer The Growth of the African Novel (London: Heinemann, 1978) p.100.

26. Arrow of God p.68.

27. Ibid., p.215.

28. Things Fall Apart p.5.

29. Ibid., p.

30. Neil McEwan, Africa and the Novel op. cit. p.23.

31. Things Fall Apart pp.67-68.

32. Charles Nnolim in'Folk Tradition in Achebe's Novels' Ariel, Vol.14, No.1 (January 1983) has analysed this tale in a similar way.

33. Things Fall Apart p.53

34. Ibid., p.134.

35. Ibid., p.99.

36. Ibid., p.105.

37. Quoted in Nnolim op. cit. p.47.

38. Things Fall Apart p.24

39. Arrow of God p. 26-27

40. Ibid. p.27

41. Ibid., p.188.

42. Ibid. pp.143-4.

43. Ibid. p.85.

44. In Lindfors and Lynette Innes op. cit. p.77.

45. Things Fall Apart p.97.

46. Ibid., p.8.

47. Ibid., p.85.

48. Ibid., p.33

49. Ibid., p.146.

50. Ibid., p.41.

51. Ibid., p.3.

52. Arrow of God, p.66.

53. Ibid., p.202.

54. Ibid., p.70.

55. Ibid., p.37.

56. In Lindfors and Lynette Innes op. cit. p.240.

Chapter Seven : The Communal Perspective Part II

Ayi Kwei Armah, _Two Thousand Seasons_

The Healers

i

Achebe's example has been followed by Ayi Kwei Armah who also attempts to make a case for his community by making it appear in his novels as protagonist. Armah is not as successful as Achebe in creating his community but their aims are the same. Community is not just an abstract concept which both writers seek to define. It is a novelistic character which can be studied and which manifests itself in many forms.

In Armah, however, the reader may recognise desperation in the way the character is created. The effortless manner with which Achebe creates Umuofia and Umuaro makes the communities of Anoa and Esuano appear a bit forced. Part of the reason for this impression can be traced to a 'hidden' narrator whose ideas are hardly sublimated in the interest of the community. The harmony between a detached observer and a participant witness which Achebe achieves in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God is missing in Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers. The latter pair provide a fascinating case for a reader in search of the authorial voice in a text. Armah's use of language betrays him and it is through a careful examination of his use of language that the characters he creates can best be understood. However, since the communal perspective for Armah is synonymous with an African past it is useful to examine his sense of history. Armah creates his community by means of an oral tradition which as with language and characterisation is fundamental to an understanding of the point of view in the novels.

ii

Characterisation

Two Thousand Seasons reads like an apocalyptic text which reveals a community under persecution and which, like John's Revelation, offers 'a unique message of consolation' for the Community.[1] Like its predecessors it seeks to recreate the Community and in the process give it a clearly identifiable character. The reader in search of 'a single memorable character' should, therefore, locate such a character in the pervasive but deliberately portrayed features of Anoa, the Community that is the novel's central concern. This is the point Eustace Palmer misses when he locates such a memorable character in King Koranche and thus incorrectly declares the novel 'sadly deficient in characterisation'.[2] Izevbaye is partially right when he observes that '(even) the characters are not whole persons but active and passive senses',[3] but, his observation is likely to lead the reader away from the true nature of the characterisation in the novel, since there is, in fact, a whole person and what he calls 'active and passive senses' are traits of the novel's major character. Criticism of Two Thousand Seasons should account for the experimentation which transfers wholeness from the individual 'person' to the Communal 'personality'.

That the novel is centred around a Community is evident in the first sentence: 'We are not a people of yesterday', and in the way the communal voice pervades the narrative.

The novel could thus be said to be an answer to the question 'Who are

we'? It pursues this answer meticulously by delineating the nature of the collective group through whose eyes the reader sees the story. The method allows the collective voice to portray the psychological and moral nature of the Community in passages such as this:

> 'Our way, the way, is not a random path. Our way begins from coherent understanding. It is a way that aims at preserving knowledge of who we are, knowledge of the best way we have found to relate each to each, each to all, ourselves to other peoples, all to our surroundings ... Our way is reciprocity. The way is wholeness. Our way knows no oppression. The way destroys oppression. Our way is hospitable to guests ... Our way produces before it consumes. The way produces before it consumes ... Our way creates ... '
>
> 4

The Communal ethic is communicated to the reader through this kind of litany which seems to go on endlessly; 'the way' appears fifty times in the first chapter alone. Armah's method creates the moral world of the novel by means of an anthology of virtues which the reader can easily locate each time the ubiquitous 'way' is used. The way becomes synonymous with all that is good in the Community, and it is defined either positively as in the above passage or as in the following passage by contrast:

> 'A shrunken soul, shrunken from the way, may see the disaster of families cut off from the other families around and still think their fearful huddling together against others is some kind of love, not hate made visible ... For souls reduced near death can see beauty even in the triumph of ugliness itself, can see love in all-pervading hate: so far is their vision cut off from any truth, so far are they from the way.'
>
> 5

Both these passages are concerned with the dominant theme of the

novel which is wholeness or unity. This theme is achieved through the strong links created among the characters and by the high degree of polarization which exists between the people of the way and those that seek to destroy them.

To understand the psychology of the community is to penetrate the two contrasting worlds where good and bad traits may be found in individuals who, by the novel's logic, cannot be understood apart. The narration 'stops' occasionally to fill in a good or bad trait as the case may be. The following passage is typical:

> 'Of those that journeyed most stopped close by, their new homes soon mere extensions of our old. A few went farther in the heat of some small anger or some unusual fear. Such, to PAUSE BRIEFLY HERE, was the hunter Brafo'. (My emphasis) [6]

Every individual 'character' in the novel is introduced in this manner. This includes even the 'developed' characters such as King Koranche and the mystic Isanusi, who, in their various activities, only embody the worst and the best traits in the Community. Koranche, for instance, emerges as a retarded child who is described by the narrators as a 'dead spirit'. He is projected at his worst when compared to other children of his age with whom he cannot compete in the Community's initiation rites. As he grows up and becomes King his relationship with some of his subjects is presented as a conflict between 'skill and intelligence on the one hand' and 'on the other hand, those born mediocre, those inferior through no fault of their own'.[7] The crisis between these irreconcilable poles results in what the narrators call the 'Schism' in the Community. While Isanusi and the twenty young men present the proper behaviour which in this

novel also means the way or the spirit of the Community, the group represented by Koranche stands for all that is bad; Koranche is a symbol of oppression and despair. There is no middle ground, no possibility of mediation or reconciliation between the two poles.

This is the background against which the racial war in the novel is executed. The irreconcilable divisions are amplified by the arrival of 'predators' from the desert, who are followed years later by 'beasts' from the sea. The novel's eschatological ethic reduces all the forces of history, which in this case read as the colonial past, to their outstanding characteristics, thus making the participants in the Colonial incursions appear as dangerous and often unnaturally degenerate beasts. Anoa's prophecy often sounds like Jeremiah's announcement of wild beasts from the North who would tear Israel to pieces.[8] The tensions already created within the group are heightened by persecution and as they reach a peak the young men and women find that their bonds become stronger:

> 'Listening minds began to grow connections, the remembrances were separate, but underneath them all ran connected meaning: Our common captivity now, our broken connectedness before the onslaught of predators and destroyers and for the time to come our common destiny'. [9]

The reader never gets to know any individual in this powerful group. Abena, who is reasonably portrayed, reads like another version of Anoa, the woman who not only gives the Community its name, but who may also be seen as the Community itself. Both women, and others such as Noliwe, Idawa, Nigome and Ndola, represent the essence of the Community. 'In their general condition of pain' the narrators say, 'there was no occasion for anyone to draw

attention to his particular affliction'.[10] This is the way much of the characterisation is handled. Most of the time there is a roll-call involving a cluster of names which the reader need not bother to remember. It is more than half way through the story that the reader gets to know about Isanusi and King Koranche. The reader, however, becomes acquainted with the Community's history, its customs, its movements, and with its problems and the ways it has gone about solving them. Even the names, as Isidore Okpewho and Emmanuel Ngara have pointed out, are carefully chosen to represent an African Community.[11] To go through the list is to make a journey across Africa. The Community is the body where all the other 'characters' are only parts:

> 'How infinitely stupefying the prison of the single, unconnected viewpoint, station of the cut-off vision. How deathly the separation of faculties, the separation of people. The single agent's action is waste motion; the single agent's freedom useless liberty. Such individual action can find no sense until there is again that higher connectedness that links each agent to the group. Then the single person is no cut-off thing but an extension of the living group, the single will but a piece of the group's active will, each mind a part of a larger common mind. THEN EACH EYE INSPIRES ITSELF WITH VISIONS SPRINGING FROM GROUP NEED, THE EAR IS OPEN TO SOUNDS BENEFICIAL TO THE LISTENING GROUP, THE LIMBS MOVE AND THE HANDS ACT IN UNBROKEN CONNECTION WITH THE GROUP'. (My emphasis)[12]

There is an incredible growth pattern in the way any 'diseased' part seems easily replaceable. The novel thus leaves the reader in no doubt about who has the last word; people are only 'memorable' when seen in the context of the Community. This is the point Isanusi makes when he is putting forward his alternative religion to the white missionary.

> 'There is indeed a great force in the world, a force spiritual and able to shape the physical universe, but that force is not something cut off, not something separate from ourselves. It is an energy in us, strongest in our working, breathing, thinking together as one people; weakest when we are scattered, confused, broken into individual, unconnected fragments'.[13]

'There is no beauty but in relationships', the narrators insist, 'nothing cut off by itself is beautiful'.[14] Wholeness is more than a slogan, it is worked into the novel's concept of a millenium. The technique provides the Community with an opportunity to live its future in the present but in such a future only one Community stands out, not single individuals. The central character of Two Thousand Seasons is Anoa or the black race, not Isanusi, not even the King, Koranche.

The Healers is told in third-person narrative, but its focus is the history of the Akan Community which, the narrator says, 'was just a little piece of something whole ... Ebibirman, the Community of all black people'.[15] The small group of healers who give the novel its title set themselves the task of understanding the nature of the Community which, in their own eyes, is now diseased. The novel is thus a series of case studies in which individual characters are treated as symptoms of a more complicated ailment. As one of the healers says:

> 'Sometimes a whole people needs healing work. Not a tribe, not a nation. Tribes and nations are just signs that the whole is diseased. The healing work that cures a whole people is the highest work, far higher than the cure of single individuals'.[16]

This therapeutic philosophy shapes the nature of the characterisation in the novel; individual characters are portrayed only if they help the reader understand the underlying cause of the crisis in which the Community finds itself. As in Two Thousand Seasons there is a polarisation which reveals 'healers' or 'inspirers' on the one hand and 'manipulators' on the other.

The reader is asked to witness an ongoing psychological warfare between these irreconcilable poles prior to the Second Asante War, which is situated in a specific moment in the history of the Community. An understanding of the nature of the former is necessary in order to follow the course and the eventual consequences of the latter. The method brings the reader to a closer understanding of the Community than to any particular individual within it. It is useful at this point, however, to indicate a difference in the characterisation and in the management of point of view between this novel and Two Thousand Seasons because individual characters here gain greater psychological depth than is the case with the 'characters' in the former novel. The theme of healing is its method and Robert Fraser describes it accurately when he remarks that it works by 'systematic discussion and gentle probing'.[17]

The method is, however, the means to a larger purpose, for, as Damfo keeps saying:

> 'If we the healers are to do the work of helping bring our whole people together again, we need to know such work is the work of a COMMUNITY. It cannot be done by an individual. It should not depend on any single person, HOWEVER HEROIC HE MAY BE'. (My emphasis)
> 18

Damfo is talking about the great Asante General Asamoa Nkwanta but this point about the dominant nature of the Community is made on such countless occasions that it is clearly meant to be the novel's central concern.[19] Yet it is difficult to ignore the existentialist anguish of Araba Jesiwa as she unburdens her soul to the would-be healer, Densu:

> 'I was afraid of my true self, I feared the disapproval of my relatives and friends. They wanted the ephemeral self to be myself. I listened to them and grew deaf to my own needs. I lost the ability. I wanted to be right in the eyes of others. So I did myself wrong. I suffered till I saw I had to change. Of course I was frightened when I saw what I had to do - to accept the desires of my own soul and to know THEY WERE NOT WRONG JUST BECAUSE OTHERS MIGHT DISAGREE WITH THEM. I HAD TO DO WHAT WAS NATURAL TO ME, AND LEAVE OTHERS TO DO WHAT WAS NATURAL TO THEM'. (My emphasis)
> [20]

The Healers is a better novel than Two Thousand Seasons, for, though both novels concentrate on the Community, and both see individuals only as they fit into a convenient slot within that Community, The Healers displays a greater understanding of the ambivalence in and the complex nature of the relationship between the individual and the Community.

This understanding is seen working well with regard to the characterisation of Densu who, were it not for the redistribution of the elements of character in the novel, might have been its central character. Densu is the link between the two 'irreconcilable' poles. Perhaps this is why the reader is told that 'his father died before he was born, and his mother died in childbirth'.[21] The orphan in search of a Community flirts with many ideas and people in the novel. He makes a brief but useful companionship with Collins who gives him some education.

He also learns quite a lot about 'manipulators' from his uncle Ababio whose ambitions, as far as Densu can see, are too ominous for comfort. But he receives inspiration from Araba Jesiwa, 'a friend of his soul' and is forever dreaming of the eastern forest, some kind of heaven which opens his mind to 'a future that went far beyond single lifetimes, or even the lifetimes of single tribes and nations'.[22] This combination of influences also qualifies him for the espionage role he plays for the Asante General. It may be said that he prepares the way for the final encounter between the two warring factions, since the General relies on his account of the Glover strategy to make up his mind to confront both the chiefs, who in Densu's now caustic viewpoint appear largely as many colourful umbrellas, and the invading Colonial army.

Densu's acceptance into the Community of the healers in the eastern forest is, presumably, deliberately delayed for the specific purpose of enabling him, and the reader, to understand more fully the nature and character of the Community. It emerges as a house at odds with itself because it is after 'strange gods'.[23] How strange the gods are can be seen in this scene at the palace as royalty celebrates:

> 'The bottleneck broke off and splintered on impact against the floor. 'Gin'! he declared triumphantly, 'and strong'. The bottle flew back to his lips. He sucked desperately, like a famished baby at a mother's breast. When he released the bottle a second time, a trickle ran down his chin, and carelessly he reached up with his left hand and wiped at the trickle with his palm. On the hand's way down again he glanced casually at it, and the bottle of gin in his hand dropped to the ground, shattering into a thousand tiny fragments. What King Kwesi had seen was his own blood ... 'I am wounded, brothers', he shouted, real consternation on his face.

> The motion dislodged his crown. THE FRAGILE SHELL HIT THE GROUND WITH A CRACK, AND ROLLED UNEVENLY TOWARDS THE DOOR'.
> (My emphasis) 24

Much as the narrator tries to paint a pathetic picture of greedy kings fighting over drinks the thrust is more toward indictment than sympathy.

The King's greed is an element in the fragile nature of his rule and when immediately afterwards one of the chiefs calls for the healer, Densu, the moral context becomes clear. Densu, of course, is yet a trainee-healer and cannot do much, but, he learns enough to be able to see the nature of the disease from which his Community suffers. He returns to the eastern forest armed, as it were, with moral and psychological weapons and ready to put them to good use if and when the opportunity arises. His experiences enable him to understand himself, his peers, and consequently, his Community. The novel is about choices, not only for the orphan, but for the others especially for the Asante General, Araba Jesiwa and the other healers, and success or failure seems to depend on the moral readiness of the characters, each of whom is a facet of the larger Community.

This is the vantage position which Densu occupies and which is responsible for the successful trial and sentence of his traitorous uncle. It is also the kind of position that leads to this conclusion to the novel which Robert Fraser finds 'mercurial':

> 'But look at all the black people the whites have brought here. Here we healers have been wondering about ways to bring our people together again. And the whites want

> ways to drive us further apart. Does it not amuse you, that in their wish to drive us apart the whites are actually bringing us work for the future? Look!'
>
> 25

If we see Densu and his band of healers as the bridge between a Community and its negation and if we follow his tortuous efforts at linking the disparate elements within his adopted Community then this is a fitting end for the novel which after all is more concerned with possibilities than with answers. 'Future work' is consistent with Densu's ambitions.

Armah's concept of character is similar in both novels even if the latter novel seems to recall the lone-rangers of his earlier novels. The method places emphasis on the Community which in Armah's definition is 'shared hopes and shared suffering'.[26] All the 'characters' carry the dreams and the scars of the larger Communities which are clearly the protagonists of both novels. In The Healers the Community emerges by implication but it is as central as Anoa in Two Thousand Seasons. If the character does not stand out clearly it is because several people have negated and tried to destroy it.

iii

- Language

The language of <u>Two Thousand Seasons</u> both sustains and mars the novel. Its incantatory and abrasive tone advances the reader's interest but it also repels and at times even bores. The litany of virtues, for instance, often sounds more appropriate for worshippers at a religious ritual than for an uncommitted reader for whom the novel may sound rather heavy and monotonous. The novel, however, speaks in many voices and interest is maintained if the reader keeps a close ear to these as they emanate not from the Communal narrative voice as it ostensibly claims, but from an 'implied author' who is looking over the shoulder of the twenty narrators and directing the reader's attention to the communal perspective and to its message of wholeness or unity.

There is what may be called, for want of a better term, a name-calling voice, identified by the narrators when they reflect on the prophecies of Anoa, as 'a harassed voice shrieking itself to hoarseness'. The language which this voice uses is evocative, contemptuous and sometimes vulgar. The first five chapters are dominated by this voice and the prologue sets the denunciatory tone:

> 'Woe the race, too generous in the giving of itself, that finds a road not of regeneration but a highway to its own extinction. Woe the race, woe the spring. Woe the headwaters, woe the seers, the hearers, woe the utterers. Woe the flowing water, people hustling to our death'. 27

Armah's community is different from that of Achebe; it speaks neither

in proverbs nor in folk tales. The language is directed against enemies identified in the book as 'predators, destroyers, askaris and zombis' and the abuse can be blunt:

> 'We are not stunded in spirit, we are not Europeans, we are not Christians that we should invent fables a child would laugh at and harden our eyes to preach them daylight and deep night as truth. We are not Muslims to fabricate a desert god chanting madness in the wilderness, and call our creature creator ... We have thought it better to start from sure knowledge, call fables fables and wait till clarity. But from the desert first, then from the sea, the white predators, the white destroyers came assailing us with the maddening loudness of their shrieking theologies'.
>
> 28

The same voice also describes some bizarre incidents such as the orgies which the reader is to associate with the sexual depravity of the Arabs in the story. The world of the novel divides into two irreconcilable groups and each has a language to match. In contrast to the vehemence and abuse described above there is an accompanying second voice also identified by the narrators as 'calmer, so calm it sounded to be talking not of matters of (our) life and death but of something like a change in the taste of the day's water'.[29] If the first voice is notorious for its name-calling this one is full of praise for 'the people of the way'. This is evident when any of the women who emerge as the essence of the group is described. This portrait of Idawa is typical:

> 'Idawa had a beauty with no (such) disappointment in it. Seen from a distance her shape in motion told the looker here was coordination free, unforced. From the hair of her head to the last of her toes there was nothing wasted in her shaping. And

> her colour; that must have come uninterfered with from night's own blackness ... But Idawa's surface beauty, perfect as it was, was nothing besides her other, profounder beauties; the beauty of her heart, the way she was with people, the way she was with everything she came in contact with; and the beauty of her mind, the clarity with which she moved past the lying surfaces of the things of this world set against our way, to reach judgements holding to essences, free from the superficies'.
>
> 30

The contrast between beauty and ugliness is extended to depth and 'superficies', harmony and chaos, 'clarity' and darkness and the oscillating nature of the 'twin voices' maintains the consistent and at times too repetitive rhythm of the prose. It also helps to sustain the major battle between 'us' and 'them'.

In trying to draw the lines of the struggle, however, the implied author gives a great deal away. The people of the way are meant to speak a very simple, direct and straight-forward language and the author succeeds when he translates such words as castle into 'the stone palace' or when east and west read as 'the falling' and the 'rising' or in the useful transfer of years into seasons (dry and wet). The effort is to present an African point of view but Armah's simplicity, unlike Achebe's, is its own enemy. The implied author in Achebe's novels, especially in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God distinguishes himself unobtrusively from the Communal voice. In Armah's novel, however, the voice of the implied author is ostensibly submerged in the Communal perspective. But if the effort is aimed at portraying a people with a simple language and an uncomplicated way of looking at life, the reader is taken aback when he is

suddenly confronted with such words and expressions as 'discombobulation', 'catatonia', 'vatic time', 'translucent threads', 'a cataclysm of anger', 'brazen cacophony', 'propitious', 'plethora of warnings', and many more.[31] Indeed it is tempting to declare at such moments that the novel has only one narrator and that the Communal voice is a trick to enable the writer to recreate his own version of African history.

Such a conscious effort can be seen in the way symbols and metaphors are deliberately reversed:

> 'Our people had prepared themselves for the coming confusion by choosing a cry of recognition, the call of the black vulture. Afterwards those who had been directly in the fight adopted the vulture as their double. Let the ignorant laugh at such identification. We listen to their mindless laughter, see their brainless faces. Of the vulture what is it they know? That bird that lives off carrion but never kills a living thing that has not first attacked it, that bird is also of the way'. [32]

There is thus a tribe of the vulture and later mention is made of vulture cries and 'signs of the vulture'.[33] Similar reversals may be recognised in the positive use of the forest which never appears as a jungle. On the contrary, all the best people live there and whatever predatory animals the reader comes across emerge instead from the sea and from the desert. The forest provides the proper environment for the guerrilla activities planned by the twenty revolutionary young men and women. Sometimes the language goes beyond these deliberate reversals and breaks the narrative to argue a thesis. One such long thesis on 'cripples' concludes thus:

> 'The cripple regrets the disappearance of the first distance, imposed by others shrieking, now remembered as useful insulation for himself. The cripple dreams of such a distance

> no longer merely a defensive distance but a distance to turn the contempt of others into contempt against others. This kind of cripple, his deficiencies are inner. But an inner reparation lies beyond his long despair. The external, the superficial, the manipulable: On such he must depend in his ambition to distinguish himself. The world of tinsel, the superficies, come as perfect clothing to cover the cripple's deformity from recoiling sight. In the fullness of the ostentatious cripple's dreams the spirit of community is raped by worshippers of impressive trash ...' [34]

Two Thousand Seasons often reads like a roman à thèse. It attempts to demonstrate a thesis on 'solidarity' by persistently distancing the chosen group from any contact with the others. But the impression of simplicity which is portrayed, especially when the wise old Seer Isanusi speaks, is betrayed when the reader confronts the other denunciatory voices whose words and phrases clearly emanate from an experience which is different and more complicated than the black and white picture which the Communal narrators try to paint. If the aim is to imitate and translate the language of a 'simple' community then the effort has failed. When the narrators depict their experiences at initiation they remark that 'each season had its riddles, its proverbs and its songs', but the reader never gets the feel of these and, with Achebe in mind, must regret the scanty references to 'full-moons', 'fundis' and of time measured in the space 'it takes a person to swallow his saliva seven times'.[35]

The Healers is different. The language is simple and straightforward but it matches the novel's themes and is adequate for its artistic purposes. Comparisons between Armah and Achebe are again useful here. The 'simplicity' of Things Fall Apart helped Achebe to investigate

his subject thus investing him with his self-proclaimed but now universally acknowledged title of 'the novelist as teacher', while Armah's simple language enables him to 'probe gently' his chosen subject which, like Achebe's, is also a significant moment in the history of his community, and to emerge, to copy a phrase, as the novelist as healer. Both the didactic and the therapeutic functions are well served by a simple language. In Two Thousand Seasons, Armah makes a conscious but unsuccessful attempt to equate simplicity of language with the way of life of the Community. The novel fails in this regard because the imitation and translation is half-hearted and too easily gives way to the passion of an implied author. In The Healers, however, the 'eloquence' speaks for itself and the language becomes an integral part of the novel's themes and purposes.

The narrator of The Healers chastises himself as if conscious of the short-comings in an earlier work:

> 'So the story-teller now forgets this rule of masters in the arts of eloquence; the tongue alone, unrestrained, unconnected to the remembering mind, can carry only a staggering, spastic, drooling idiot tale'. [36]

The caution works because the language here is restrained, devoid of the hysterics of the former novel and operates through detailed description and dialogue. The prose displays an evenness and calm which is consistent with the novel's concern for the balance necessary for its 'curative' purpose as shown in this description of the River Esuano:

> 'Two streams flowed by Esuano. One was a calm stream. It flowed so gently there were places where its motion was barely visible. Its waters were extraordinarily clear. You could see all the way down to the bed of fine sand sprinkled with pebbles of many colours, from light yellows to deep, dark purples ... The second river was wider and more turbulent than the first. Its bed was invisible; its waters were opaque with mud. In its flow past Esuano it carried a heavy load of leaves, twigs, and broken branches from its course upstream. Along both of its banks it deposited not sand but silt, a thick, muddy ooze. Partly because this second stream was heavy and physically forceful, and partly because it lacked the beauty of the first, people called it Nsu Nyin, the male river'.
> [37]

The reader fresh from the monochromatic picture of Two Thousand Seasons gets a pleasant surprise to come across 'beds of fine sand sprinkled with pebbles of many colours'. 'Turbulence' which contrasts with the calm in the first part of the description does not come out as something necessarily harmful, indeed it is an inevitable masculine complement to the 'feminine qualities' already described. The sense of balance implied in the description when transferred to a character in the novel produces a clear sense of control and judgement on the part of the novelist:

> 'Bedu Addo, the man Jesiwa accepted for a husband, was a man entirely without any energy of his own. Left to himself, he never expressed anything - nothing good, nothing evil. He did act at times, but always in compliance with influences and suggestions pushed upon him by those who surrounded him. As a result, all he ever did was what was expected of him by the royals at Esuano. HIS CHARACTER WAS NOT LIKE A YOUNG RIVER, ITS RUSHING WATERS REFRACTING LIGHT, MIXING WITH SUN AND AIR. HIS CHARACTER WAS A BECALMED POND, PLACID, DUMBLY REFLECTING THE LIMITED FRAGMENT OF THE UNIVERSE AROUND IT, A STAGNANT LITTLE POOL, GOING NOWHERE.' (My emphasis)
> [38]

No wonder, then, that his marriage to the princess breaks down. Yet the man is not condemned for what he is, rather an attempt is made to understand the nature of his dilemma by placing it in context. In The Healers even the villains, such as Ababio, for all his vaulting ambition and his rather pathetic wish to ally with the 'enemy of the people', come out nevertheless with arguments which Densu can only fault because he has the 'instinct' of a healer:

> 'Power doesn't always go to those who most expect it. Those who decide these things have been watching you. They know, for instance, what everybody knows; that you will be the winner of these games, and these things are important; you have no idea just how important'.
>
> 39

Densu disagrees because 'affairs of the court do not concern him' but at least he listens to Ababio's pragmatic arguments.

Dialogue, translated here as 'conversation', is the novel's strong point. It comes in crisp questions and answers:

> 'How long have you been here?' he asked.
> 'Ages', she said. 'But you didn't see me'.
> 'You hid behind me all the time', he said.
> 'I wanted to find out', she said.
> 'Find what out?'
> 'They say a person can sense your presence, even if he doesn't see you. But he has to like you truly'.
> 'Will you come and sit by me?' Densu asked her.
> 'Will you let me?' she asked him.
>
> 40

This dialogue is between two lovers but the systematic probing is a pervasive feature of the novel. Even the greedy Kings who are caricatured do discuss, albeit raucously, but their propensity for drink is responsible for their type of language. The love of discussion is consistent with the theme of 'togetherness':

> 'The decision was taken by all of us healers through discussion. We work together. Even if I disagree with a decision, once we've made it I work with it. And I don't disagree with this particular decision'.
> 41

The democratic spirit which governs the life of the healers is not only put forward as a sign of their own good condition, it is also advanced as their major psychoanalytic tool. This is the way all the 'patients' in the novel get treated, whether it is the Asante General or the temporarily dumb Araba Jesiwa. The centrality of dialogue to the narration can be seen in the way much attention is devoted to making the dumb woman speak. Language becomes the crucial bridge between the sick and the healthy. The goal of the healers consists in teaching people to communicate properly.

The two novels contrast very sharply with regard to language. Two Thousand Seasons is dominated by one narrator with a caustic tongue concerned more with heightening divisions than with seeking any reconciliation. The Healers, however, reveals a community willing and able to talk with another community. The war takes place and the Asante are defeated because their is no common language between the Colonial Army and the Chiefs (but still the white army came towards Kumase), nor is there any between the Chiefs and their subjects. Yet the possibility of such a language is so evident in the novel that the reader does not feel cheated. All the competing sides have a case which seems a far cry from the abrasive and irreconcilable tone of the other novel. In both novels, however, the strong sense of a Community is emphasised. If the language of Two Thousand Seasons seems to negate such claims, The Healers reinforces them through its

gentle, even, and well-controlled prose. There is indeed 'a new dance' as the last section of the novel claims. It is, however, through a more consistent use of setting that both novels reveal the central characters and betray the soft spot for a lost Eden.

iv

Setting

Two Thousand Seasons creates a sense of Community through a careful manipulation of space and time. The method first reveals general characteristics and then relates these to the mood and character of the Community. There is also an attempt, though not a very successful one, to set the Community in a solidly constructed environment. The landscape, however, is not as vague as it would first appear, and it is not true, as Palmer claims, that 'Armah makes little attempt at the evocation of setting or creation of local colour'.[42] The novel's aim is to create a garden of Eden where 'the people of the way' can live. Background description thus serves two purposes, first to highlight this ideal, then to set it into a context:

> 'With what shall the utterers' tongue stricken with goodness, given silent with the quiet force of beauty, with which mention shall the tongue of the utterers begin a song of praise whose perfect singers have yet to come? ... Who saw mountains flung far to the falling, so far they in the end seduce the following eye and raise it skyward, when the return to the source, to you. Descending slopes, unhurrying even at the long curve of the waterfalls, descending into the gentleness of land, of earth so good it is seldom visible itself, earth covered under your forests: Who would have known, coming from so near the desert, who would have known there was in this world such a variation, such a universe of Green alone?'
>
> 43

The 'universe of green' has a name - Anoa. It is also 'washed' by two rivers, Esuba and Su Tsen. Similarly as the people migrate they identify deserts, plains, mountainsides and forests. The reader is

reminded of Poano where there is a 'stone place' and names of neighbouring towns such as Simpa, Anago, Bomey and Ahwei. The towns of Edina and Enchi have suffered an invasion. There are also towns such as Fulani, Gao and Kedia. The towns, like the names of the characters, reflect the pan-African thrust of Armah's argument. The specifics may result in a useful map of the country but more than this is a qualitative divide between beautiful places where the people of the way live and unpleasant places which are remnants of what their enemies have left. The former is usually described in language that is enchanting and rhetorical:

> 'We had thought, from seeing the waters of Anoa - water suspended bubbling at the lip of its forest fountain, water falling like long, translucent threads airing in the wind before the masters of the waving art take them for their use, water flowing, rushing, water slowed down behind new obstacles, water patiently rising till it overflows what can never stop it, water calm, immobile like the sky in a season starved of rain - we had thought, from seeing Anoa's waters from hearing their thirty different sounds, that there was nothing of beauty in water we had yet to see, no sound of its music we had not heard. But the last of our open initiations took us to the coastland. There we saw in the same water we thought we knew so well a different beauty'.
>
> 44

The sense of calm, music and beauty is contrasted with the desolation inflicted by the enemy:

> 'That eight day we came to a large town, larger than where we had stopped among the gentle people. But here only the physical place was left, and of that merely the charred husk ... There was not one living creature there. Death had visited this place and time had passed over it. There were no corpses, only skeletons. From these too the bones were being removed - by which night creature we could find no indication ...

> In the centre stood a huge baobab, leafless, all its branches dead'.
>
> 45

Images of towns reduced to 'charred husks' and of skeletons and shrunken baobab trees contrast sharply with the beauty of Anoa's waters. Just as the characters and the language fall into two distinct categories the setting is also depicted in such a way that one terrain stands for oppression and despair while the other represents victory and hope, one is ugly while the other is beautiful. The symbolic use of the setting is the novel's strong point. A description such as the movement of the young men through a cave enacts their present predicament and shows the possibilities for the future:

> 'In the middle of a long stretch of calm sea and rock there was this whirling turbulence, pushing itself forward down a tiny opening in the rockface, its movement giving off a low sound like a moan. The space through which the water rushed in its disappearance was large enough to take the width of one canoe, no more ... We were amazed. Here was beauty to madden the soul with happiness. Here was space for wandering, here was cool darkness to soothe each spirit seeking quiet. Here also was light reaching rock and water from hidden, subtle openings above'.
>
> 46

Their path through the turbulence, into the cave, and eventually into light is reminiscent of their capture and their experiences in the slave ship out of which they finally liberate themselves. The 'fifth grove' serves a similar symbolic function. The narrators say that it is not a place of visible paths: 'Dwellers there have always been quiet movers, disturbing nothing they need not disturb. Yet even here the eye searching for easy access is drawn naturally to openings between plants, openings that would be the beginning of paths ...'[47]

The novel's persistent concern with the future offers the reader a way to examine the way time functions. There are two time schemes in the novel. The twenty narrators take the reader from the moment King Koranche assumed power (chapter 4 - 7) through their capture and finally to their liberation. Events do follow in an ordered sequence of days and seasons though they get a bit blurred when the reader confronts biblical expressions such as 'the thirty days and thirty nights' in which the narrators find their way to the fifth grove. The second scheme (chapter 1 - 3) is more fascinating as it exposes the presence of the other narrator already mentioned. This second time scheme cannot be measured even though as the title suggests it could be a period covering 'two thousand seasons'. The truth about this second scheme is, however, explained by the novel's narrator masked in a communal voice:

> 'We lost count of stable seasons, lost count of drought, lost count of good rains and in the ease of thirty thousand seasons forgot all anxiety'.
> 48

This is the voice of tradition evoking the mythical background by taking the Community back to its primordial times. The novel erects two poles of perfection within this background. The past which can be identified as a mythical Eden is 'interrupted' by a concrete situation (Colonialism) which leads the seer to construct a Heaven which his persecuted Community will inherit. Glimpses of the 'new heaven and new earth' are enacted thus enabling the people of Anoa to live their future in the present. In such a scheme time is momentarily suppressed. When Isanusi sees the twenty young men and women who have broken from their past he remarks that it is 'a new day beginning'. All their activities are part of this new day:

> 'Endless our struggle must seem to those whose vision reaches only to the end of today. But those with ears connected to our soul will hear a message calling us to a better life, to a life closer to our ancient way'.
>
> 49

For the twenty 'narrators' such a life began with their liberation.

The Healers is subtitled 'an historical novel'. Its readers would thus be quite justified in expecting a specific concern with space, time and events. Yet the pattern it reveals is more in line with the technique deployed in Two Thousand Seasons where general characteristics take precedence over the specific. Both novels successfully create an essence of time and place which is then related to a specific context. The narrator of The Healers reveals a self-consciousness which is designed to condition the reader's view about the events being described:

> 'Did you remember to tell your listeners of what time, what age you rushed so fast to speak? Or did you leave the listener floundering in endless time, abandoned to suppose your story belonged to any confusing age? Is it a story of yesterday, or is it of last year? ... Is it of that marvellous black time before the desert was turned desert, thirty centuries and more ago. Or have you let the listener know the truth; that this story now is not so old - just over a century old? What of the place? Have you told the listener where the town Esuano was, beside which the numberless rivers of Africa? ... Let the listener know when. Let the listener know where. Then Anoa tongue, born of eloquence continue your telling'.
>
> 50

Despite the commitment to the problems of the 'listener', the novel is still more concerned with the essence than with the facts. This is immediately revealed in the scene following the above observations,

and already quoted, where descriptions about the river Esuano soon turn more to its feminine and masculine features than to any spatial links it has with other rivers within the story. Similarly, though much attention is given to what historians describe as the Second Asante War the novel is more concerned, as Fraser rightly observes, with helping the reader 'to understand some basic truths about the social interaction of different hostile cultures',[51] than with the specific details of that war.

The most successfully evoked setting is the eastern forest, the abode of the titular characters. The reader is kept deliberately in suspense about the forest which it is obvious is not just a figment of Densu's imagination. It teems with healers and has many paths but Densu's first entry is described in more profound terms:

> 'The forest was not hostile. It could have been friendly except that as yet Densu did not really know the forest. He felt happy walking under fallen leaves. And he felt good breathing in its quick, changing, surprising, humid scents. But when he really looked at the trunks coming towards him and up at the roof of leaves softening the sunlight above, he did not know what particular kind of tree he was looking at in every case, what it was like, in what ways its spirit differed from that of other trees, and in what ways it was similar. Around him were all the small, subtle sounds of the forest. But there were few he recognised without a doubt, and he felt his own ignorance like an aching hollow within his being'.[52]

The forest emerges in Densu's eyes as a character worth studying; the trees in it assume a life of their own. Densu must penetrate the character and understand it well in order to appreciate what he is undergoing. The forest is the novel's microcosm of the community

to which all should aspire. It contains all the ingredients of a perfect, caring community. Densu's prayer for a time 'in which he and the universe would grow familiar with each other' is a plea for Community. This is why towards the end the group of healers are enchanted to witness the huge gathering at the 'new dance':

> 'Here were Opobo warriors from the east, keeping at a distance from their neighbours from Bonni. Here were Hausas brought by Glover from the Kwarra lands. Here were mixed crowds with men from Dahomey, Anecho, Atakpame, Ada, Ga, and Ekuapen. There were a few Efutu men, and numbers of Fantse policemen in ill-fitting new uniforms. Here were tough, hardened Kru men from the west, the Mande and Temne men from even further west, the fierce Sussu men inseparable from their swords of war'.
>
> 53

The method of the novel has prepared the reader for this roll-call as a necessary proof of the work of the healers. The community of healers appears as a model in which all these characters may operate. The way is not specifically mentioned in the novel but like Two Thousand Seasons it outlines the ingredients of a Community.

The novel also operates two time schemes as in Two Thousand Seasons. A linear time-scheme unites the two plots. In the first instance great attention is paid to the sequence of events that leads to the arrest of the suspect Densu who is in the 'twentieth year of his life'. Then on one of his numerous visits to the eastern forest the two plots unite when he is enlisted by the General Asamoa Nkwanta. His duties take him through an ordered sequence of events up to and including the final battle between the British Colonial Army led by Captain Glover and the people of Asante. Indeed as the battle

becomes imminent consciousness of time is heightened and each day of the week is shown to be eventful or at least a torture for the participants:

> 'So this Saturday Glover knew only bitter failure. He tried to coax the kings into crossing the river back to the camp with him ... Sunday followed. Glover found no rest. There was work to do in preparation for the forced journey ahead.'
>
> 54

The healers, however, operate a different time scheme. 'Are we forgetting', asks the master healer, 'that for healers the meaning of the span of life takes in our whole people not just our single separate lives?'[55] Such a concept of time sees any event, no matter what its impact, as just a small part of a very large scheme. One of the healers elaborates:

> 'Often, our confusion comes merely from impatience. The disease has run unchecked through centuries. Yet sometimes we dream of ending it in our little lifetime, and despair seizes us if we do not see the end in sight. A healer needs to see beyond the present and tomorrow. He needs to see years and decades ahead. Because healers work for results so firm they may not be wholly visible till centuries have flowed into millenia'.
>
> 56

Earlier it is remarked that the disease, the break-up of the black Community, has taken centuries and centuries, thousands of years. This recalls Two Thousand Seasons which also is situated in a mythical past but which at the same time looks forward to the millenium. Both novels develop the two poles of perfection which Armah has identified elsewhere with a Socialist tradition:

> 'There is in socialist literature always a past free from the harrowing antagonisms of modern

> class society. The precise historical location and the specific character of this mythical Eden differs from culture to culture, but the phenomenon itself seems to be universal, showing itself whenever socialist thought begins to develop'.- 57

The two novels are Armah's way of giving his vision of the 'precise historical location' and the 'specific character of the mythical Eden'. In both novels he carefully delineates the essential characteristics of the Community and then places them within a reasonably recognizable context. It is possible to identify both Communities as Akan but Armah's canvas takes in the whole continent of Africa.

V

Performance

Richard Bauman defines performance as 'a mode of spoken verbal communication which consists in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative competence'. This competence, according to Bauman, 'rests on the knowledge and ability to speak in socially appropriate ways'.[58] Bauman also draws attention to a list of communicative means through which such competence operates, namely: special codes, figurative language, parallelism, special paralinguistic features, special formulae, appeal to tradition and disclaimer of performance.[59] These features are relevant to a discussion of Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers. Even more useful is Burke's point that performance arouses an attitude of collaborative expectancy. 'Once you grasp the trend of the form', says Burke, 'it invites participation'.[60] Both novels appeal to a participating 'audience'.

Two Thousand Seasons is addressed to two audiences. One audience is identified in the prologue and it consists of 'hearers, seers, imaginers, thinkers, rememberers and prophets'.[61] They are enjoined by the narrator, who claims to be one of them, 'to make knowledge of the way'. The second set is identified first in general terms as 'listeners' but specified in the course of the story as the Community of Anoa, or 'all the black people'. The narrator of the prologue surrenders his authority in much of the novel to a group of twenty revolutionary young men and women who start as would-be

'seers and imaginers' but attain their dream as the story unfolds. But, for these young men and women the story should begin from chapter four because it is at this stage that they reach an age which would allow them to communicate their experiences to an audience. As they themselves confirm at the end of chapter three:

> 'It was in Koranche's time as King that the children of our age grew up. It was also in his time - disastrous time - that the white destroyers came from the sea'.
>
> 62

The first three chapters, therefore, are dramatizations of the communal ethic, designed to be chanted, the reader can assume, by a group of faithful followers of the way. These chapters are supposed to express the mood of its listeners who are invited to participate in the re-enactment of history and myth. A sense of community and participation is emphasised by the pervasive use of the pronouns 'we', 'us', 'they', and 'them':

> 'WE are not a people of yesterday. Do THEY ask how many single seasons WE have flowed from OUR beginnings till now? WE shall point THEM to the proper beginnings of THEIR counting. On a clear night when the light of the moon has lighted the ancient woman and her seven children, on such a night tell THEM to go alone into the world. There, have THEM count first the one then the seven, and after the seven all the stars visible in THEIR eyes alone'. (My emphasis)
>
> 63

Sometimes specific questions are addressed to a group within the group because the method seeks to challenge as well as to differentiate the audience. Questions are asked of sections of the audience who apparently are not sure about the events being described:

> 'Who is calling for examples? You do not understand how the destroyers turned earth to desert? Who would hear again the cursed names of the predator Chieftains? With which stinking name shall we begin'.
>
> 64

Part of the audience, the narrators say, is still 'fascinated by glittering death'. Often the audience is asked to hear something 'for the sound of it' and some events have become so well-known, the narrators claim, that 'it would be wasted breath repeating them'. Participation and shared beliefs are crucial to the novel but that may also explain why it has alienated more readers than it has enchanted.[65] The reader who is not part of this eschatological vision is bound to feel bored and frustrated and it can be assumed that even the 'faithful' could find the drama outrageous.

Armah, however, makes good use of parallelism and at times some fascinating figure of speech to keep the interest of the reader. If parallelism, as Geoffrey Leech describes it, consists of variant and invariant units,[66] then 'the way' is the invariant unit, not just of specific passages but of the whole novel. It provides, to use Leech's phrase,'the foregrounded regularity' which gives the novel its rhythm. Every other part of the novel is the variant unit providing definitions and means of arriving at the Communal message of the novel.

In keeping with the skill of the performer the narrators do resort sometimes to what Bauman calls 'disclaimers':

> 'With what shall the utterer's tongue stricken with goodness, river silent with the quiet force of beauty, with which mention shall the tongue of the utterers begin a song of praise whose perfect singers have yet to come?'
>
> 67

This, of course, is only a pose by the 'utterer' who looks forward to his audience to applaud his efforts. 'The people using all things to create participation, using things to create community' the narrators assert, 'have no need of any healer's art, for that people is already whole?' Community and wholeness constitute the major themes; the narrative design of the novel and the attempt to perform before an audience by using some well-known codes or indeed by creating new ones provides the novelist with the opportunity to realise his objective.

The Healers boasts no communal narrator but aspires to communal participation. The self-consciousness of the narrator is directed to an audience even if it ostensibly claims to be self-referential:

> 'But now this tongue of the story-teller, descendant of masters in the arts of eloquence, this tongue flies too fast for the listener. Pride in its own telling skill has made it light, more than merely light'.
>
> 69

The story-teller tries to appropriate the role of the audience by providing the censorship necessary in such a performance. But the recognition of an audience has prompted the censorship; by putting himself in the role of the audience the narrator is again using the familiar trick of the disclaimer. Later in the novel the narrator reserves this ploy for occasions when he is about to describe a dreadful

incident such as the brutal murder of the Prince Appia:

> 'Ah, Fasseke, words fail the story-teller. Fasseke Belen Tigui, master of masters in the art of eloquence, lend me strength. Send me eloquence to finish what I have begun ... Where the corpses eyes had been ...
>
> Send me words, Mokopu Mofolo, send me words of eloquence. Words are mere wind, but wind too has always been part of our work, this work of sowers for the future, the work of story-tellers, the work of masters in the art of eloquence. Give me strength for this work, and give your own wounded soul reason to smile, seeing in the work of one who came after you a small, quick sign that your long, silent suffering was not meant, after all, to be in vain'.
>
> 70

The narrator's assumptions about his audience make him take on the voice of tradition. The appeal to well-known African writers such as Mokopu Mofolo, the author of the now famous novel Chaka, of which Armah himself wrote a very laudatory review,[71] recalls symbols with which the audience ought to be familiar.

Densu's meticulous and clever descriptions of the Asante Chiefs in which he succeeds in presenting them as comic and grotesque-looking figures often betray the relish of a performer but the most fantastic part of the novel is the chapter entitled 'omens' in which the master of eloquence carries the reader through some marvellous scenes depicting incredible incidents which, even if they portray the changed times, are aimed more at raising the interest of the reader (the listener) than at any significant contribution to the overall message. 'Why should it not be true' the narrator asks, 'this was the time of omens and strange stories'.[72] He goes on

to recount half a dozen stupendous stories ranging from the birth of a goat with six legs to that of a tree that makes love. The effort is surely aimed at pleasing a participating audience who are supposed to have triggered the stories in the first place.

The Communal perspective has been used to good effect by Ayi Kwei Armah even though its effect in Two Thousand Seasons needs qualification. The method provides Armah with a tool which enables him to tackle such issues as pan-Africanism which have always been his subject.[73] In pursuing his dream of a unified Africa, Armah delineates the character of the Community from its primordial times through its present and even gives the reader a glimpse into what the future would look like. It is tempting to compare his style and message with the Bible especially with the Revelation. The language of beasts and predators invites comparison with John's book, as does the overt commitment to a participating audience. For a novel which denounces Christianity and all religions foreign to Africa this may sound very ironical but Armah's comment about scientific socialism, in another context seems to have anticipated his novel:

> '(This) was the mature, adult socialist vision; forward-looking, bursting with hope, a superb motivational instrument invented by intellectuals who were so busy condemning the motivational gimmicks of Christian religion (as so much opium) that they failed to see that they were themselves creating a religious system par excellence'.
> 74

The reader of both novels gets an impression of his work similar to that which Armah had of the intellectuals who 'invented' socialism.

Armah's community in The Healers, however, is a convincing one and there can be no doubt about its Africanness. The historical moment which Armah tries to reconstruct emerges in a balanced portrayal. Armah's 'curative' style serves him well because his diagnosis of the disease is done with compassion and simplicity. The same simplicity, however, proves unhelpful in Two Thousand Seasons because there is always an implied author too keyed up to control the events of the story. Achebe makes his characters speak for themselves and even though he also interprets he never allows his own interpretation to spoil the reader's feel of the Community whose failures and triumphs he champions. But Armah in Two Thousand Seasons does not trust his characters and most of the time advances long theses on their behalf, a device which tends to slow down his style and make it repetitive and boring. The 'error' is corrected in The Healers which is a very successful novel. It blends the facts of history with a good psychological study of a community.

The dominant style and theme is Community and a look at the 'characters' leads to a larger character who speaks a language that inspires unity. The setting and the manner of presentation also bear the marks of the Communities which the novels portray. Armah's method was anticipated by Gabriel Okara whose novel is the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

1. This comparison resulted from a reading of Paul D. Hansen, ed. Visionaries and their Apocalypses, (London: SPCK, 1983).

2. Eustace Palmer, The Growth of the African Novel op. cit. p.234.

3. Dan S. Izevbaye, 'Ayi Kwei Armah and the 'I' of the Beholder' in B. King and K. Ogungbesan eds. A Celebration of Black and African Writing (Oxford Zaria: OUP ABUP, 1975) p.232.

4. Two Thousand Seasons p.39.

5. Ibid., p.183.

6. Ibid., p.5.

7. Ibid., p.74.

8. Hansen op. cit. p.23.

9. Two Thousand Seasons p.125.

10. Ibid., p.55.

11. Isidore Okpewho, 'Armah's Two Thousand Seasons' in African Literature Today, 13 (1983) p.13; Emmanuel Ngara, Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel (London: Heinemann, 1982), p.134.

12. Two Thousand Seasons p.134.

13. Ibid., p.50.

14. Ibid., p.206.

15. The Healers p.84.

16. Ibid., p.82.

17. Robert Fraser, The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah (London: Heinemann, 1980)., p.93.

18. The Healers, p.78.

19. All the healers, for instance, are one community.

20. The Healers, p.78.

21. Ibid., p.156.

22. Ibid., p.82.

23. This phrase is associated with T.S. Eliot and Richard Poirer uses it in a related context in 'Strange Gods in Jefferson, Mississippi', a study of Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!

24. The Healers p.207.

25. Ibid., p.309.

26. Ayi Kwei Armah 'African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific', Presence Africaine, 64, (1967) p.28.

27. Two Thousand Seasons pp. XII-XIII

28. Ibid., p.3.

29. Ibid., p.16.

30. Ibid., p.70.

31. Ibid., pp.31,32,41,60,66,79,80.

32. Ibid., p.43.

33. Ibid., p.153.

34. Ibid., p.63.

35. Ibid., p.66.

36. The Healers p.2.

37. Ibid., p.3.

38. Ibid., p.73.

39. Ibid., p.38.

40. Ibid., p.42.

41. Ibid., p.146.

42. Palmer op. cit. p.234.

43. Two Thousand Seasons p.56.

44. Ibid., p.75.

45. Ibid., p.79.

46. Ibid., p.102.

47. Ibid., p.186.

48. Ibid., p.141.

49. Ibid., p.153.

50. The Healers pp.2-3.

51. Robert Fraser op. cit. p.85.

52. The Healers p.61.

53. Ibid., p.309.

54. Ibid., p.149.

55. Ibid., p.261.

56. Ibid., p.84.

57. Ayi Kwei Armah, op.cit. p.9.

58. Richard Bauman, Verbal Art as Performance (Mass: Newbury House Publishers, 1977) p.10.

59. Ibid., p.16.

60. Ibid., p.17.

61. Two Thousand Seasons p.XI

62. Ibid., p.74.

63. Ibid., p.1.

64. Ibid., p.7.

65. The publishing record of the novel has been well-documented by Armah himself in the essay, 'Larsony or Fiction as Criticism of Fiction' Asemka, 4 (1976) pp.1-14.

66. Bauman op.cit., p.17.

67. Two Thousand Seasons p.56.

68. Ibid., p.62.

69. The Healers p.242.

70. Ibid., p.73.

71. Ayi Kwei Armah, 'The Definitive Chaka', Chindaba 50, (1974), p.10.

72. The Healers p.245.

73. All Armah's novels have this idea either as an implicit or as an explicit theme.

74. Ayi Kwei Armah op. cit. p.9.

Chapter Eight : The Communal Perspective Part III

Gabriel Okara, _The Voice_

i

Community is at the centre of Gabriel Okara's The Voice.[1] This may seem odd since much of the story emerges through the point of view of Okolo who is also the voice of the title. But Okolo is only the eyes through which Okara scrutinizes his community which emerges as the novel's centre of dramatic action and as its major character. His 'silence' enhances his role of the narrator as observer and it also triggers much of the activity that takes place in the novel; the reader comes to appreciate his dilemma but only against the background of the dramatic relationships in which he engages with different sections of the community. He often seems to loom large because his community, like that of Densu in The Healers, is after strange gods and is thus recognisable more in terms of what it might have been than in its present state of anarchy. Both novels define their communities through a series of vices which are then juxtaposed against a background of virtues, but they both reveal a passionate need on the part of the participant observers, who are both orphans, to seek relationships in spite of the serious shortcomings of their respective communities.

The Healers represents the quest, to borrow a term from Two Thousand Seasons, as a search for 'the way'[2]. Similarly Okolo is searching for 'it' but he will not give it a name because, as he says, 'names bring divisions and divisions, strife'.[3] He is looking, he claims, 'for belief and faith in that something (we) looked up to in times of sorrow and joy,[4] which really is another phrase for community.[5]

The community, and not Okolo, is thus the centre of interest in the novel. Okolo penetrates the psychology of the twin communities of Amatu and Sologa, which have both refused to adopt him, in order not only to understand the reasons for this refusal, but also to analyze the causes of their general malaise. The malaise, as he demonstrates so well, stems from the excessive worship of 'the shadow-devouring trinity of gold, iron, and concrete'.[6] Each 'character' is seen as one of the many images which could develop the composite picture of Amatu and Sologa; each is a trait of the larger character. The tendency among critics such as Emmanuel Obiechina, Eustace Palmer and Solomon Iyasere, to treat the novel as a clash between the individualism of Okolo (and Tuere) against the community is justifiable but it ignores the fact that Okolo only provides a point of view on the community and that 'they' and not he constitute the novel's centre of dramatic interest.[7] Their follies, and their crass materialism, expose them as a community without a core but one which is powerful nevertheless. That is why at the end of the novel the water rolls over Okolo and Tuere 'as if nothing had happened'.[8]

Emmanuel Ngara's observation is more accurate. 'Okolo', he says, 'has used what little education he has to acquire real knowledge about his society and its predicament'.[9] Okolo's knowledge is the reader's gain, for, much as one sympathises with his predicament, it is the community which outlasts him that fascinates the reader. Okara deploys many devices to give the reader the feel of this community, one of them being the device of using a silent but thoughtful character as a benchmark from which to survey the community. But

more than this, he speaks the language of the people and allows them to express themselves in their own idiom. He places them within a convincing setting so that their performance, as it were, may be watched by the reader. Okolo is the device that records the performance but sometimes the actions of individual characters speak for themselves and the reader can dispense with Okolo's point of view which tends to be tinted by his depressing experiences.

ii

Characterisation

Eighty odd voices in The Voice form the 'dark cloud' which suffocates Okolo who would otherwise have been a 'bright star'.[10] The metaphor is used early in the novel and it is crucial to an understanding of the management of its point of view and of the nature of the relationship between Okolo and his community. Okolo is isolated in such a way that his morality sharply contrasts with the amoral communities of Amatu and Sologa. His Spartan existence contrasts with the exhibitionist display by the people of their new-found gods of gold, iron and concrete. Consequently they cannot understand or appreciate his search for 'it'. He is thus 'smothered' so that the people may 'shine'. The shine, of course, is purely a narrative device since the reader comes to know corrupt, irresponsible, and apathetic communities. Okolo is submerged so that the reader may see these shortcomings in their full perspective. His predicament offers the reader a perspective from

which to evaluate the character of the twin communities.

Okolo's role as observer and recorder is highlighted from the beginning:

> It was the day's ending and Okolo by a window stood. Okolo stood looking at the sun behind the tree tops falling. The river was flowing, reflecting the finishing sun, like a dying away memory. It was like an idol's face, no one knowing what is behind. Okolo at the palm trees looked. They were like women with their hair hanging down, dancing, possessed. Egrets, like water flower petals strung slackly across the river, swaying up and down, were returning home. And, on the river, canoes were crawling home with bent backs and tired hands, paddling. A girl with only a cloth tied round her waist and the half-ripe mango breasts, paddled, driving her paddle into the river with a sweet inside ... To the window he went once there and looked at the night ... Larger and darker clouds, some to frowning faces, grimacing faces changing, were skulking past without the moon's ring, suffocating the stars until they too lost themselves in the threatening conformity of the dark cloud beyond.
>
> 11

The window serves as a useful observation point from which Okolo's metaphoric mind scrutinizes the environment. The links between nature and man, in which palm trees dance like frenzied women or in which clouds look grim and frown, can be seen as a reflection of his colourful mind but they also enact and forecast his future that is suggested by that ominous metaphor of the stars, which, like Okolo, lose themselves in 'the threatening conformity of the dark cloud beyond'. The dilemma notwithstanding Okolo never abandons his role of an onlooker and recorder of the activities of the people around him. The passage is a good illustration of the faithfulness to

detail which characterises this task. Such details accumulate until they become the 'mysterious might of tradition'.

The tradition maintains its might by sheer force of numbers. Size, not quality, explains its dominance over Okolo. When the novel opens, the reader is introduced to three messengers who, as they approach Okolo, multiply into 'a thousand hands, the hands of the world', then into 'a million pursuing feet, the caring-nothing feet of the world'.[12] Indeed to say that Okolo is overwhelmed by this mass of people is an understatement, for, even if the reader sees these figures as a figment of Okolo's persecuted imagination, it is difficult to ignore the manner in which he has been reduced to a 'rat' small enough to 'escape through a hole'.[13] As the reader's attention is shifted from one community to another the dominance of the other voices over that of Okolo is maintained. In Amatu, the corrupt Abadi insists that 'all the voices must be one'. These voices 'drown Okolo's voice asking, is it here?'. The experience is duplicated in Sologa where he finds 'frustrated eyes, ground-looking eyes, cold eyes, bruised eyes, despairing eyes, nothing caring eyes, hot eyes, ... grabbing eyes and aping eyes'.[14] Even in the boat which takes him to Sologa, Okolo experiences isolation and diminution amidst the voices which 'tear up the engine's sound to pieces'.

Okolo's communities are, however, not mere undifferentiated masses as these first impressions suggest. Okara's dramatic method allows the reader to go beyond Okolo's perception so as to record the diversity of traits which eventually cohere around the

communities whose character is the subject of the novel. Their character is successfully created through a series of traits which are similar but which at the same time reveal remarkable differences.[15] Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the scene in chapter seven in which Chief Izongo calls his Council of Elders to deliberate on the aftermath of Okolo's expulsion:

> Izongo: 'One-man-one-face!'
>
> First Elder: 'Yes', No two persons have the same face, and no two persons have the same inside. What is yours?'
>
> Izongo: 'You are asking me? I am lightning!'
>
> First Elder: 'Lightning!'
>
> Izongo: 'Yes. I am lightning. Nothing stands before lightning. What is yours?'
>
> Second Elder: 'Yes! I am water. Water is the softest and the strongest thing be. What is yours?' ...
>
> [16]

The first Elder's wisdom about differences in human nature is, presumably, a residue of a culture that is now gone but their list of praise names provides a useful guide to the diversity that exists in the community. What the scene illustrates is the way this diversity which in the past served useful communal objectives is now being misused by Chief Izongo for his own selfish ends. Water, fire, and pepper, which each of the elders selects as a praise name, are different but complementary. It is also true as one of them later claims that 'many ants gather together and crumb bigger than themselves they carry'[17] but such metaphors now bear little value because what the chiefs carry is only the burden of Chief Ozongo. Okara's method works by implication. The reader knows the community by what it might have been and such 'reminiscences' which the Elders

enact are reminders to the reader of the way things were. Similar violations of tradition are shown in Sologa where 'good old' methods of judgement are replaced by a kangaroo court which forces a young girl to confess a crime she clearly has not committed.

These vignettes of the past crop up very often; Okolo keeps recalling the past as a means to understand a chaotic present:

> Seeing only darkness in front like the wall, Okolo looked back at his early days when he was a small boy, a small boy going to the farm with his mother in a canoe and making earth heaps to receive the yam seedlings. How sweet his inside used to be when at the day's finishing time with the sun going down, they paddled home singing; and how at harvest time when the rain came down almost ceaselessly, they returned home with the first yams, only for small boys, like him, to eat first. How in expectation of the first yams he went through the long planting time ... then the death of his mother and then his father.
>
> 18

The passage is symbolic. The loss of his parents, especially his father whom he portrays as the embodiment of tradition, is a sign of what the people as a whole have lost: the singing and the joy of harvest are cut short by the 'death' of the community (his father and mother).

The past may be seen by implication but the present displays its vulgarity and chaos in individuals ranging from Chief Izongo to his confused messengers in Amatu, and from the Big One to the policeman in Sologa. Each of these people exhibits the traits which have negated the community. To indicate how bad things have become Okara draws profiles of two individuals, Abadi, and the white man in the service of the Big One, who should 'know' but who are as

bad as the mob. Abadi, the reader is told, has his M.A. and Ph.D. but does not have 'it'. Indeed the reader need not learn this from Okolo because Abadi's abuse of language speaks for itself.[19] His perversion is shown in the way he turns words like 'collective responsibility' to translate as dictatorship, all in the interest of 'our leader'. For him, anything is right especially if it is done to 'toe the party line'. Similarly the white man in Sologa recommends the asylum for Okolo when the latter is convinced that, 'at least', he will understand.

Very short sketches usually suffice to show the motivations and activities of most of the 'characters' in the novel. The second messenger, for instance, says:

> Anyway the world turns I take it with my hands. I like sleep and my wife and my son, so I do not think.
> [20]

Similar sentiments are expressed by Tebeowei and it can be assumed that most of the people of Amatu and Sologa have come round to this pseudo-philosophy of 'live and let live'. Some of the people Okolo encounters on his journey go even a step further in seeking dubious ways by which they can become rich. It is charitable to say that the 'characters' in the story constitute a community. They have lost those 'ties of blood and kinship' which bind people to a land and which ensure bonds of friendship, of shared feeling and common belief, unless we see their excessive concern with money and 'concrete' as a common belief.[21] The novel, however, does not allow us to do this. Okolo, who still loves those who would persecute him, cries out in anguish:

> 'All I want ... is to revitalise my flagging faith, faith, in man, belief in something', he said with all his inside and his shadow. 'Belief and faith in that something we looked up to in times of sorrow and joy have all been taken away and in its stead what do we have? Nothing but a dried pool with only dead wood and skeleton leaves. And when you question they fear a tornado is going to blow down the beautiful houses they have built without foundations.'
>
> 22

Okolo finds a bit of what he is looking for in Tuere who, like him, has also been rejected by the community. When both of them are condemned to death, the cripple, Ukule, vows to continue where they have left and the doubts that are beginning to manifest themselves among some of the messengers and possibly even in Abadi show that some sense of community might have been cultivated after all. Okara creates this sense of a community by showing its vices depicted in individuals within it and then contrasting them with a few like Okolo and Tuere who are virtuous. The emphasis, however, is never on these individuals. They form, instead, a network that helps the reader to understand the community. This applies even to Okolo whose presence in the story cannot be easily ignored. Okara's point seems to be that community is not only prior to the individual, it normally outlasts him. What Okolo has left behind is a potentiality, a real possibility of producing 'individuals - as - communal' which the vicious 'characters' in the novel seem unable to grasp.[23] The novels leave the reader with a self-destructive character (the community) but one full of energy which expresses itself through a vigorous use of language.

iii

Use of Language

The language of The Voice is babelish. It is, therefore, not surprising that readers of the novel are often irritated by its 'strange Ijaw rhythms and syntax'.[24] But as in Armah's Two Thousand Seasons, this curious language both sustains and mars the novel. Its variety fascinates the reader who may also feel that it is perhaps too varied. The movement from character to character with its accompanying shifts in register and idiom makes great demands on the reader's attention and it is often difficult to determine the criteria for some of the shifts especially those between the third-person narrator and Okolo, the novel's main narrator. The latter often speaks what must be the traditional language but he appears to be so much at home with all the 'languages' that it is tempting to charge Okara with a false attempt at translation, a 'crime' which is more obvious in Armah's Two Thousand Seasons but which is always threatening to occur in The Voice as well. It can, however, be argued that language and theme are indistinguishable in the novel and that Okara successfully creates a Tower of Babel as an index of the anarchy into which the communities of Amatu and Sologa have plunged themselves.

There is plenty of evidence in the text to support this argument. In the first place, the implied author always appears in complete control of the material, so that, even if we quarrel with him for making us adjust too often, we cannot fault him for the dexterity

with which he moves from one 'language' to the other:

> 'You have your M.A., Ph.D., but you have not got IT', Okolo interrupted him, also speaking in English. All eyes, including Chief Izongo's left Abadi and settled on Okolo, Abadi's face became twisted in rage but he held himself.
>
> 'As I was saying, I have my M.A., Ph.D., degrees', he continued and all eyes left Okolo and settled again on Abadi. 'But I, my very humble self, knew where my services were most required and returned to Amatu to fight under the august leadership of our most honourable leader. I cannot therefore stand by when I see our cause about to be jeopardised by anyone ... We are fighting a great fight and this is not the time to split hairs'.
>
> 'Whom are you fighting against? ... Are you not simply making a lot of noise because it is the fashion in order to share in the spoils. You are merely making a show of straining to open a door that is already open ...
>
> 'Listen not to him, fellow Elders. His mouth is foul. As Abadi ended, there arose a great shout of applause, feet stamping and hand-clapping. Then with his voice quavering with emotion he (Chief Izongo) began to speak in the vernacular ...
>
> 25

Two main languages are identified here, the vernacular and English. The former is spoken by Chief Ozongo and his Elders while the latter is the language of the third person narrator or the implied author and it is also the language which both Okolo and Abadi speak. There is, however, a close link between the observations of Okolo and the third-person narrator. Their language is distinguished from the pompous, almost meaningless, expressions of Abadi who has his M.A. and Ph.D. An indication is given of a further attempt to speak in another language when Abadi switches from such expressions as 'the unparalleled gallantry of our leader' to 'Listen not to him, fellow Elders'. Similar awareness of audience is responsible for the

constant shifts from Okolo's impeccable English, as when he communicates with the whiteman in the service of the Big One, or at moments when he is soliloquising on the possibilities of his search for 'it', to the colloquial speech of the people of Amatu and Sologa. The reader is often reminded that this is the 'vernacular'. What emerges is thus a translation which is carried out sometimes by Okolo, as when he is recalling the conversation in the boat, or by the third-person narrator who, like Okolo, is quite capable of moving from one language to another.

The technique of the novel suggests, however, that it is not so much a matter of who says what at any given time, rather it is a question of who shouts most. The novel reveals eighty-three voices which invariably 'sing out' or 'shout' or 'threaten' or, like Okolo's, are just 'silent'. Readers who are irritated by the style can take comfort in the fact that what they are witnessing is a 'shouting' contest whose inevitable winners are the communities of Amatu and Sologa. Attention has so much been centred on the strangeness of the language that it is too often forgotten that the novel deliberately draws the reader's attention to the problem of language as a way of showing the complete breakdown of values in the community. This breakdown is not simply a case of Okolo's clarity against the people's confusion, it is also an indication of Okolo's own dilemma which stems from his unsuccessful efforts to try and discover his tradition and the reasons for its collapse. The people's struggle with proverbs and praise-names, which they now completely misuse, his own inability to capture the essence of a forgotten culture, are all enacted through language. The facility with which Achebe captures the idiom of

his people, for instance, cannot be found in The Voice and this is because, while Achebe worships his ancestors and celebrates the past, Okara chastises his contemporary society and asks it to find ways of recovering that past. The reader, however, leaves the novel with the impression that this is neither possible nor desirable.

The last paragraph of the novel perhaps supports such a claim:

> When day broke the following day it broke on a canoe aimlessly floating down the river. And in the canoe tied together back to back with their feet tied to the seats of the canoe, were Okolo and Tuere. Down they floated from one bank of the river to the other like debris, carried by the current. Then the canoe was drawn into a whirlpool. It spun round and round and was slowly drawn into the core and finally disappeared. And the water rolled over as if nothing had happened.
> 26

The ease and clarity with which the third-person narrator handles this sad event is a sharp contrast to the confusion that the reader has witnessed so far. Community endures in spite of all its shortcomings and it is this endurance, and not Okolo's rather naive approach to tradition, which shows signs of hope. No one doubts his moral earnestness but it seems that he is as irrelevant as some of the new things which he so vigorously opposes.

Okara's use of language thus presents a paradox. He muddles it in order to clarify the theme. The 'translations' are better than those of Armah in Two Thousand Seasons but they are not an end in themselves. Critics who praise him for finding an idiom which combines the 'devices of his native language with Modern English syntax' do not do him much justice, for the combination of such odd phrases as 'hunger-killing

beauty', 'wrong-doing inside', 'inside smelling with anger', 'surface-water-things' and all the numerous misapplied proverbs which run concurrently with such fine passages of beautiful prose as that in the paragraph just quoted, do not reveal a contented implied author. On the contrary, the babelish language is a measure of the anguish of both the third-person narrator and of Okolo who is the main narrator of the story. As with characterisation Okara's management of point of view works by implication. The reader can only imagine what might have been if he is able, as Okolo cannot, to survive the chaos.

iv

Setting

Okara's management of setting in The Voice is convincing. He manipulates landscape to suit the emotions of the 'characters' and it works best at this symbolic level, but consciousness of a specific, recognisable environment is also carefully maintained. The village of Amatu is identified by its palm trees, its nearby forest, its drums, and by its huts with mat doors. The reader is also reminded of the gatherings in Chief Izongo's compound. Similarly, the town of Amatu is identified by its streets, and by 'honking' cars, by 'eating houses' and the Constable on his beat. It can be said that Okara successfully localises the characters in an environment within which they can act out their stories. As Okolo moves from village to town and back the reader notices the care with which these two communities are

delineated, but since both communities are corruptions of an ideal, they both are raised to the level of symbols and thus stand for more than their specific descriptions allow.

The novel is marked by several observation points such as Okolo's window already mentioned. These guideposts help to establish Okolo as the novel's main observer of the events but they also provide the setting from which these events derive their significance. Many of the activities in the first part of the novel, for instance, take place in or around Tuere's hut which is both a specific, geographically identifiable place, and a symbol of the community's abuse of tradition. She has been condemned to this hut near the forest because the people claim that she is a witch. Yet her fate and that of Okolo have become so identical that it is obvious there is more to it than the community is prepared to admit. Okara sets the scene in symbolic terms:

> As Okolo stood thus speaking with his inside, a voice entered his inside asking him to bring some firewood from the corner of the hut. With a start, he moved towards the corner with hands extended in front. Soon his hands touched the wall. Then he lowered them slowly until he touched the splinters of firewood propped against the wall. He took them and moved back. As he moved back unseen hands took the firewood from his hands and crossed them on the embers. Then there were more blowings. Then suddenly a twin flame shot up. The twin flame going into one another and becoming one, grew long and short, spread, twisted and danced, devouring the essence of the firewood like passion. And the face of Tuere was satisfaction, for her breath and shadow had gone into the flame. She remained kneeling before the dancing flame with face intent, looking at the flame, looking at what is behind the flame, the root of the flame.
>
> 27

The effort to light a fire in a dark hut is realistically portrayed, but, as the twin flame shoots up, it becomes clear that this scene symbolically unites Okolo and Tuere whose face now beams with satisfaction because, as she says, 'her breath and shadow (had) gone into the flame'. It is possible to see the firewood as the tradition whose 'essence' is now being 'devoured' by the twin flame. Tuere's desire to see what is behind the flame, the root of the flame, coincides with the desire of Okolo to understand the meaning of 'it'. This scene also highlights the paradox in the novel because it is the flame which symbolises both characters that also destroys them. What they enact in the hut foreshadows their fate in a community which no longer appreciates their search for meaning. The common humanity which has produced their flame is lost by the world outside and as Okolo surrenders to the mob the reader is treated to an evocative setting in which sub-human creatures dominate:

> The people snapped at him like angry dogs snapping at bones. They carried him in silence like the silence of ants carrying a crumb of jam or fishbone. Then they put him down and dragged him past thatched houses that in the dark looked like pigs with their snouts in the ground; pushed and dragged him past mud walls with pitying eyes; pushed and dragged him past concrete walls with concrete eyes; pushed and dragged him along the waterside like soldier ants with their prisoner. They pushed and dragged him in panting silence, broken only by an owl hooting from the darkness of the orange tree in front of Chief Izongo's house.
> 28

The inhumanity of the community is evoked in this scene in which houses look like 'pigs with their snouts in the ground'. The passage also shows how Okara successfully transmutes specific details about the environment such as the thatched houses with mud

walls, the yams, the waterside and the owl, into symbols. The reader gets a good picture of a village setting but attention is also drawn to the inhumanity and superstition that are part of the village of Amatu. The unequal relationship between Okolo and his community is also highlighted; the 'beasts' overwhelm the silent, helpless, Okolo. The Voice sometimes reads like a novel of terror and in scenes such as the one quoted above this terror manifests itself through external violence. In the City of Sologa such terror is depicted in the mind of Okolo:

> His thoughts in his inside began to fly in his inside darkness like frightened birds hither, thither, homeless... Then the flying thoughts drew his hand but the hands did not belong to him, it seemed. So Okolo on the cold, cold floor lay with his body as soft as an over-pounded foo foo. So Okolo lay with his eyes open wide in the rock-like darkness staring, staring.
> 29

The terror of this darkness 'expands his head' until he begins to touch objects within the cell. What he touches is a skull but no one will believe him and his terror only intensifies. The town turns out to be a worse form of terror than the village from where he was exiled. But even in the description of this state of terror vignettes of village life can be recognised. Okolo's body, for instance, is 'as soft as an over-pounded foo foo'. Earlier we learn that 'his legs were as heavy as a canoe full of sand'. Such subtle hints give the reader a feel of the community which is being studied. The people gather in the city in the same way as they do in the village and Okara's description highlights the similarities:

> Night had fallen and in one of the unpaved streets in the slum areas of Sologa the darkness was more than darkness because it had been forgotten. In the forgotten street stood a house with corrugated iron sheet walls and roof held together with nails and sticks. And in the house, sitting round an oil lamp, were the mother-in-law and her son, Ebiere, the bride; and her brother, and a group of men and old women.
>
> 30

The oil lamp, the rickety building, and the crowd which has assembled to 'try' Okolo are reminders of his previous experiences in Amatu; indeed, this trial is a prelude to the final trial in Amatu in which Okolo (with Tuere) is condemned to death.

The Voice ends where it began, in the village of Amatu:

> The drums were beating in Amatu. They had been beating bad rhythms since the finishing of the day and the night had fallen. It was a night that the moon did not appear and it was darkness, proper darkness. Still the drums continued to beat in the compound of Izongo. And the people continued to dance, the men and women knowing nothing, dancing like ants round a lamp hung on a pole. They continued to dance and drink and eat goat meat, for today was the day to remember the day Okolo left the town.
>
> 31

The village lives, but only just. The rhythms of their drums are 'bad rhythms' and they dance like ants round a lamp hung on a pole. On such a moonless night, the narrator implies, the idea of a dance in the Chief's compound is absurd. But things have changed; the Chief now wears 'a black suit with brown shoes and on his head a pith helmet in the dark night'. It can be assumed that such a grotesque appearance and other perversions of 'tradition' heighten the antagonism between Okolo and the community. In outlining

the details of this antagonism, however, the narrator pays greater attention to the community than to Okolo who himself, as narrator, adds to our knowledge of his community. One of the messengers significantly remarks that 'Okolo has no wife, no children and his father and mother are dead'.[32] No wonder, then, that he should go the lengths he does in search of a community. What he finds is chaotic but dominating and the reader is not surprised that he feels terrorised and is eventually eliminated by it.

Okara deploys setting effectively and through it gives the reader a full picture of a world at odds with itself. Time does not feature here as much as in Armah's Two Thousand Seasons or The Healers but the environment is exploited fully in order to give the reader the feel of a world that might have been, in Okolo's words, 'if only ...' As we move with him from his window, to Tuere's hut, through the boat, and into the town, we come across various traits which contribute to our knowledge of the novel's main character.

iv

Performance

Okara is a story-teller in the real sense of the word. The Voice shows an awareness of audience and is everywhere marked by a sense of performance. It has, as Palmer remarks, 'the directness of folk-lore, the mystery of a fairy-tale and the symbolism of a fable'.[33] As in a folk-tale the characters 'live' and act their stories rather than just

tell them. The reader is able to recognise the various traits of the community by the way the numerous individuals present them. The novel begins on an evocative note:

> Some of the townsmen said Okolo's eyes were not right, his head was not correct. This they said was the result of his knowing too much book, walking too much in the bush, and others said it was due to his staying too long alone by the river.
>
> So the town of Amatu talked and whispered; So the world talked and whispered. Okolo had no chest they said.
>
> 34

The town of Amatu is evoked as a purveyor of gossip. This sense of common knowledge is a hallmark of the folktale where most of the events relayed are usually assumed to be part of a well-known tradition. Everyone in the community knows about Okolo and his 'dangerous' search for 'it'. That is why they all come out in large numbers to arrest him when he takes refuge in Tuere's hut.

No one, it appears, wants to miss any of the excitement generated by Okolo. Thus his pursuit is started by three messengers whom Okara introduces as if on stage, then the group is expanded to include so many people that they all can only be identified as 'voices', 'hands', and 'feet'. As the story progresses, however, it is possible to identify many of the voices. Tuere, for instance, notices the voice of Seitu who was responsible for her banishment. But the people love a performance whether as spectators or as actors. Chief Izongo's gestures which sometimes tell them to laugh, scream or simply keep quiet, suit many of them, but when they do get a chance they prove to be very good performers, as Abadi, the Chief's spokesman shows. The scene in chapter seven where each of the

Elders takes pride in enacting their praise names shows them at their best.

It can be argued that The Voice has no continuous line in its narrative and that the novel is a series of dramatic episodes performed by the various 'characters'. The structure of the book supports this argument. There are constant shifts from village to town. The first two chapters take place in Amatu and end with the expulsion of Okolo. Chapter three is the boat scene where the curious but lively passengers enact what may be seen as a microcosm of the activities of the larger communities of Amatu and Sologa. Chapter four takes the reader back to Amatu, specifically to Chief Izongo's compound where a mini-celebration is already going on to mark the departure of Okolo. The reader is again taken to Sologa in chapter five where Okolo's other nightmare begins, only to be returned to the village in chapter six where a bigger celebration is being planned by the Chief. There is another boat-scene (chapter ten) which records the return of Okolo. The remaining chapters dramatize Okolo's final return and its consequences. These shifts sustain the reader's interest.

Repetition also enhances performance in the novel. Mention has already been made of the numerous voices in the story for which Okolo's voice is no match. The reader's attention is also drawn to 'spoken words' (eleven times), and 'teaching words' (twelve times) all of which are reminders to the reader of the significance of speech in the novel. Repetition is a pervasive feature of the novel. The following passage is typical:

> Okolo opened his eyes and looked in front of him. The people were sleeping. He looked towards his left. The people were sleeping. He looked towards his right. The people were sleeping ... Okolo at the rising, falling rising, falling cheeks looked. They were rising, falling, rising, falling, like the cheeks of a croaking frog.
>
> 35

The scene reveals Okolo as the only 'watcher' and the technique of repetition emphasises this role which enables Okolo to recall and describe accurately the words and actions of the people in the boat.

Proverbs and wise-sayings, though largely misused, form part of the repertoire of the community and for the Elders, and sometimes for Okolo, they are a useful way of encapsulating the essence of the group. They, however, use them as badly as they use their drums and their dance. But in each case these shortcomings are highlighted to show what has been lost by the people. If they can no longer dance properly it is because they have become too busy to recapture the rhythm.

The title of The Voice suggests a situation of dominance on the part of the titular character over the events which take place in the novel. This is, however, not the case because Okolo is only one voice among many voices; he merely provokes the other voices into action during which he becomes a mere 'watcher' or 'hearer'. Okolo, like the reader, watches and analyzes the community of the novel. The eighty odd voices provide the basis for an assessment of the group and the initial response which does not need revision is one of anarchy. Criticism of the novel has so far centred on Okolo and his predicament

and it has missed the central focus which is the community. The character of Okolo is a tool which should help the reader to understand the 'tradition' which Okara is trying to describe. It is true that what appears in the novel can hardly be called a community but this is precisely the point of the story: Where has the community gone?

Okara has made efforts to recover his tradition but he has also shown how difficult such retrieval can be. Nowhere is this better shown than in his use of language which can at best be likened to the tower of Babel. Okara has been praised for being able to reconcile the 'syntax' of a traditional African language with the European form of the novel but this is only half the story. The effort is unsuccessful but the narrator shows us that the lack of success is deliberate. It is meant to show the present chaos in the society and the difficulty which the Modern African experiences when he tries to recover the past. Okara argues that it is community that endures, not brave individuals within it, no matter how earnest or well-intentioned.

An effective use of setting gives the community a credible and realistic environment. The reader also finds that background description quickly rises to the status of symbol and the place becomes more important for what it stands for than its current diminishing form. Subtle methods are, however, introduced to give the reader a feel of what village life used to look like before it was violated by the new-found gods of gold, iron, and concrete. The reader comes to know this through reminiscences of individuals such as Okolo who keeps

referring to his father as a standard bearer of the tradition. Even the corrupt and apathetic Elders do sometimes show what it was like. They do misapply their proverbs and wise saying but they are still reminders, for Okolo at least, of the 'good old days'. The novel is also told in the manner of folk-tales and it is successful in its attempt to draw the attention of an audience. Participation is required since each 'character' appears only in a group. Okolo's isolation is more a psychological, self-inflicted, affair than a dramatic one. No one leaves him alone even if this seems to be what he demands.

The Voice differs from the novels of Chinua Achebe and Ayi Kwei Armah which have been discussed under the title of 'the communal perspective' but it bears resemblances with them as well. It differs from the other novels because it defines its community by implication and suggestion. There are, however, similarities with Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God in its use of language as a theme. The language of the community does not come out as clearly as it does in Achebe but this is because Okara seems to suggest that such a retrieval is neither possible nor desirable. Characters in all the novels by these three writers always have to give way to a large community figure which, in Achebe, more than in the others, reveals a shrewdness and a humanity which demands the reader's attention. This technique adds a new dimension to characterisation and the management of point of view in the African novel.

Notes

1. Gabriel Okara, The Voice, (London: Heinemann, 1970; first published, 1964) All references are to the 1970 edition.

2. 'The Way' is Armah's all-embracing term for the 'essence' of the African. It is used ad nauseam in Two Thousand Seasons.

3. The Voice, p.25.

4. Ibid, p.89.

5. In a recent study, 'Community: The Elusive Unity', Kenneth L. Schmitz defines it in exactly the same terms as Okara and Armah apply to it. See The Review of Metaphysics, Vol. XXXVII, No.2 (1983) pp. 243-264.

6. The Voice, p.89.

7. Emmanuel Obiechina, Culture and Society in the West African Novel, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 147-9. Eustace Palmer, An Introduction to the African Novel (London: Heinemann, 1972), pp. 155-167. Solomon Iyasere, 'Narrative Techniques in Okara's The Voice' in African Literature Today, Vol. 12 (1982) p.11.

8. The Voice, p.127.

9. Emmanuel Ngara, Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel, (London: Heinemann, 1982), p.52.

10. The Voice, p.26.

11. Ibid., p.26.

12. Ibid., p.28.

13. Ibid., p.28.

14. Ibid., p.80.

15. The 'Sameness' which Iyasere has observed is only on one plane, their new found gods. They do, however, display appetites which are remarkably different even in this aspect. See especially the boat ride.

16. Ibid, pp.98-99.

17. Ibid., p.99

18. Ibid., p.105.

19. See Section iii for a further discussion of language in the novel.

20. The Voices, p.25.

21. K. Schmitz, op.cit. p.243.

22. The Voice, p.89.

23. See Schmitz, op.cit. p.256.

24. Palmer, op.cit. p.156.

25. The Voice, p..44-45.

26. Ibid., p.127.

27. Ibid., p.33.

28. Ibid., pp.38-39.

29. Ibid., pp.76-77.

30. Ibid., p.107.

31. Ibid., p.113.

32. Ibid., p.25.

33. Palmer, op.cit. p.166.

34. *The Voice*, p.23.

35. Ibid., p.58.

Chapter 9 : Conclusion

In Comparative Literary Studies : An Introduction, S.S. Prawer defines 'placing' as:

> The mutual illumination of several texts or series of texts, considered side by side; the greater understanding we derive from juxtaposing a number of (frequently very different) works, authors and literary traditions.
> 1

Placing is the essence of this thesis. Twenty novels are described in the preceding chapters with the aim of allowing them to illuminate one another, and point of view is used as an instrument to achieve this aim. If the method is successful then it shows that the critic of the novel in Africa need not necessarily declare a stand in one of two opposing camps before he can arrive at a useful interpretation of the novels. It is also shown that the arguments of the syncretic critics, who seek to reconcile the two camps, are self-defeating and that the dichotomy which they establish between an 'aesthetic' and a 'sociological' approach is ultimately false. If we cannot understand novels by Soyinka or Awoonor, for instance, it is not because their material is obscure or unique, but because they are not able to express their point of view clearly. The study places the African novels side by side with their British and American equivalents and demonstrates the striking similarities in method and theme thus belying the uniqueness and apartness which the three main approaches seem to suggest. There are ways to break through the walls created by the critics and the devices of point of view are shown to be among these ways.

There are those who will quarrel with the idea of using a term which

is common in Western criticism to study the African novel. These literary nationalists, such as the Chinweizu trio, for whom the notion of borrowing conceptual tools constitutes a blow to their pride, need to be assured of our common interest in establishing the contribution that the African novel has made to world fiction and ultimately to its recognition as a useful complement to current trends in modern fiction.

The point of view discussed in chapters six, seven and eight, for example, shows that views about character in the novel need to be revised to account for a human referent which is larger than the individuals to whom we have become accustomed. Such attributes as 'proper name', 'physical and moral nature' need to be transferred from the individual to the community. Rather than ask who is he? and what does he stand for? we should instead ask who are they? and what do they stand for? These crucial questions represent a revolutionary approach to an understanding of the presentation of character in some novels written by Africans. With such questions in mind we may no longer accuse Armah, for example, of failure in presenting character in Two Thousand Seasons since the dominant character in the novel is, in fact, Anoa, and the individuals are only traits of this character. To recognise this method is to notice at once that ideas held about novels, such as Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God are suspect. Umuaro and Umuofia are not just backgrounds against which the tragedies of Okonkwo and Ezeulu are enacted. Both communities are characters in the novels.

Achebe creates them as characters and the reader must understand them

in order to appreciate the proper roles of Okonkwo and Ezeulu. It is justifiable, as critics have done so far, to see these characters as central to both novels but such a view should not make us forget the protagonists, Umuofia and Umuaro who upstage both these men. This argument can be extended to Gabriel Okara's The Voice where Okolo serves a similar function to that of Okonkwo and Ezeulu. Armah's Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers depict the communities of Anoa and Esuano respectively and, as in Achebe and Okara, these communities tower above the individual characters.

This is the unique contribution the novel in Africa has brought to world fiction. In order to appreciate this innovation we need to compare their novels in this mode with the novels of a writer like Faulkner who is as concerned with his folk as Achebe, Armah and Okara. Much as Faulkner's community leaves lasting impressions on the reader it is still a chorus, a background against which the inimitable individuals, such as Thomas Sutpen, may be understood. Faulkner shares with these novelists a need to extract value from a dubious heritage but where he defines these values, such as honour, truth and respectability, through individual sensibilities and enacts their drama as they confront their communities, the African novelists define similar values through a powerful communal presence displayed in Achebe especially, by a skilful use of language and setting. What we are led to know is a people, not individuals. We may further appreciate this technique if we see how in Achebe's other novels this sense of community is lost and attempts by the characters to enforce it fail. The Umuofia Progressive Union in No Longer at Ease, for instance, is a pale, almost unrecognisable shadow of its past. In

'those days' it was a character but things have changed. These changes are reflected in the quality of the novels; it is not surprising that many readers miss the vibrant communities of Umuofia and Umuaro.

The critic, however, can go beyond this distinctive feature and establish the common ground between the African novelist and his British and American counterparts. It can thus be argued, as is done in chapter two, that both James and Soyinka write novels from a dramatised perspective. In their novels the devices of drama are used to express a world view, which perhaps not coincidentally, is similar. The Tragic Muse and The Interpreters, for instance, deal with protagonists who are faced with the problem of 'apostasy'. Conflict is central to their lives and the devices of drama seem to present opportunities for highlighting these conflicts. With drama in mind both novelists are able to let these characters speak for themselves; the reader is thus presented with a position similar to that of a spectator at a play. The way to understand Soyinka is then not through a study of Yoruba myths, which he uses extensively, but through the means by which these myths are presented.

Soyinka's dexterous manipulation of time in The Interpreters would have made James proud as his own attempts to write the dramatic novel seemed to have fought shy of the possibilities Soyinka employs in his novels. Both The Interpreters and Season of Anomy present an African perspective but this perspective need not be studied in isolation. Henry James provides a useful light by which we can read Soyinka's novels.

James Joyce and Virginia Woolf similarly provide useful points from which a discussion of Kofi Awoonor's novel can be conducted. It is not true, as Richard Priebe suggests, that This Earth defies the conventions of the Western novel. The comparison in chapter three shows that Awoonor's novel is written from an inward perspective. The three novels may thus be read as works deploying what is usually termed as stream-of-consciousness. Here too similarities in method are matched by affinities in thematic concerns; the reader notices in these novels a kinship of search or pilgrimage. Point of view is enhanced through a skilful use of symbolism and the use of memory. Awoonor's acknowledgement of a debt to Joyce does not come as a surprise. Similarities are also recognised between his novel and The Waves. An examination of their method reveals more about Awoonor's themes and techniques than any recourse to specifically African features. It is true that This Earth is an 'African Dirge' but knowledge of its identity should not prevent us from observing the 'coincidences' between this dirge and similar ones composed years before Awoonor's.

It is also shown that the devices which Ngugi deploys in A Grain of Wheat and Petals of Blood resemble those used by Conrad in Under Western Eyes and Nostromo. Both writers fragment their material and present it through the multiple perspectives of several major characters. Both stretch the use of metaphor so that their novels demand interpretation through an understanding of their complex interfusion of metaphors. But while Conrad introduces one dominant metaphor, such as the silver in Nostromo, which he invests with a strong impression and from which related metaphors derive their import, Ngugi, instead, fragments his

metaphors in the same way as he fragments the characterisation in his novels. Both writers, however, reinforce the significance of their metaphorical images through repetition. Patterns of verbal expression are repeated in order to give greater resonance to the metaphorical undercurrent of the novels; they also serve as a device to distinguish the numerous characters. The reader comes to know characters through stock phrases such as Nostromo's 'one in a thousand'. Such characters, however, do not become anonymous; the phrases merely enhance their 'reputation' or 'disrepute' as with Nostromo and Captain Mitchell.

Conrad's characters act as if they were unaware of time. The novels, especially Nostromo, are full of 'immortal' people whose activities deny the necessity of time. Even when they die, it seems, like the Azuera 'gringos', that they are alive somewhere. This attitude to time affects the narrative whose texture becomes chaotic. Ngugi's characters on the other hand are conscious of time because they seem possessed by a 'flaming' desire to change the society in which they live. Ngugi's time-scheme usually assumes a cyclical pattern. Within this cycle, however, the chaos that emerges is akin to the one observed in Conrad, especially in Nostromo. There is a difference which may be explained by Ngugi's politics, because, though conscious, like Conrad, of the preponderant contradictions of imperialism and capitalism, he differs from Conrad because, for him, the conquest of 'material interests' need not take the doubtful turn it takes for Nostromo or Mrs Gould. The activities of Ngugi's characters may thus be measured reasonably in time. Since he writes about contemporary politics and since he is compelled to approach

the specific as opposed to Conrad's more universal posture, he tends to place his characters within the historical time in which they operate.[2] This makes Petals of Blood less chaotic in its time-scheme than Nostromo. Both writers suggest, however, that to penetrate the private lives which they depict and to show the chaos within such minds properly, the narrative must necessarily assume the confused nature of a dream. The quality of the movement towards self-discovery is more significant than the time it takes to reach such discovery.

In Conrad, the characters work as if utterly alone but in Ngugi the device is more like a relay which stresses the interdependence between the individual and the group. Ngugi's perspective is the result of his socialist commitment but he is also able to delve into 'old' Africa - represented in Petals of Blood by Nyakinyua - to obtain material which enhances the collective and alternating nature of the narrative. Petals of Blood, however, is a complex novel in the true Modern tradition and in the Conradian spirit. To examine it and A Grain of Wheat in the light of Conrad's novels is to highlight the significance of the multiple perspective for both novelists. The differences in their method can be seen in their specific ideological orientations and not in geographical politics. The devices of point of view are enough to penetrate and isolate these differences.

Ayi Kwei Armah, in Fragments and Why Are We So Blest? deploys a similar technique to the one used by Faulkner in As I Lay Dying and Absalom, Absalom! The technique which is also described as multiple

perspective shows, as in Conrad's and Ngugi's novels, great variation in point of view. Faulkner and Armah's variation of this method produces 'doubling' in the nature of the characterisation. They are in these novels closer to the technique Conrad used in Lord Jim where the reader is invited to listen to conflicting accounts of witnesses who seem to share similar experiences. Such are the roles of Solo and Modin in Armah's novel. In each of the novels discussed in chapter five repetition serves as a useful accummulative device which enables the narrators to tease out meaning from the numerous ambiguous situations in which they find themselves.

There are similarities between As I Lay Dying and Fragments as there are between Absalom, Absalom! and Why Are We So Blest? Here also affinities in technique are matched by similarities in thematic concerns. In spite of the differences in locale the nature of the family quarrels of the Bundrens and the Onipas is the same. Similarly Solo and Modin often remind one of the two undergraduates, Quentin and Shreve, in Faulkner's novel. All four characters provide numerous perspectives through which a single incident could be viewed. It is thus more helpful to examine Fragments with a novel such as As I Lay Dying than to group it together with The Interpreters as novels depicting the post-Independence disillusionment in the African novel. The novels depict disillusioned characters but they are written from entirely different points of view.

There is, as Rene Wellek has argued, 'a common humanity that makes all art, however remote in time and place, accessible to us'. Wellek suggests further that:

> We can rise beyond the limitations of traditional tastes into a realm, if not of absolute, then of universal art, varied in its manifestations but still amenable to description, analysis, interpretation and finally inevitably, to evaluation.
>
> 3

Critics of the novel in Africa could be said to reject Wellek's useful premises. They seek ultimately to deny 'a common humanity' in art. Whether as Afro-centric, or as Euro-centric or as syncretic, each has in his own way tried to divorce the novel in Africa from beneficial links with other novels. Afro-centric critics argue as if the novels dropped from the sky and Euro-centric critics seem sometimes to deny their very existence by insisting that the novels are only poor imitations of other novels. In a bid to bring some sobriety to the debate the syncretists offer a distinction between sociology and aesthetics by arguing that if the novel in Africa were to be examined with the dichotomy in mind it might somehow be better understood. It is, however, pertinent to ask if this dichotomy is unique to Africa. If we must know about the sociology of a people before we appreciate their novels then readers of Faulkner, for example, need to know the American South. Yet this is not the case.

This study shows that novels may be accessible to readers if they are prepared to listen to the voices in the text and if the novelist is skilled enough to present these voices. Such voices need not be studied in isolation, as critics of the art for art's sake tradition are often accused of doing, but they may equally not be any more accessible just because the reader has a special knowledge of the reality which the novel imitates. Point of view is shown

to be a matter of ideology and technique, it provides the reader with the tools necessary to decode the stylistic-philosophic centre of a work, indeed it constitutes that centre.

It is perhaps instructive to remember that some of the best criticisms of African novels are achieved by Europeans and that the African critics who write perceptive studies of African novels are not always those with special knowledge of the African worlds portrayed.[4] It is possible, for instance, to know a lot about Yoruba myth and still be a poor critic of Soyinka's novels. The African novelists discussed here are influenced by many traditions, European and African, but they all speak in their own voices. It is these that the thesis isolates and describes in the spirit Achebe encourages, of 'assembling the world's gifts' in order to make 'a rich harvest'. Seen in this way criticism of African fiction may perhaps take on a more serious outlook than the current comic demonstrations of prejudices seem to suggest. The path to 'the authentic African novel' is not through cultural chauvinism, as displayed by all the 'camps', but through a vigorous and open approach to methods that lay bare a work of art to its audience.

Notes

1. S.S. Prawer, *Comparative Literary Studies: An Introduction* (London: Duckworth, 1973) p.144.

2. The difference, though, is a very fine one because there is a sense in which Conrad too may be seen to be writing about contemporary politics. Unlike Conrad, however, Ngugi integrates the current history of Kenya into his novels while in *Nostromo* Sulaco is pure imagination. Both novels are 'imaginary' but Ilmorog does not emerge as a metaphysical, hypothetical place as does Sulaco.

3. Rene Wellek, *The Attack on Literature and Other Essays* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1980), p.63.

4. The brilliant collection of essays in *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*, for instance, reveals more foreign critics than African ones. Solomon Iyasere's essay, for example, compares in brilliance with that of C.L. Innes. Both critics write well not out of any special sociological knowledge of the communities whose activities are depicted in the novels but because both examine details of technique and show how these affect the themes of the novels.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The place of publication is London unless otherwise stated.

A. TEXTS

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Heinemann, 1958)

Arrow of God (Heinemann, 1964)

Ayi Kwei Armah, *Fragments* (Heinemann, 1974. First published New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1969)

Why Are We So Blest? (Heinemann, 1974)

Two Thousand Seasons (Heinemann, 1979. First published Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1973).

The Healers (Heinemann, 1979. First published Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau 1978).

Kofi Awoonor, *This Earth, My Brother* (Heinemann, 1972)

Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo* (J.M. Dent & Sons, 1904)

Under Western Eyes (Methuen,1911)

William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (Chatto and Windus, 1935)

Absalom, Absalom! (Random House, 1936)

Henry James, *The Tragic Muse* (Macmillan, 1890)

The Ambassadors (Methuen, 1903)

James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, (Jonathan Cape, 1916)

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o *A Grain of Wheat* (Heinemann, 1967)

Petals of Blood (Heinemann, 1977)

Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters* (Heinemann, 1970, First published by Andre Deutsch, 1965)

Season of Anomy (Thomas Nelson, 1980. First published by Rex Collings Ltd., 1973)

Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (The Hogarth Press, 1931)

B. CRITICISM AND BACKGROUND SOURCES

I Books

Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (Heinemann, 1975)

Robert M. Adams, *James Joyce: Common Sense and Beyond* (New York: Random House, 1966)

J.W. Aldridge, *Time to Murder and Create: The Contemporary Novel in Crisis*, (New York: McKay, 1966)

Walter Allen, *The English Novel: A Short Critical History* (Phoenix House, 1954)

Tradition and the Dream: The English and American Novel from the Thirties to Our Time (Phoenix House, 1964)

Six Great Novelists: Defoe, Fielding, Scott, Dickens, Stevenson, Conrad. (Hamish Hamilton, 1965)

Miriam Allot, *Novelists on the Novel* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959)

Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975)

Guy Armirthanayagan and S.C. Harrex, *Only Connect* (Adelaide: Centre for Research in the New Literatures, 1982)

Guy Armirthanayagan, *Asian and Western Writers in Dialogue: New Cultural Bearings* (Macmillan, 1982)

Kofi Awoonor, *The Breast of the Earth: A Survey of the History and Literature of Africa South of the Sahara* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975)

Ernest Baker, *The History of the English Novel* (New York: Barnes) 1936

Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, 1977)

John Bayley, *The Uses of Division: Unity and Disharmony in Literature* (Chatto and Windus, 1976)

Ulli Beier, ed. *Introduction to African Literature* (Longman, 1967)

Joan Bennet, *Virginia Woolf: Her Art as a Novelist* (Cambridge University Press, 1945)

Phyllis Bentley, *Some Observations on the Art of Narrative* (Home and Van Thal, 1946)

Richard Blackmur, ed. *Henry James: The Art of the Novel* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934)

Bernard Blackstone, *Virginia Woolf: A Commentary* (The Hogarth Press, 1949)

Joseph Blotner, *The Modern American Political Novel 1900-1960* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1966)

Morton W. Bloomfield, ed. *The Interpretation of Narrative: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970)

Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961)

Helmut Bonheim, *The Narrative Modes: Techniques of the Short Story* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1982)

Eugene Ted Boyle, *Symbol and Meaning in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad* (The Hague: Monton, 1965)

Malcolm Bradbury, *Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel* (Oxford University Press, 1973)

The Modern American Novel (Oxford University Press, 1984)

Nicola Bradbury, *Henry James: The Later Novels* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979)

Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure Especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981)

A Grammar of Metaphor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958)

Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha County* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964)

William Faulkner: First Encounters (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983)

Cleanth Brooks and R.B. Heilman, *Understanding Drama* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1945)

Oscar Cargill, *The Novels of Henry James* (New York: Macmillan, 1961)

David Carroll, *Chinua Achebe* (New York: Twayne, 1970)Revised Macmillan 1980

Wilfred Cartey, *Whispers from a Continent* (New York: Random House, 1969)

Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Traditions* (New York: Doubleday, 1957)

Seymour Chatman, *The Later Style of Henry James* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972)

Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978)

Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978)

David Cook, *African Literature: A Critical View* (Longman, 1978)

David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe, *Ngugi Wa Thiong'o : An Exploration of His Writings* (Heinemann, 1983)

Malcolm Cowley, *The Faulkner - Cowley File: Letters and Memoirs 1944-62*. (Chatto and Windus, 1966)

C.B. Cox, *Joseph Conrad: The Modern Imagination* (A. Deutsch, 1974)

Jean Betty Craige, *Literary Relativity: An Essay on Twentieth Century Narrative* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1982)

R.S. Crane, ed., *Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957)

I.K. Crossman *Metaphoric Narration: The Structure and Function of Metaphors in A La Recherche du Temps Perdu* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978)

Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader* (Hutchinson, 1979)

Leon Edel, *The Psychological Novel: 1900-1950* (Hart-Davis 1955)

John M. Ellis, *Narration in the German Novelle: Theory and Interpretation* (Cambridge University Press, 1974).

The Theory of Literary Criticism: A Logical Analysis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974)

Una Ellis-Fermor, *The Frontiers of Drama* (Methuen, 1964)

Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970)

E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Arnold, 1927)

Robert Fraser, *The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah* (Heinemann, 1980)

Ralph Freedman, *The Lyrical Novel: Studies in Herman Hesse, Andre Gide, and Virginia Woolf* (Oxford University Press, 1963)

Alan Warren Friedman, *Multivalence: The Moral Quality of Form in the Modern Novel* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978)

Melvin Friedman *Stream of Consciousness: A Study in Literary Method* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1955)

Arthur S. Gakwandi, *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa* (Heinemann, 1977)

Peter Garret, *Scene and Symbol from George Eliot to James Joyce* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969)

Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980)

Peter Glassman, *Language and Being: Joseph Conrad and the Literature of Personality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976)

Judith Gleason, *This Africa: Novels by West Africans in English and French* (Evanston: University of Illinois Press, 1965)

Joseph Gold, *William Faulkner: A Study in Humanism, from Metaphor to Discourse* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966)

Arnold Goldman, *The Joyce Paradox: Form and Freedom in his Fiction* (Evanston: North Western University Press, 1966)

John Goode, ed. The Air of Reality: New Essays on Henry James (Methuen, 1972)

Philip Grover, Henry James and the French Novel: A Study in Inspiration (Paul Elek, 1973)

Albert Guerard, Conrad the Novelist (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958)

The Triumph of the Novel: Dickens, Dostoevsky, Faulkner, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976)

Andrew Gurr and Angus Calder, eds., Writers in East Africa : Papers from a Colloquium held at the University of Nairobi, June 1971 (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1974)

Andrew Gurr and Pio Zirimu, eds., Black Aesthetics : Papers from a Colloquium held at the University of Nairobi, June 1971 (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1973)

Frederick Gwynn and Joseph Blotner, Faulkner in the University (Charlottsville: University of Virginia Press, 1959)

Paul Hansen, ed. Visionaries and their Apocolypse (SPCK, 1983)

Barbara Hardy, The Appropriate Form: An Essay on the Novel (The Athlone Press, 1964)

W.J. Harvey, Character and the Novel (Chatto and Windus, 1965)

Jeremy Hawthorn, Joseph Conrad: Language and Fictional Self-Consciousness (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1979)

David Hayman and Eric Rabkin, Form in Fiction: An Introduction to the Analysis of Narrative Prose (New York: St. Martins Press, 1974)

Paul Hernadi, Beyond Genre: New Directions in Literary Classification (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972)

Frederick Hoffman, William Faulkner (New York: Twayne, 1961)

John Holloway, Narrative and Structure: Exploratory Essays (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979)

Irvin Howe, William Faulkner : A Critical Study (New York: Random House, 1962)

Robert Humphrey, Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel: A Study of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, William Faulkner and others. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954)

Abiola Irele, The African Experience in Literature and Ideology (Heinemann, 1982)

Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication In Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974)

Walter Isle, Experiments in Form: Henry James's Novels, 1896-1909 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968)

Janheinz Jahn, Muntu : An Outline of Neo-African Culture (Faber, 1961)

Eldred Jones, The Writing of Wole Soyinka (Heinemann, 1973, Revised 1983)

Donald Kartiganer, The Fragile Thread: The Meaning of Form in Faulkner's Novels (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1979)

Graham Kenneth, Henry James, The Drama of Fulfilment: An Approach to the Novels (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975)

Frank Kermode, _Essays on Fiction: 1971-82_ (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983)

Robert Kiely, _Beyond Egotism: The Fiction of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence_ (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980)

G.D. Killam, _The Novels of Chinua Achebe_ (Heinemann, 1969)

An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi (Heinemann, 1981)

Bruce King and Kolawole Ogungbesan, eds., _A Celebration of Black and African Writing_ (Zaria and Oxford: Ahmadu Bello University Press and Oxford University Press, 1975)

Mark Kinkead-Weekes, _Samuel Richardson : Dramatic Novelist_ (Methuen, 1973)

Paul Kirschner, _Conrad: The Psychologist as Artist_ (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1968)

Ira Konisberg, _Samuel Richardson and the Dramatic Novel_ (Lexington : 1968)

Dorothea Krook, _The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James_ (Cambridge: The University of Cambridge Press, 1967)

Shiv Kumar, _Bergson and the Stream-of-Consciousness Novel_ (Glasgow: Blackie and Son Ltd., 1962)

Susan Sniader Lanser, _The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction_ (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981)

Charles Larson, _The Emergence of African Fiction_ (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971)

Margaret Laurence, _Long Drums and Cannons_ (Macmillan, 1968)

Benjamin Lease, _Anglo-American Encounters: England and the Rise of American Literature_ (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982)

Mitchell Leaska, *Virginia Woolf's Lighthouse: A Study in Critical Method* (Hogarth, 1970)

F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition : George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad* (Chatto and Windus, 1948)

Hermione Lee, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (Methuen, 1977)

Harry Levin, *Joyce: A Critical Introduction* (Norfolk, Connecticut: University of Connecticut Press, 1941)

Bernth Lindfors, *Folklore in Nigerian Literature* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1973)

Bernth Lindfors and C.L. Innes, eds., *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe* (Heinemann, 1979)

David Lodge, *Language of Fiction* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966)

Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921)

M. Mahood, *The Colonial Encounter: A Reading of Six Novels* (Rex Collings, 1977)

Edris Makward, *Is There an African Approach to African Literature?* (Los Angeles : African Studies Centre, 1969)

Jay Martin, *Harvests of Change : American Literature 1865-1945* (New Jersey : Prentice-Hall, 1962)

Daniel Massa, ed., *Individual and Community in Commonwealth Literature* (Malta: The University Press, 1979)

F.O. Mathiessen, *Henry James : The Major Phase* (New York: Galaxy, 1963)

A.A. Mendilow, *Time and the Novel* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1972)

J. Merriwether and M. Millgate, eds., Lion in the Garden (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968)

James Miller Jr., ed., Theory of Fiction : Henry James (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972)

J. Hillis Miller, Fiction and Repetition (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982)

George Moore, The Lake, (Heinemann, 1905)

Gerald Moore, Wole Soyinka (Evans, 1971)

Twelve African Writers (Hutchinson, 1980)

Thomas Moser, Joseph Conrad : Achievement and Decline (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966)

Edwin Muir, The Structure of the Novel (Hogarth, 1928)

Peter Nazareth, Literature and Society in Modern Africa (Nairobi: East Africa Literature Bureau, 1973)

Elsa Nettels, James and Conrad (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1977)

Emmanuel Ngara, Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel (Heinemann, 1981)

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Homecoming (Heinemann, 1972)

Writers in Politics (Heinemann, 1981)

Barrel of A Pen : Resistance to Neo-Colonial Kenya (New Beacon Books Ltd., 1983)

J.H. Nketia, Funeral Dirges of the Akan People (New York: Negro University Press, 1969)

Lewis Nkosi, Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature (Longman, 1981)

Emmanuel Obiechina, *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 1975)

Kolawole Ogungbesan, ed., *New West African Literature* (Heinemann, 1979)

Stein Haugom Olsen, *The Structure of Literary Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978)

Kole Omotoso , *The Form of the African Novel* (Akure: Fagbamigbe Publishers, 1979)

Michael O'Toole, *Structure, Style and Interpretation in the Russian Short Story* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982)

Palaver: Interview with Five African Writers (Austin: African and Afro-American Research Institute, 1972)

Eustace Palmer, *An Introduction to the African Novel* (Heinemann 1972)

The Growth of the African Novel (Heinemann 1979)

Richard Poirer, *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966)

John Press, ed., *Commonwealth Literature : Unity and Diversity in a Common Culture* (Heinemann, 1965)

John Preston, *The Created Self: The Reader's Role in Eighteenth Century Fiction* (Heinemann, 1970)

Martin Price, *Forms of Life: Character and Moral Imagination in the Novel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983)

V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968)

Eric Rabkin, *Narrative Suspense* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1973)

Arthur Ravenscroft, *Chinua Achebe* (Longman, 1969)

Joseph Reed Jr., *Faulkner's Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973)

William Riggan, *Picaros, Madmen, Naifs, and Clowns : The Unreliable First-Person Narrator* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981)

Harvena Ritcher, *Virginia Woolf : The Inward Voyage* (New Jersey : Princeton University Press, 1970)

Adrian Roscoe, *Mother is Gold* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1971)

Louis D. Rubin Jr., *The Teller in the Tale* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976)

Hugh Ruppersberg, *Voice and Eye in Faulkner's Fiction* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1983)

Edward Said, *The World, The Text, and The Critic*, (Faber and Faber, 1984)

Robert Scholes, *The Fabulators* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967)

Fabulation and Metafiction (Illinois : University of Illinois Press, 1979)

Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (Oxford University Press, 1966)

Mark Schorer, *The World We Imagine* (Chatto and Windus, 1969)

William Schuette, ed., *Twentieth Century Interpretation of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968)

Sallie Sears, *The Negative Imagination: Form and Perspective in the Novels of Henry James* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1968)

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics (Methuen, 1983)

Robert Stallman, The Art of Conrad: A Critical Symposium (East Lansing: Michigan University Press, 1961)

Oladele Taiwo, Culture and the Nigerian Novel (Macmillan, 1976)

Tony Tanner, ed., Henry James (Macmillan, 1969)

Tzvetan Todorov, The Poetics of Prose (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977)

Boris Uspensky, A Poetics of Composition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973)

Allan Wade, ed., Henry James, The Scenic Art: Notes on Acting and Drama (Rupert Hart-Davis, 1949)

Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the American Novel, from the Birth of the Nation to the Middle of the Twentieth Century (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967)

Ronald Wallace, Henry James and the Comic Form (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975)

William Walsh, A Manifold Voice: Studies in Commonwealth Literature (Chatto and Windus, 1969)

Joseph A. Ward, The Search for Form: Studies in the Structure of James's Fiction (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967)

Robert Penn Warren, ed., Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1962)

Claude Wauthier, The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa (Pall Mall, 1966)

Rene Wellek, *The Attack on Literature and Other Essays* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982)

Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader* Second Series (Hogarth Press, 1965)

Robert M. Wren, *Achebe's World: The Historical and Cultural Context of the Novels of Chinua Achebe* (Longman, 1980)

Michael Wreen and Donald M. Callen, *Monroe Beardsley: The Aesthetic Point of View, Selected Essays* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982)

Edgar Wright, *The Critical Evaluation of African Literature* (Heinemann, 1973)

Donald C. Yelton, *Mimesis and Metaphor: An Inquiry into the Genesis and Scope of Conrad's Symbolic Imagery* (Mouton: The Hague, 1967)

II Articles

Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa', *Research in African Literatures* 9:1 (1978) pp.1-15

'Viewpoint' *TLS* Feb. 1, 1980, p.113

Regina Amadi - Tshiwala, 'Critical Bearings in African Literature' *Presence Africaine* 115 (1980) pp.148-155.

Ayi Kwei Armah, 'Larsony or Fiction as the Criticism of Fiction' *Asemka* No.4 (1976) pp.1-14

'The Definitive Chaka', *Chindaba* 50 (1974) pp.10-13

'African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific?' *Presence Africaine* 64 (1967) pp. 6-30.

Kofi Awoonor, The Poem, the Poet and the Human Condition, *Asemka* 5 (1979) pp. 1-23.

'Comes the Voyager at Last' *Okike*, 7 (1975) pp.31-56.

N.I. Bailey, 'Pragmatism in The Ambassadors' Dalhousie Review LIII (1973) pp.143-148

Warren Beck, 'Faulkner's Point of View', College English II (1941), pp. 736-749.

Joseph Blotner, 'Mythic Patterns in To The Lighthouse, PMLA, 71 (1956) pp. 547-562

Lawrence Bowling, 'What is the Stream of Consciousness Technique?' PMLA, LXV (1950) pp. 333-345

Steven Cohan, 'Readable Character' in Novel: A Forum on Fiction 17: I (1983) pp.5-27

Dorrit Cohn, 'Narrative Monologue : Definition of a Fictional Style' Comparative Literature, 18 (1966) pp. 97-112

Thomas E. Connolly, 'Point of View in Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! Modern Fiction Studies 27:2 (1981) pp.255-272

J.I. Cope, 'Joyce: Test Case for a Theory of Style' English Literary History 21 (1954) pp.221-236

Philip J. Egan, 'Embedded Story Structures in Absalom, Absalom!' American Literature 55: 2 (1983) pp.199-214

Romanus Egugu, 'Criticism of Modern African Literature: The Question of Evaluation' World Literature Written in English 21 : 1 (1982) pp.54-66

Victor Emmett Jr., 'The Aesthetics of Anti-Imperialism: Ironic Distortions of the Vergilian Epic Mode in Conrad's Nostromo', Studies in the Novel, 4:3 (1972) pp. 459-472

Suzanne Ferguson, 'The Face in the Mirror: Authorial Presence in the Multiple Vision of Third-Person Impressionistic Narrative'. Criticism, 21:3 (1979) pp.230-250

Joseph Frank, 'Spatial Form in Modern Literature' Part I-III Sewanee Review 53 (1945) pp.221-240, 433-456, 643-653

R.W. Franklin, 'Narrative Management in As I Lay Dying', Modern Fiction Studies 13 (1958) pp.57-65

Philip L. Greene, 'Point of View in The Spoils of Poynton', Nineteenth Century Fiction XXI (1967) pp.359-368

Mark Goldman, 'Virginia Woolf and the Critic as Reader', PMLA, 80 (1965) pp.275-284

Susan Gorsky, 'The Central Shadow: Characterisation in The Waves', Modern Fiction Studies 18:3 (1972) pp.449-465

John Graham, 'Point of View in The Waves: Some Services of the Style' University of Toronto Quarterly 39:iii (1970) pp. 445-467

Thomas A. Hale, 'Africa and the West: Close Encounters of a Literary Kind', Comparative Literature Studies Vol.20:3 (1983) pp. 261-275

Irene Hendry, 'Joyce's Epiphanies' Sewanee Review, 54 (1946) pp. 445-467

John A. Hodgson, 'Logical Sequence and Continuity : Some Observations on the Typographical and Structural Consistency of Absalom, Absalom! American Literature XLIII (1971-2) pp. 97-107

Katherine Hoskins, 'Henry James and the Future of the Novel', Sewanee Review LIV (1946) pp.87-101

Abiola Irele, 'The Season of a Mind : Wole Soyinka and the Nigerian Crisis', Benin Review 1 (1974) pp.111-122

Solomon Iyasere, 'Oral Tradition in the Criticism of African Literature' The Journal of Modern African Studies 13: 1 (1975) pp. 107-119

'Art, A Simulacrum of Reality - Problems in the Criticism of African Literature', The Journal of Modern African Studies XI:3 (1973) pp.447-455

'Cultural Formalism and the Criticism of Modern African Literature'; The Journal of Modern African Studies XIV:2 (1976) pp. 322-330.

'African Critics on African Literature: A Study in Misplaced Hostility' African Literature Today 7, (1975) pp.20-27

'Modern African Literature and Ideological Commitment', West African Journal of Modern Languages 2 (1976) pp.5 - 9

'Narrative Techniques in Things Fall Apart', Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe, B. Lindfors and C.L. Innes op.cit. pp.92-110

'Narrative Techniques in Okara's The Voice', African Literature Today 12 (1982) pp.5-21

D.S. Izevbaye, 'The State of Criticism in African Literature', African Literature Today 7 (1975) pp. 1 - 19
'Issues in the Reassessment of the African Novel', African Literature Today 10 (1979) pp.7 - 31

'Time in the African Novel', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature XVII:1 (1982) pp.74-89

J.Z. Kronenfeld, 'The Communalistic African and the Individualistic Westerner: Some Comments on Misleading Generalisations in Western Criticism of Soyinka and Achebe', Research in African Literatures 6:2 (1975) pp.199-225

Isle D. Lind, 'The Design and Meaning of Absalom, Absalom! PMLA 70 (1955) pp.887-912

Bernth Lindfors, 'Ambiguity and Intention in Arrow of God,' Ba Shiru V:1 (1973) pp. 43-48

Edward Lobb, 'Armah's Fragments and the Vision of the Whole', Ariel X:1 (1979) pp.25-38

Juri Lotman, 'Point of View in a Text', New Literary History 6:2 (1975) pp. 339-352

W.R. Macnoughton, 'The First-Person Narrators of Henry James', Studies in American Fiction, 2, (1974) pp.145-164

Michael Moloney, 'The Enigma of Time: Proust, Virginia Woolf and Faulkner', Thought XXXII (1957) pp.69-85

David Monoghan, 'The Single Narrator of *As I Lay Dying*' *Modern Fiction Studies*? 18, (1959) pp.213-220

Sister Kristin Morrison, 'James's and Lubbock's Differing Points of View', *Nineteenth Century Fiction* XVI (1962) pp.245-255

James Naremore, 'Style as Meaning in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*', *James Joyce Quarterly* 4 (1967) pp.331-342

Peter Nazareth, 'Is *A Grain of Wheat* a Socialist Novel?' *Literature and Society in Modern Africa: Essays on Literature* (Nairobi: East Africa Literature Bureau, 1972) pp. 128-154

Charles Nnolim, 'The Form and Function of the Folk Tradition in Achebe's Novels', *Ariel* 14:1 (1983) pp. 35-47

Joyce Carol Oates, 'The Tragedy of *Nostromo*' *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 9:1 (1975) pp. 5-22

E.N. Obiechina, 'Transition from Oral to Literary Tradition', *Presence Africaine* 63 (1967) pp.140-161

E. Obumselu, '*A Grain of Wheat*: Ngugi's Debt to Conrad', *Benin Review* 1 (1975), pp.80-91

Kolawole Ogungbesan, 'Simple Novels and Simplistic Criticism: The Problem of Style in the African Novel', *Asemka* 5 (1979) pp.24-40

Isidore Okpewho, 'Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*', *African Literature Today* 13 (1983) pp.1-23

Richard Poirer, 'Strange Gods in Jefferson, Mississippi: Analysis of *Absalom, Absalom!*' *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Absalom, Absalom!* (New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, 1971) pp.14-27

Richard Priebe, 'Kofi Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother* as an African Dirge', *Benin Review* 1 (1975) pp.95-111

Felicity Riddy, 'Language as a Theme in No Longer at Ease', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature 9, (1970) pp. 38-47. Also in B. Lindfors, and C.L. Innes op. cit. pp.150-159

Kenneth Schmitz, 'Community: The Elusive Unity', The Review of Metaphysics XXXVII:2 (1983) pp.243-264

Mark Schorer, 'Technique as Discovery', The Theory of the Novel, ed. Philip Stevick (New York: The Free Press, 1967) pp.65-84

Austin Shelton, 'The Palm-oil of Language: Proverbs in Chinua Achebe's Novels,' Modern Language Quarterly 30 (1969) pp. 86-111

Bob Sherrington, 'Metaphor and Narrative Meaning: Some African Examples', Essays and Monographs Series 1 (Adelaide: Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1982) pp.71 - 110

R.W. Short, 'Some Critical Terms of Henry James', PMLA, LXIX (1954) pp.1076-1084

Jack Stewart, 'Existence and Symbol in The Waves', Modern Fiction Studies 18:3 (1972) pp.433-447

Wole Soyinka, 'From a Common Back Cloth: A Reassessment of the African Literary Image', American Scholar XXXII:3 (1963) pp. 387-396

Peter Swiggart, 'Time in Faulkner's Novels', Modern Fiction Studies 1 (1955) pp.25-29

Helen Tiffin, 'Commonwealth Literature and Comparative Methodology', World Literature Written in English 23:1 (1984) pp.26-30

Patricia Tobin, 'The Time of Myth and History in Absalom, Absalom!' American Literature XLIII (1971-2) pp.97-107

Edgar Wright, 'African Literature 1: Problems of Criticism', The Journal of Commonwealth Literature 2 (1966) pp.103-112

Karl Zink, 'William Faulkner: Form as Experience', South Atlantic Quarterly, LIII (1954) pp.384-403

Robert H. Zoellner, 'Faulkner's Prose Style in Absalom, Absalom! American Literature XXX (1959) pp.486-502