

tutional and other legal rights mean very little unless they are constantly enforced and protected.

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T. Obinkaram Echewa. *The Crippled Dancer*. African Writers Series. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1986) 227 pp., \$7.50 paper.

At the end of *The Crippled Dancer*, Ajuzia asks, “Was everyone coincidentally and inadvertently carrying a bag packed by other people?” Like Browning’s Andrea del Sarto who says, “So free we seem, so fettered fast we are,” Ajuzia appears to accept the limitations fate and/or custom place upon the individual. Both men accept with reluctance, however, for both are free, creative spirits aware of the waste of their own talents.

From childhood on, Ajuzia has been menaced by his grandfather’s foes, the village chief and his adherents. Ajuzia, who has no basic interest in the feuding (over witchcraft, inheritance, power, property and social standing), and who is an excellent student and a near-free thinker, is forced into the conflict by people on both sides. The final resolution—a halfway win for the grandfather’s side—is hardly achieved as a result of Ajuzia’s acumen; chance and external interference are the major factors.

The events in Ajuzia’s life of frustrations are often humorously told to the reader. A narrative style, rich in folk sayings (often cryptic and even contradictory) gives the reader a feeling for the village life, somewhat exaggerated, but generally credible. There are some slow-moving passages and a bit of needless repetition, but the reader can easily survive them. The book is pleasant reading.

Like Andrea—and, indeed, like Voltaire’s *Candide*—Ajuzia, the Igbo, makes a gentle, philosophic comment:

O well . . . Life was truly a court case, and he, Ajuzia had best be like the crippled man of the popular proverb, and whether he had lost or won his case, he should go home swinging, swagging, and dipping as if he were dancing.

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