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METAPHYSICAL CONCEPTS IN WEST AFRICAN PROSE: SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE AND AESTHETIC IMPLICATIONS

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of western Ontario
London, Ontario
August, 1991

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ISBN 0-315-66313-8

Abstract

This dissertation examines how West African prose in English is informed and shaped by the underlying African world-view and its expression in the beliefs and practices of the ethnic group from which each writer originates. The world-view is of a cosmos controlled by multiple deities and spirits, a world in which the gods exist for man and in which power is not dichotomized as spiritual and physical, nor as good and evil. The study includes one autobiography and sixteen novels by eight writers from five ethnic backgrounds: Chinua Achebe (Igbo), Elechi Amadi (Ikwerre), Ayi Kwei Armah (Akan), Kofi Awoonor (Ewe), T.O. Echewa (Igbo), Buchi Emecheta (Igbo), Flora Nwapa (Igbo), and Wole Soyinka (Yoruba).

Each of the texts studied is written in the mode of realism but is centred in one or more metaphysical concepts or elements extant in west Africa. Forest spirits figure in Soyinka's childhood memoir _Aké_ and water spirits in Achebe's _Anthills_, Amadi's _The Concubine_, Armah's _The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born and Fragments_, Awoonor's _This Earth, My Brother..._, Nwapa's _Efuru_, and Soyinka's _The Interpreters_. The last-named, however, is focused on the Yoruba Pantheon, as is Soyinka's second novel, _Season of Anomy_. The Igbo _chi_ and the belief in reincarnation are paramount in Achebe's _Things Fall Apart_ and Emecheta's _The Joys of Motherhood_. The Igbo custom of _osu_ on which Emecheta's _The Bride Price_ and Amadi's _The Slave_ are centred also plays a role in Achebe's _No Longer_

at Ease. Priests are the major figures in Achebe's Arrow of God and Echewa's The Land's Lord, as are traditional Akan healers in Armah's The Healers.

The significance of these spiritual concepts is explained through material drawn from studies by African and Western philosophers, theologians, anthropologists, literary critics, and art historians and critics, as well as from autobiographies of West African public figures and from news reports of current events. Moreover, other writings by the authors of the texts discussed clarify their understanding of the key spiritual concepts.

The literary works are interpreted and evaluated from the Afrocentric point-of-view arrived at by this exploration of many diverse texts.

Dedicated

with love and gratitude

to

my sister

ISABELLE

without whose unflagging physical and moral support

I could never have completed this study

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to my advisor Dr. T.E. Tausky for sacrificing his own time to permit me to begin my academic study of African literature, and for challenging me to undertake this particular study. Above all, I am grateful for his unfailing moral and academic support which enabled me to pursue it until its completion.

As well, I acknowledge the valuable insights and suggestions provided by my second reader, Dr. R.F. Green.

Finally, I want to thank Ms. Cécile Daoust-Mellamphy for putting her clerical expertise at my service in the production of the manuscript.

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Orthography

The orthography of a number of West African languages requires both diacritical marks and tone markings. However, many of the secondary works consulted for this study, especially the chronologically early ones, use standard English orthography for all African words, and more recent studies vary widely in this regard. For this reason, and because the markings do not aid a reader unacquainted with the languages, I have retained these markings only when quoting from primary sources in which they are used; for example, for the Yoruba words in <u>Aké</u>.

Introduction

As a consequence of colonialism, much of contemporary African literature is written in European languages, but the metaphysical concepts out of which it arises are very different from the Greco-Roman and Hebraic-Christian ones on which Western literature is founded. As James Olney points out, while Western thought has been developing directly and consistently from the Greeks through the Renaissance to the present time, "African thought was developing in its own and different way on a continent where the effect of the Greco-Roman and Hebraic Christian traditions was almost nil" (Tell 11). A comprehensive understanding of Western literature requires, Northrop Frye insists, a thorough knowledge of the Bible and Classical Mythology, the two sources of the metaphysical concepts developed in the Western world (45-46). Likewise, a comprehensive understanding of African literature requires, among other things, a cognizance of the metaphysical concepts that evolved in Africa, concepts that led to a world-view very different from that held by the West. Hence, in the words of the Ghanaian writer Kofi Awoonor, "No critical approach to African writing in English, French, or Portuguese can ignore the aesthetics, concepts of time, ontological systems and perceptions of the world which most of the writers bring to their work" (Morell 140).

West Africa is peopled by diverse ethnic groups that share many or all of the following: "a contiguous territory, a common social and political structure and organisation, common religious institutions, a common material culture, a common language and very often a common genealogy, whether real or fictitious" (Wente-Lukas 1). Owing, however, to the European colonizers' division of Africa according to their own priorities and with complete disregard for the divisions among the indigenous inhabitants, the twentieth-century return to independence has found West Africans living in multi-lingual, multi-cultural nation-states whose only common language is the European one earlier foisted upon them, a language that has, of necessity, become the official language of the country.[1]

Among each of these peoples there has evolved, from the underlying African world-view, a cosmological belief system that is unique in many ways. To interpret the work of their writers, then, one must be aware of the specific religious beliefs peculiar to each group. It is therefore the purpose of the present study to explore the ways in which the prose of each writer is informed and shaped by the specific metaphysical concepts of the ethnic tradition from which he or she originates.

But first, the underlying world-view common to all of them needs to be understood. West African peoples have

perceived the cosmos as a terrestrial world controlled by multiple deities and spirits that inhabit it along with human beings who may communicate and interact with them through divination, and a corresponding spirit-world inhabited by ancestors awaiting reincarnation. The ancestors are respected, Awoonor explains, because "above all they exist in the spiritual state in which they know more than we do since they 'can see in the dark'" (Breast 50). Moreover, "Africa accepts the trinity of the dead, the living, and the yet unborn in the eternal cyclic order in which the rites of passage of the living form only an infinitesimal journey or stage" (Breast 50).

Three essential presuppositions distinguish the African world-view from that of the west. First, as the theologian John S. Mbiti emphasizes, in traditional African societies, "No line is drawn between the spiritual and the physical" (5). Secondly and similarly, African thought does not dichotomize metaphysical power. In the words of Sandra Barnes,

> [I]n the West, positive and negative--familiarly glossed as evil and good--can be divided into opposing parts and symbolized by Satan and God. In West Africa, positive and negative power is not separate. Power is singular, and therefore what we in the West see as dual and capable of being divided into two mystical notions cannot be divided

> in African thought. For the latter, power exists in a single supernatural representation. (Africa's Ogun 19)

Thirdly, Western and African assumptions about the requisite characteristics of a deity differ profoundly because, as the Ugandan poet Okot P'Bitek asserts in his treatise African Religions in Western Scholarship, "African deities are for man, and not man for them" (109); or, as Awoonor explains in The Breast of the Earth, "African society placed man at the centre of the universe" (50). Hence, in P'Bitek's words, "African peoples may describe their deities as 'strong' but not 'omnipotent'; 'wise' not 'omniscient'; 'old' not 'eternal', 'great' not 'omnipresent'" (88). Therefore, P'Bitek concludes:

> The Greek metaphysical terms are meaningless in African thinking. . . . The African deities of the books, clothed with the attributes of the Christian God, are, in the main, creations of the students of African religions. They are all beyond recognition to the ordinary Africans in the countryside. (88)

Awoonor explains that

> the African assigns to the Creator God a certain degree of distance and unapproachability, not because he considers Him unconcerned but rather

> because he thinks of Him in his primal ancestral role as the supreme paterfamilias who must not be bothered with the petty details of the universe. (Breast 51)

The minor deities, appointed by the Supreme God, "intervene and interfere in the ordering of the spiritual community in which man and the forces of nature are one and interdependent" (Awoonor Breast 51-52). As Emmanuel Obiechina points out in Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel, religious and mystical attitudes towards nature are more appropriate for the rural communities of West Africa than are romantic or aesthetic ones:

> Nature is so overpowering and so intimately connected with basic survival that it has to be seen largely in terms of metaphysical forces to be conciliated and coaxed to extend their beneficent influences to man. . . . Where there is little scientific knowledge it is not surprising that natural phenomena should seem to have divine and metaphysical powers. (48)

The minor deities, as Awoonor explains, "function as consultants to the omniscience of the Creator for order, health, longevity, success, good harvest, rain, avoidance and averting of disaster, and peace among men" (Breast 151-52).

The priest-mediums who set them up "function as their spokesmen, oracles, and prophets" (Breast 151-52). The essence of the Creator who sends these deities "is caught and reposited by the priest and enshrined in any natural object or in a carving. This object, or focus, is not itself sacred; it can be destroyed or renewed at will" (Breast 151-52).

For the African, in the words of Dominique Zahan, the cosmos is "a world which 'speaks,'" in which he finds

> a partner with which he can enter into communication, with which he must in fact maintain an almost constant dialogue if he wants to be informed about himself. This is because the macrocosm contains in itself all the potentialities of the microcosm which is man. . . . Consequently, to know oneself it is necessary for one to know the messages which the universe continuously sends. It is through these messages that one can interpret one's own destiny. (81)

Hence comes the indispensable role of diviners and priests in West African life and its literature. "It is the diviner," Zahan explains, "who holds the code which allows the decipherment of the various messages intended for man, the society in which he lives, and all else related to his destiny" (81). As for priests, their principal function, as Wole Soyinka tells us, is to reinforce by observances, rituals

> and mytho-historical recitals the existing consciousness of cosmic entanglement in the community, and to arbitrate in the sometimes difficult application of such truths to domestic and community undertaking. (Myth 54)

From man's "cosmic entanglement in the community" arises a consequence that Awoonor describes as follows:

> [M]an's proper function is to exist according to the natural laws of the universe; if there is disaster, then it means that one or more of these laws has been broken and the harmonic chain is shattered. An individual's transgressions bring disaster upon the group. So the group, within whose womb the individual exists through blood and lineage, must as a whole be subjected to the act of cleansing and expiation. (Breast 52)

The all-encompassing world-view just outlined prevails throughout West Africa, but with widely differing ritual and social manifestations.

It is true that the literary works examined here have been written within the last fifty years and that, long before this, both Islam and Christianity had become well-entrenched and powerful forces in West Africa. But it is essential to

realize that the rapidity with which West Africa has been plunged into the twentieth-century westernized world has meant that the old, indigenous ways of thinking co-exist with the new, alien ones to such an extent that the monotheistic religions have assumed an African configuration. As Geoffrey Parrinder reminds us, in the last century the tropical areas of Africa have gone through "the social and educational changes that came to Europe over the centuries since the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution" (African Traditional Religions 142). Therefore it is not surprising that "[e]ven in the towns, and among those who have accepted the new religions, there is a great substratum of traditional beliefs which must never be left out of account in an assessment of religious life" (143). And Mbiti asserts: "Beliefs connected with magic, witchcraft, the spirits and the living-dead are areas of traditional religions which are in no danger of an immediate abandonment" (274). Nor, we may remind ourselves, has the Western world entirely rid itself of irrational and seemingly contradictory beliefs.

As for the West African writers themselves, John Updike perceptively notes: "A village-born, mission-taught, Oxford-anointed African has lived a synopsis of human history. He has outgrown prehistory so quickly that nothing has had time to die, the village gods, the Christian God, and the modern absence of God coexist in him" ("Books" 84).

Donatus Nwoga discerns in this background a source of "richness" in the writer's work:

> Not only does the conflict [of beliefs] provide some thematic interest, it also provides images of deep reverberation and, above all, creates an extra dimension for literature by making it possible for modern West African writers to deal with contemporary situations in mythic terms. ("Conceptual" 284)

Thus the Nigerian writer and critic Isidore Okpewho speaks of "the mythic texture of modern African literature" (Myth 263), but the reader must avoid imposing on it Western assumptions about "myth" and "reality". For a twentieth-century Western reader Greek naiads like Cyrene and fauns like Pan have no reality outside the world of literature. But in West Africa, as Parrinder tells us, "Most people still believe in spirits of the forests, hills and streams, even if they do not worship them" (African Traditional Religions 146). Hence forest spirits were real to Soyinka in his childhood as he describes it in Aké, just as water spirits are real to the characters of Elechi Amadi's novel The Concubine and Flora Nwapa's Efuru. Richard Priebe recounts an incident at a literary conference in which an African scholar was upset with the way Priebe was using the term "myth" in a paper. Priebe

explains: "He felt I was looking at African myths with an attitude that I would not assume in studying the myths of my own society. In effect, he was saying 'What you call myths are my sacred beliefs'" (Myth 2).

The original purpose of European realism, according to Ursula Brumm, was "to investigate and depict the concrete and specific form of reality at a particular time in a particular place" (357). Since in African culture, as Soyinka maintains, "the mystical and the visionary are merely areas of reality like any other" (Myth 65), these will be included in realistic works. Moreover, as Emmanuel Obiechina insists, "realism is determined by what people apprehend as real and their mode of apprehending it" (Culture 177). Thus, in an African novel, the thought processes and behaviour of a character or an incident in plot development may seem implausible to a non-African reader but may be highly realistic when viewed within its ethnic milieu. In "The Conceptual Background," Nwoga points out that in African literature "motivations resulting from non-material and non-psychologically explainable reasons are accepted as sufficient . . . because any community in which folklore, mythology, and religion are still "vibrant parts of the imaginative framework" is "bound to produce work which inclines towards the archetypal" (284).

African writers in English are the heirs not only of two religious legacies but also of two narrative traditions, that of Western literature and that of the vast and ancient oral inheritance that is their birthright. Accordingly, it is not only the African world-view but the conventions of this oral treasury that preclude a rigid western definition of what constitutes realism. European realism, Brumm says,

> owes its origin to rejecting the paradigm that had for centuries determined literary forms; fable, legend, myth, and the traditional, typical stories and characters from the storehouse of world literature that were being constantly reworked (i.e., the "archetypes" that have become so popular again today). (156-57)

The Igbo novelist begins from a different perspective, as Chinua Achebe explains:

> Since Igbo people did not construct a rigid and closely argued system of thought to explain the universe and the place of man in it, preferring the metaphor of myth and poetry, anyone seeking an insight into their world must seek it along their own way. Some of the ways are folk-tales, proverbs, proper names, rituals and festivals. ("Chi" 94)

Hence the inclusion of such features in Achebe's novels contributes to their realism rather than detracts from it.

Furthermore, Mazisi Kunene asserts that in African oral literature "Men and women in society are seen . . . as individuals perpetually interlinked in a cosmic context and cosmic continuity" (200). Thus, whereas Brumm depicts the European realistic novel as being "against types, against the changeless decked out in varying guises, against the authority of the eternal and the accepted" (357), James Olney suggests that African written literature is "representational of the general, the communal, the essential, the spiritual, of the typical and the archetypical," with "a reality transcending the particular individual and the single moment of the present" (Tell 181-82).

For the following study, I have chosen to examine long prose works in which metaphysical concepts are of paramount importance but which, nevertheless, are written in realistic mode. The following "working definition of realism in literature" offered by David Lodge is a particularly useful one for this study: "the representation of experience in a manner which approximates closely to descriptions of similar experience in nonliterary texts of the same culture" (25). Hence, for information on the spiritual significance of the metaphysical concepts central to the literary works being considered, I have had recourse to the treatises of African

and Western anthropologists, art historians and critics, theologians, philosophers, and literary critics, as well as to autobiographies of eminent West African public figures and to news reports of current events. Equally important for my purposes are the authors' explications of the key concepts in interviews and in their essays, poetry, drama, and non-fiction prose works. Wherever possible I have also compared these African concepts with Western metaphysical beliefs that can be traced to the same human questionings.

With the conceptual understanding obtained by taking an Afrocentric point-of-view, I have then analysed, interpreted, and evaluated sixteen novels and one autobiography, attempting to discover the aesthetic purposes served by the presence of the major metaphysical concepts in each work. One, but only one, of these purposes is to represent the reality of Nigerian and Ghanaian life, not only in pre-colonial and colonial times, but in the present, during which they continue to be a fundamental part of that reality.

Included in the seventeen works chosen for detailed study are twelve by four major writers of West Africa, major in both the quality and quantity of their creative output: three Nigerians, Chinua Achebe (Igbo), Elechi Amadi (Ikwerre), Wole Soyinka (Yoruba); and one Ghanaian, Ayi Kwei Armah (Akan). The other five novels, by less well-known writers, have been included because of the central importance in them of one or

more of the metaphysical concepts that are keys to understanding of the twelve works first selected. These five are by three Nigerian writers, all Igbo: T.A. Echewa, Buchi Emecheta, and Flora Nwapa; and the Ghanaian Kofi Awoonor of Ewe ancestry. Since the geographically-contiguous Igbo and Ikwerre are culturally very similar, only four distinct religious traditions underlie and permeate the works of the eight writers just named; and all the other writers whose works are referred to briefly come as well from one of these four ethnic groups.[2]

The study begins with the only non-fiction work included, Wole Soyinka's memoir Aké: The Years of Childhood. In discussing why autobiography has lately become "a popular, even fashionable, study in the academic world," Olney suggests that its special quality is that it "renders in a peculiarly direct and faithful way the experience and the vision of a people, which is the same experience and the same vision lying behind and informing all the literature of that people" ("Autobiography" 13). Hence it "provides a most convenient way" to make the "primary adjustment from the literary assumptions of the West to the literary and other inter-related assumptions of Africa" (Olney Tell 12). Thus Chapter I--"The Spirit World of a Yoruba Child"--provides, with its descriptions of wood spirits, as fully believed in by

Soyinka's Christian mother as by the child Wole, an appropriate prelude to Chapter II--"Water Spirits"--an examination of seven novels from the four distinct ethnic traditions represented by this study, in each of which water spirit figures play a major role.

Next follow two chapters on concepts of destiny. In Chapter III--"Concepts of Destiny" I: Chi, Reincarnation, Osu--five novels by Igbo and Ikwerre writers are considered. The chi has equivalents among the Yoruba, Ijaw, Ewe, and Akan, and the belief in reincarnation is as widespread throughout West Africa as the belief in nature spirits. Only the concept of osu is peculiar to the Igbo-Ikwerre. Chapter IV--"Concepts of Destiny II: Priests and Healers"--looks at three novels by Igbo and Akan writers, in each of which one or more of these figures, omni-present throughout West Africa, function as protagonists.

Finally, the study turns to two novels by Wole Soyinka to discover how he invokes the metaphysical essence of the Yoruba Pantheon for the purpose of social criticism of contemporary Nigeria. Also found in these novels are water-spirit, priest, and healer figures which have spiritual and aesthetic affinities with, and differences from, those discussed in earlier chapters. Thus Chapter V--"The Yoruba Pantheon and Wole Soyinka"--ends the study as it began, with West Africa's

most distinguished writer, the 1986 winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Notes

1. In Nigeria alone, six major language groups--Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Kanuri, Fula and Efik-Ibibio--account for 85 per cent of the population, but more than fifty other language groups account for the remaining 15 per cent (Obiechina "Problem" 13).

2. Both the Igbo and Ikwerre originate in southeastern Nigeria. The Yoruba are the dominant ethnic group of southwestern Nigeria, as the Akan are of Ghana. The Ewe live on the border of Ghana and Togoland.

CHAPTER I

The Spirit World of a Yoruba Child: Wole Soyinka's Aké

The memoir Aké: The Years of Childhood by Wole Soyinka is a work which, in the words of Obi Maduakor, "underscores the mystical, the inexplicable, and the irrational as permanent features of the African world-view" (153). Surprisingly, then, although Maduakor recognizes that "[t]he mystical world is made real in Ake [sic]," he claims that it is "treated with scepticism" and that "Soyinka is not a part of that world" (162). This unsubstantiated and contradictory assessment possibly arises from Maduakor's misconception that Aké is written in an "impressionistic mode of characterization" (166) in which "[c]haracters are not seen in action most of the time but are simply described to us" (166). On the contrary, as James Gibbs sees, "Aké is "obviously a dramatist's autobiography, with dialogue and characters ready for the stage" (14). For this reason, the narrator and protagonist rarely assume separate identities, and if "[t]he mystical world is made real" (Maduakor 162), it can only be so because the narrator-protagonist is part of that world.

Soyinka has explained that the genesis of Aké lay in his initial desire to write a biography of his remarkable uncle the Reverend O.A. Ransome-Kuti known as Daodu, "yet I was

haunted by not just his personality but the whole atmosphere which he with others inhabited, and finally I thought I would just try to recapture that period in its own right" ("Seminar" 513). Recapture it he does, not fixed as in a photograph, but alive as if filmed with all its sound, action, and mystic ambience.

In the works of dramatic autobiographers, William L. Howarth points out, "characters, scenes, and events dominate the narrative, not ideas" (98). Just so is Aké dominated by characters: Soyinka's mother and father, Wild Christian and Essay; Father, his paternal grandfather; his Aunt Beere and Uncle Daodu. Scenes and events of momentous import to young Wole--accidents, misdemeanours, adventures in which he is the dominant figure--give way in later years to significant community events in which he is an observer or only peripherally involved. Dialogue, an essential element of the dramatic mode, abounds, and Soyinka insists on its authenticity:

> [O]nce some triggering mechanism--some smell or some taste, for instance--set the process in motion and I succeeded in reentering the Aké of my childhood, then all the characters were there again, as they had been, speaking as they spoke. . . . Once I was back in that world, I had total, total recall. . . . Yes, this is all the way it

> was, including the conversations. ("Seminar" 525)

Howarth notes a further characteristic of the dramatic autobiographer: "If everything in life serves the artist, then he will value his native soil as highly as his personal talent. The dramatic autobiographer always pays special tribute to his earthly locale, whether Florence, Dublin, or Paterson" (104)--or Aké, we may add. Soyinka tells us that, in writing his account of his early years,

> it didn't make sense to me to spend time on it unless I could capture it from the viewpoint of a child--the way I sensed : at the time. Obviously it would not be the same language that I would have used at the time, but one could at least attempt to enter that world as one experienced it through the senses and physical place. ("Seminar" 514)

Thus Soyinka begins his loving description of the world within the walls of the parsonage compound through the mind of a child so young that this "sprawling, undulating terrain" is still "all of Aké" (1). Only later does he realize that Aké is the rest of what can be seen over the walls.

Outside the text of any childhood autobiography the distance between the adult narrator and the child whose experience he is remembering is very great, but within the text that distance depends to a considerable extent on the narrative mode. As Howarth explains, because the principal tool of an author following dramatic principles is action, not

exposition, "his persona usually blurs its narrator and protagonist roles onto one" (101). Moreover, Soyinka is a poet as well as a dramatist and Aké, like all his prose works, is as much poetry as prose. Speaking of poetic autobiographers, Howarth states: "One of their special passions is description . . . arranged in long and intensely imagined catalogues. The personal remains stable during these passages" (111). Such catalogues in Aké include descriptions of the goods sold by Hausa traders (47), the night smells and sounds of Aké (149), and the multifarious market foods (153-54). In an autobiographic work with both dramatic and poetic qualities, then, one can expect that the narrator and protagonist will merge more often than diverge, and this blurring of roles proves to be the case in Aké. Schlimoth-Kenan suggests that focalizer is a more accurate term than protagonist to identify the person who is "a character within the represented world" (73). Hereafter, for the sake of clarity, I shall refer to the child focalizer of Aké as Wole and to the adult narrator, when he has clearly separated himself from this child, as Soyinka.

The adult narrator very seldom intrudes into the world of Wole. He pauses to mourn the loss of some of the physical aspects of that childhood world, describing their present-day replacements in scathing terms. The mood in these passages is one of what Richard Coe calls "'black' nostalgia"; that is,

"shot through with bitterness, resentment, and disgust" over the annihilation of beauty of "an ancient way of life" by civilization and "progress" (64). Such moments occur most frequently in Chapter X where Soyinka contrasts the varied sounds and foods of his childhood with the electronic medley and "synthesized feed" (157) of the present.

However, Soyinka leaves it to Wole to show us the numinous aspects of his world. The kind of "'black' nostalgia" expressed by Soyinka had been felt by Wole when the Sunday-School teacher, seeking for a visual image for the size of the whale that swallowed Jonah, forever demystified his "own very secret habitat" (64), his "own very private rock" (64):

> For after that, the patient, placid presenc hitherto unnamed, became Jonah. Permanently. Its mystery became complicated in a world of biblical tall tale. . . . Jonah was bare, solitary and private. Until the school teacher turned it into a fairy tale. Swallowed and sealed up in a whale's belly! It did not sound wholly improbable but it did belong in a world of fables, of the imagination, of Aladdin's lamp and Open Sesame. Whereas before . . . I experienced the passing of a unique confidant, the loss of a complete subsuming presence. (64)

It is significant that, for Wole, mystery was not equated with tall tales, fairy-tales, or the imagination. Nor did he ever thus restrict African improbabilities to "a world of fables".

The opening sentences of Aké take us immediately into the mind of a child struggling with the mysteries of intermingling metaphysical worlds: "More than mere loyalty to the parsonage give birth to a puzzle, and a resentment, that God should choose to look down on his own pious station, the parsonage compound, from the profane heights of Itoko" (1). Wole was growing up in the Christian world of his parents and, at the same time, in the traditional Yoruba world in which the Alake (king), a maternal relative, "was compelled by his position to follow the orisa [the Yoruba gods]" (205), and in which Wole's paternal grandfather "belonged in that same province of beliefs as the ogboni [devotees of the Earth spirit]" (139). In the compound, the Canon's house had its back turned "to the world of spirits and ghommids who inhabited the thick woods and chased home children who had wandered too deeply in them for firewood, mushrooms and snails" (2), thus forming "a bulwark against the menace and siege of the wood spirits" (2). While Wole's maternal uncle Sanya was "acknowledged by all to be an òrò [wood spirit]" (5), his headmaster father "had the habit of speaking as if he was on first-name terms with God" (21). In the child's imagination, God strode from the heights of Itoko over the "babbling markets" straight into St. Peter's church, "afterwards visiting the parsonage for tea

with the Canon," then "paused briefly at the afternoon service, but reserved his most formal, exotic presence for the evening service which, in his honour, was always held in the English tongue" (1). So far, Wole's God seems more English than African. But the fusion of this God with uniquely African mysteries appears in the next sentence:

> The organ took on a dark, smoky sonority at evening service, and there was no doubt that the organ was adapting its normal sounds to accompany God's own sepulchral responses, with its timbre of egúngún [ancestral spirits in masquerade], to those prayers that were offered to him. (1)

Wole had watched the yearly festival of the egúngún over the wall and "knew that the egúngún were spirits of the dead" (31). He did not think this, but knew it. When one of the spirits startled him by addressing him playfully in Yoruba in words which meant "Greetings, son of the Senior Teacher" (31), an adult watcher assured him that "it was only natural that the dead should know all about the living ones" (31). Wole was delighted when one of his school-friends promised to lead his family's egúngún to Wole's house at the next festival. Eagerly, Wole enquired if he himself could come back as an egúngún if he died and resisted the unwelcome answer: "I've never heard of any Christian becoming an egúngún" (32). He then wondered whether the egúngún spoke English in their world and decided that the figures of three white men in the

stained-glass window in the church were "dressed in robes which were very clearly egúngún robes" (32). The fact that their faces were exposed, "very unlike our own egúngún" (32), was perhaps "something peculiar to the country from which these white people came," for his friend had explained that there were many different kinds of egúngún. Satisfied, Wole then planned to make the St. Peter egúngún come out of the ground in the church cemetery, but his friend still doubted that a white Christian could be an egúngún. For Wole, without the egúngún St. Peter, "the parade of ancestral masquerades at Aké would always seem incomplete" (34).

The following year, bleeding from a potentially blinding playground accident, Wole was convinced that he "had obviously lost an eye" (34). Wondering if he would die, he tried to recall if he "had ever seen a one-eyed masquerade among the egúngún" (34). When he opened his undamaged eye, he saw "a semi-circle of teachers" looking at him as if he were "already a masquerade, the opidan type, about to transform himself into something else" and touched himself "to ensure that this had not already happened, so watchful were all the pairs of eyes" (35). Thus, in his very early years, Wole's concept of death was a traditional Yoruba one, not a Christian one.

Similarly, whenever he passed Bishopscourt, where the long-dead Bishop Crowther had once lived, he saw "a gnomic face with popping eyes whose formal photograph had first

stared . . . from the frontispiece of his life history" (4). The Bishop "sat silently . . . his robes twined through and through with the lengthening tendrils of the bougainvillaea" (4-5). Next, Wole "saw" the eyes "turned to sockets" (5). When he remembered another photograph with a silver chain vanishing into a waistcoat pocket and wondered what was at the end of the chain, the figure lifted out a round, silver pocket-watch and pressed a button:

> [T]he lid opened, revealing . . . a deep cloud-filled space. Then he winked one eye, and it fell from his face into the bowl of the watch. He winked the other and this joined its partner in the watch. He snapped back the lid, nodded again and his head went bald, his teeth disappeared and the skin pulled backward till the whitened cheekbones were exposed. Then he stood up and . . . moved a step towards me. I fled homewards. (5)

These "strange transformations" of the Bishop confirmed for the child that "the Bishops, once they were dead, joined the world of spirits and ghosts" (5).

Although Soyinka, as usual, makes no comment on this experience, the reader may conjecture that Wole must have been listening to those Yoruba stories in which figures disintegrate piece by piece. For example, one of the triggering incidents in Amos Tutuola's <u>The Palm-Wine Drinkard</u>

is that of the beautiful "complete" gentleman whom a lady follows from the market into "an endless forest" where he returns each of his hired body parts until he is reduced to a skull (18-21).[1] Similarly, in Tutuola's The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town, the protagonist meets the Crazy Removable-Headed Wild Man, on whose ugly head the ears are "temporarily attached" and the eyes are "removable as well" (74).

Soyinka has said that it was very easy for him to understand the literature of Tutuola and of D.O. Fagunwa, a novelist in Yoruba, because "it formed a continuum not merely with my own physical environment but with the tales that I was told as a child--side by side with the biblical [sic] stories which we had been told in Sunday School or by my father before going to sleep" ("Seminar" 515). In Aké, one of these bedtime stories about gourds without arms or legs that pursued Tortoise over rocks and rivers made Wole, on his next expedition through the woods, keep "one fearful eye on anything bulbous" (81-82). In his awareness that he was resisting some of his mother's demands on him, he imagined that even the "velvet-cased oval fruits" on the baobab trees might rain down on him and pursue him, fearing, "If Wild Christian prayed hard enough, perhaps it could happen" (82).

Not only in bedtime stories, but in daily life, it was taken for granted that spirits, although not usually visible, were present and functioning. Wild Christian confirmed that

her great-uncle, the Reverend J.J. Ransome-Kuti, "had actually ordered back several ghommids [forest spirits] in his lifetime" (5). An emissary of the spirits had complained to him about the children of his household: "They didn't mind our coming to the woods, even at night," Wild Christian explained, "but we were to stay off any area beyond the rocks and that clump of bamboo by the stream" (6). Feeling quite safe with her brother Sanya (believed by everyone to be an òrò), the children disobediently returned to the place to gather snails, to be terrified by a "sort of light, like a ball of fire" which "began to glow in the distance" (7). Wild Christian remembered,

> It was only this figure of fire that I saw and he was still very distant. Yet I heard him distinctly, as if he had many mouths which were pressed against my ears. Every moment, the fireball loomed larger and larger.
>
> . . . That iwin [a ghommid that lives in the ground as well as the trees] followed us all the way to the house. (7)

Her uncle turned back the pursuing spirit by holding out his Bible and ordering it to go back in the name of God. There is no doubt in the mind of Wole's mother that she and the other children were chased by an actual and potentially dangerous spirit, a conviction tempered only by a belief in the greater power of Christianity with its own amulet, the Bible.

She further recounted to the children incidents proving that her brother was an _òrò_. Most convincing was the occasion in the woods in which she heard him "chattering away to no one that she could see" (10). Frightened, she insisted that they return home, but she saw that "Sanya appeared to be trying to follow her but was being prevented, as if he was being pulled back by invisible hands" (10), and she heard him saying, "Leave me alone. Can't you see I have to go home?" That evening, when he became very ill with a high fever and delirium, an old woman, a Christian convert, ordered the preparation of a _sààrà_, an appeasement feast for offended spirits, in which the excited household expected to share. Instead, the food was left in the sick boy's room, which was then locked. When the other children eavesdropped at the doors and windows, they could hear Sanya offering food to others, and when the room was opened, six hours later, all the food was gone and Sanya was sleeping peacefully, free from fever.

It was difficult for Wole to conceive of his Uncle Sanya as an _òrò_ until he followed his usual method of associating one mystery with another. In a 1987 seminar on _Aké_ Soyinka explained that as a child he constructed and integrated his disparate experiences into his "entire cosmological universe":

> [A]s to the cosmic totality: I have to confess to you that this child I'm describing to you was

> really very heavily impregnated not merely by the fragmented sensibilities of his totality, in other words the particularization of it, but even more by a desire or a need constantly to link one thing to another. (518)

Thus at first Wole felt that Uncle Sanya "seemed far too active to be an òrò" and for a long time "confused him with a local scoutmaster who was nicknamed Activity" (12). This confusion led to clarification:

> I began to watch the Wolf Cubs who seemed nearest to the kind of secret company which our Uncle Sanya may have kept as a child. As their tight little faces formed circles on the lawns of Aké, building little fires, exchanging secret signs with hands and twigs, with stones especially placed against one another during their jamboree, I felt I had detected the hidden companions who crept in unseen through chinks in the door and even from the ground, right under the aggrieved noses of Wild Christian and the other children in J.J.'s household, and feasted on 50 wraps of àgidi and a huge bowl of èkuru [stew]. (12)

The ambience of this world that Soyinka has evoked is very strange to a Western reader. It is true that childhood fears of lurking unseen presences occur commonly in Western society (the bedtime "something-in-the-closet" syndrome), but

these fears take a different form from those experienced by an African child. Moreover, adult concurrence in the conviction that a sometimes-menacing, sometimes-benevolent spirit world co-inhabits and interacts with ours is rare in present-day Western society.

For example, fears of trees and dark woods are reported in Canadian reminiscences of childhood but are not linked to specific beings acknowledged by the community to exist. In The Book of Small, the Canadian painter and writer Emily Carr describes her childhood fear of a tree covered with ivy:

> It was not a very big tree, but the heavy bunch of ivy that hung about it made it look immense. The leaves of the ivy formed a dense dark surface about a foot away from the bole of the tree, for the leaves hung on long stems. The question was--what filled the mysterious space between the leaves and the tree? Away above the ivy, at the top, the bare branches of the tree waved skinny arms, as if they warned you that something terrible was there. (29-30)

The child Small (Emily) heard her father say to her mother, "The ivy has killed that tree," and misunderstood his meaning: "She would not have thrust her arm into that space for anything" (30). Even before the day that she found a dead sparrow under the tree, she called it "The Killing Tree" (30). When it was finally chopped down, and the ivy piled ready for

burning, Small asked: "Mr. Jack, when you chopped the ivy off the tree did you find anything in there?" (31). The child had felt immense fear of some dread unknown existing behind the ivy, but the unknown had had no concrete image or conceptual basis.

Another Canadian writer, L.M. Montgomery, in her brief autobiography The Alpine Path, describes fear of a woods similar to the fear experienced by the child Emily Carr--a fear with no object. Lucy was frequently sent to buy household supplies from a small shop no more than a quarter of a mile through the woods, but to her the walk "seemed endless." She puzzles,

> I cannot tell just what I was afraid of. I knew there was nothing in the wood worse than rabbits or as the all-wise grown-ups told me "worse than yourself." It was just the old, primitive fear handed down to me from ancestors who, in the dawn of time, were afraid of the woods with good reason. With me, it was a blind, unreasoning terror. And this was in daylight; to go through those woods after dark was something simply unthinkable. (44)

Again, the differences from the experience of the child Wole are worth noting. The adults of Lucy's world did not share her attitude to the wood; her fear had no focus; and she "knew" there was nothing to be feared in the wood, whereas Wole knew otherwise.

During the seminar referred to earlier, Soyinka asserted that, although as a child he constantly questioned and challenged the attitudes and beliefs of adults, he never questioned the "numinous properties" of the physical world (514), and that he experiences them still, but in a more profound way:

> I consider myself to have been enormously enriched by looking at trees and discerning a whole spirit world within those trees, which are outside but sometimes in or inwardly related with the human society either in a menacing or benevolent way. (515)

For Wole, the tree spirits were external; Soyinka has internalized them. In neither aspect is their reality questioned.

Montgomery's memories of the trees of her childhood and her continued feeling of affinity with them in adulthood is expressed very differently from Soyinka's:

> I was grateful that my childhood was spent in a spot where there were many trees, trees of personality, planted and tended by hands long dead, bound up with everything of joy or sorrow that visited our lives. When I have "lived with" a tree for many years it seems to me like a beloved human companion. (_Alpine_ 33)

Montgomery invests the tree-world with friendly intimacy, whereas Soyinka stresses its other-than-human quality.

As Coe points out, "[f]or the European child, the experience of Otherness is haphazard and chancy; for the African child, it is institutionalized" (228). One should add that for the African child the humanly familiar and the Other are co-existent. A child may be at the same time one's daily companion and òrò like Sanya, or abiku like Wole's playmate Bukola. An abiku is a spirit that enters the mother's womb to be born and then dies to rejoin its spirit companions, repeating the cycle endlessly, often with the same mother. Bukola was the only daughter of Mrs. B., one of Wole's "many mothers" (15). Her parents' efforts to keep her in this world were seen in Bukola's dress and facial appearance:

> Amulets, bangles, tiny rattles and dark copper-twist rings earthed her through ankles, fingers, wrists and waist. She knew she was àbikú. The two tiny cicatrices on her face were also part of the many counters to enticements by her companions in the other world. (16)

Wole sensed the Otherness in Bukola:

> When we threw our voices against the school walls of Lower Parsonage and listened to them echo from a long distance, it seemed to me that Bukola was one of the denizens of that other world where the voice

> was caught, sieved, re-spun and cast back in diminishing copies. (15-16)

To his inquiry about whether Bukola could fall into a trance on request, she replied that she could, but only if he were sure that he could call her back from the other world. She believed that she could hear her spirit companions pleading for her to come and play with them, and she explained to Wole:

> [S]ometimes my father and mother will deny me something. So then I may hear my other companions saying, "You see, they don't want you there, that is what we've been telling you." They may say that and then I get a feeling of wanting to go away. I really _want_ to go away. I always tell my parents, I will go. I will go if you don't do so and so. If they don't, I just faint. (17-18)

For this reason, "Like all _àbikú_ she was privileged, apart. Her parents dared not scold her for long or earnestly" (16).

On one occasion, Bukola told her parents that her spirit companions had asked her to have a _sààra_ for them. When her parents refused, it took her "longer than usual" (18) to come back, and the _sààra_ was provided. Wole felt sorry for Bukola's mother, whom he loved: "Mrs. B. was too kind a woman to be plagued with such an awkward child. Yet we knew she was not being cruel: an _àbikú_ was that way, they could not help their nature" (18). Thus he did not question the reality of

àbikú, but he was puzzled that at the resulting sààra Bukola "ate at our mat, from the same dish, there was nothing other-wordly [sic] about her" and he "had not seen her giving food secretly to unseen companions, yet the sààra was for them" (18). Soyinka sums up Wole's feelings: "Natural as it all seemed, there was also a vague disquiet that this was too much power for a child to wield over her parents" (18).

Some lonely Western children, of course, create imaginary friends, but no-one else believes in their existence. In her Journals, Montgomery describes how an optical illusion provided her with such friends:

> In our sitting room there has always been a big bookcase used as a china cabinet. In each door is a large, oval glass, dimly reflecting the room. When I was very small each of my reflections in these glass doors were "real folk" to my imagination. . . . As far back as consciousness runs Katie Maurice and Lucy Gray lived in the fairy room behind the bookcase. Katie was a little girl like myself and I loved her dearly. I would stand before that door and prattle to her for hours, giving and receiving confidences. . . .
>
> Lucy Gray was grown up--and a widow! . . . She was always sad and always had dismal stories of her troubles to relate to me; nevertheless, I always visited her scrupulously in turn, lest her

> feelings should be hurt, because she was jealous of Katie, who also disliked her. All this sounds like the veriest nonsense, but I cannot describe how real it was to me. I never passed the room without a wave of my hand to Katie in the glass door at the other end. (306)

The differences from the experiences related in Akẹ́ are telling. For Montgomery, although they lived in "the fairy room behind the bookcase," Katie and Lucy were always people. They were obviously psychological, as well as physical, projections of herself. As well, in recalling how "real" they were to her as a child, her older self remarks, "All this sounds like the veriest nonsense." Nowhere in Akẹ́ does Soyinka make any equivalent comment.

On the contrary, elsewhere Soyinka has explained the Yoruba belief that the àbikú has "a certain area of awareness, of consciousness which is closed to the normal human being" as a result of its constantly passing through the "area of transition, through the unborn to the living world, from the living world to the dead." In this repeated journey, the àbikú "acquires a certain honing of his psychic essence" (Morell 18). After the death of his baby sister Folasade, Wole found the other-worldliness of the àbikú child Bukola soothing to his distressed spirit. Inexplicably at odds with himself and with most of those around him, he sought out the àbikú:

> Bukola knew how to be silent. Even when she spoke, she transmitted a world of silence into which I fitted.
>
> . . . I watched her intently, seeking something that would answer barely formed questions. She glided over the earth like a being who barely deigned to accommodate the presence of others. With her, I found some peace. (100)

A third kind of human/suprahuman being also inhabited the world of Aké--witches, wizards, and sorcerers. One day when the four-and-a-half-year-old Wole marched abroad after a passing police band, he turned off into a market area where medicines were being sold. Presiding over stalls with dried barks and leaves and plain whitened skulls were aged women with wizened hands, of whom he suddenly became frightened, experiencing "shock at their flat, emptied breasts," and wondering, "Were these the witches we heard so much about? No breast that I had seen before had appeared so flat, it did not seem human" (42). When one of these women smiled at him, "her face, which did not look like the face of the living while it was at rest, suddenly turned into the face of the shrunken heads which dangled just above her head" and Wole "turned and fled" (43). His panic rose from his already-instilled fears about the kidnapping of children for witches' rituals, the thought having occurred to him that "there was no certainty whatsoever that the skulls were really the skulls of animals.

They could have been the skulls of young children who had been foolish enough to wander too close to the witches' stalls" (43).

Again, childhood fears of kidnappers are not restricted to African children, but in the Western world these fears arise from strictly human causes. The Canadian writer Jean Little, in her autobiography *Little by Little*, tells of such an experience. Her older brother Jamie, alarmed that she had accepted a ride with a stranger, warned her that kidnappers steal children and imprison them in dark cellars, threatening to kill them if their parents do not pay the ransom. He made the warning as gruesome as possible.

One day when her brother was ill and the very near-sighted Jean had therefore, for the first time, to travel alone on a street-car, she was afraid that she had missed her home stop. But when she had almost gathered enough courage to ask the man beside her for help, she saw the headline on his newspaper:

> KIDNAPPER SOUGHT
>
> The words leapt out at me. I stopped breathing. Kidnappers! There really were kidnappers. Until that moment, I had believed, deep down, that Jamie had invented them simply to terrorize me. He hadn't.
>
> I did not say a word. (64)

No similar suggestion of original disbelief "deep down" occurs in the account of Wole's experience.

Wole did not question that supra-normal powers could be appropriated and used by human beings. After enacting the role of The Magician in a school operetta, he believed that he had gained "a formidable weapon" in his "armoury of incantations against the unknown" (150). In the operetta, the Magician was "self-declared both 'magician' and 'wizard,'" a "baffling contradiction" to Wole, for whom the magician "was the agent of the mysterious Orient--India, Egypt, the Three Wise Men, Moses and Pharaoh and the Plagues," whereas the wizard was "our own challenger, armed with local charms against the alien forces of the orient" (152). This impression arose from performances in Centenary Hall by " a procession of magicians who were invariably 'trained in India'" (151). Once when a challenger from the audience finally succumbed to hypnotism after an incredibly long resistance, the "magician" pulled up the challenger's dansiki to reveal a leather thong of amulets around his waist. To Wole, this had been a "simple contest between the magician and the oṣó, the wizard or sorcerer" (152).[2] Since the operetta songs were those of a man both magician and wizard, their language, he felt, "was the language of a dual force which the witches and the kidnappers would understand" (152). Wole made good use of that language to ward off fear:

> Songs from that operetta became my regular guard

> whenever I had to brave the passage between our backyard wall and the churchyard where, to add to the menace of the dark, there was also a cemetery, not to mention the huge mango tree whose bole was large enough to house a hundred _ewèlè_, _iwin_ and other _ànjònnú_! (152)

The fear is universal; the form that it assumes and the stratagems adopted for besting it are not. In _Ox Bells and Fireflies_, the Canadian writer Ernest Buckler recalls childhood walks after dark:

> Sometimes I would pass the church at night when all the lights were out in all the houses. The dark trees would be whispering together their primeval messages that were not for man's knowledge. And I would feel at my heels the chill of lateness that haunts every hour. . . . But the moment I ran in past the big hackmatack at our gate and saw the lamp turned down for me on the kitchen table I instantly forgot my fear. (23)

Here, the security of home, not the protection of incantation, dispelled the fear.

In Wole's world, the power of both good and bad magic (or medicine) went unquestioned. Wole was provided with protective medicine by his paternal grandfather, a non-Christian, when there was a likelihood that the boy, at the age of nine-and-a-half, would enter a boarding-school in which

some of the students would be grown men. Father, as his grandchildren called him, understood that these men would not be pleased when a child whom they were "nearly old enough to spawn" (143) began to outdo them academically. Although admitting that Wole's mother was as aware as he that envy is a "disease" found everywhere, Father complained that "[t]he only trouble with her is that she thinks she knows what to do about it," asking, "What does she think I am for?" (143). Believing that "[t]here is more to the world than the world of Christians, or books" (143), he set out to protect his grandson by having him incised with protective medicine. Encircling cuts made in Wole's ankles and wrists were wrapped with bands soaked in some mysterious potion.

For all that, it is apparent that Wild Christian herself believed in the potency of harmful magic. When the family visited Father's village of Isara, she forbade the children to accept food outside the walls of their grandfather. Soyinka explains,

> Our Ijebu relations, it seemed, had a reputation for poisoning, or for a hundred and one forms of injuring an enemy through magical means. We were drilled in ways and means of avoiding a handshake, for various forms of injury could be operated through the hands. One would return home and simply wither away. (130)

"Harmful medicines could be passed through the head," Soyinka

continues, "so it was a measure of his closeness to the family that Wild Christian sent us to Broda Pupa [the Isara barber] for our Christmas-and-New Year hair-cut special" (131)

The bond between Father and Wole was very strong. Father was another parent who, for Wole, "truly embodied the male Isara . . . in its rugged, mysterious strength" (139), and the boy secretly feared that Father would not be able to resist "the religious onslaught of Aké" (139).

Soyinka now uses the Y-ruba gods, particularly Ogun, as "creative metaphors," sometimes, he says, as "metaphors for my own existence" ("Seminar" 512). But Wole's initial impression of Ogun came from the distortions of Christian teaching. Then an experience in Isara introduced him to a very different concept, the one held by Father. On an expedition with Broda Pupa, Wole had seen the grossly swollen face and body of the victim of a hornet attack, and Broda Pupa had instructed him how to behave in such a situation. When, shortly later, he himself disturbed a nest of hornets, he followed these instructions "as if in a practice drill" (138), and thus escaped with only two stings to the forehead. Wole thought of this sequence of events as providential, experiencing "the elation of feeling" that he was "under some special protection; in Isara, this was a constant, unquestioned state of mind, nothing could even threaten to unsettle it" (138). Full of having saved himself "by a lesson whose timing bordered on omens, on the supernatural" (139), he hurried to

display his wounds to his grandfather. Father's response was "Ogun protects his own" (140). To the child's surprised rejoinder: "Ogun is the pagans' devil who kills people and fights everybody" (140), his grandfather returned only, "Is that what they teach you?" He made no attempt to re-educate his grandson, but decided on no further delay in protecting him against harm.

Elsewhere, Soyinka refers to the ritual as a "scarification/inoculation exercise . . . to induct me into life formally" ("Seminar" 512), and in Aké it is clear that it achieved at least one of his grandfather's aims. It strengthened Wole's courage. At the age of ten, he travelled alone to apply for admission to the government college in Ibadan. At the school, two boys were rumoured to have come with oogun (supernatural or magical medicine) "to throw all others into confusion while they took, uncontested, the top places" (187-88). In the luggage of one was found "an assortment of strange objects--amulets, black powder wrapped in a piece of paper . . . and, a sheet of paper with strange diagrams and words which seemed . . . distortions of some biblical names from the Old Testament" (188). Although Wole "knew we had no right to search their luggage," he "accepted that we needed to do it" (188), because of the importance of obtaining a scholarship and the fact that, as he admitted, "[n]obody is sure" whether juju works (189).

Nevertheless, when the boys feared to dig up the juju

that had been buried in the corner of a classroom, Wole impulsively boasted, "My hands won't wither" (190). After "a white bundle, about the size of an orange" was unearthed, the now more prudent Wole carried it "by the tip of its tie" to the middle of the lawn where it was burned as was done with bad juju in court. As it burned, small explosions, interpreted as "dangerous spells spurting from its mouth" (190), caused the panicked boys to run, screaming Christian protective incantations: "'Jesu' 'Jesu Gbami'" and "S.M.O.G." (Save Me O God) (190).

A similar fear of harmful magic is evidenced in the adult Christian community. Under the leadership of Wole's aunt (Beere Ransome-Kuti), his mother, and others, an Egba Women's Union had been formed, and it protested against the taxation of women. During a trip to England, Beere claimed publicly that "the women of Egbaland led a pauper's existence. They were wretched, underprivileged and ruthlessly exploited" (192). As do all movements that challenge those in power, Beere's efforts aroused considerable opposition. During the festive celebrations for her homecoming, a naked woman was discovered attempting to deposit a calabash of <u>ebo</u> (a ritual sacrifice) close to Beere's house. The carrier was beaten by the angered Union women, and the awakened Wole was struck by the "unearthly quality" of the woman's face that "registered nothing of the pain" of the beating (196). To the women avengers, a "diabolical plot to injure Beere through satanic

means" (197) had been foiled.

The most common explanation of the incident was that "the carrier had been bathed in a potion which rendered her invisible" (198). That her "invisibility had worn off as she was about to set down the evil load at Beere's doorstep" (212) was credited to Beere's supernatural powers. Belief in these powers was strengthened on the occasion when the women massed at the Alake's palace to assert their demands. When the Balogun (a war chief) arrogantly ordered the women to go home and mind their kitchens and children, "something happened to the Balogun's thigh as he . . . delivered a kick in the general direction of the women. As he set that leg down, it simply gave way under him and he collapsed" (211-212). Later he became "fully paralysed on one side" (222). As usual, Soyinka presents these events without comment.

As has been pointed out earlier, because of Wole's Christian upbringing, the Yoruba gods that have become such a metaphoric treasury for Soyinka scarcely entered Wole's consciousness, being present to him at first only in the sculptures that fringed the courtyard wall of the Alake's palace, an "arc of silent watchers, mounted warriors--single and clustered, kneeling priestesses, sacrificial scenes, royal processions" (204). As Soyinka explains, "knowledge of the names came later--the eyes of Ifa, Sango, divination priests, Ogun, Obatala, Erinle, Osanyin iron staffs with their rings of mounted divination birds . . . even the ogboni in procession,

frozen in motion" (204). Without formal teaching in the matter, Wole and the other children came to know that

> in the ogboni (a secret society of elders) reposed the real power of the king and land . . . the real power, both supernatural and cabalistic, the intriguing midnight power which could make even the king wake up one morning and find that his houseposts had been eaten through during his sleep. (203)

However, after Wole had seen the fearsome ogboni abandoning their staffs of office and fleeing from the enraged women at the palace and then heard that the ogboni later claimed not to have been surprised or alarmed at the women's uprising because according to Ifa divination such events came in cycles, every thirteenth or fourteenth king, Wole wondered why they had not "anticipated their treatment at the hands of the women" (222), and he "did not think much of the claims to prescience of the ogboni" (222). Here is the only support for Moduakor's assertion that "the mystical . . . is treated with scepticism in Ake [sic]" (162).

Until then, the focalizer Wole has been very much part of that mystical world. In reporting experiences of metaphysical presences and powers, some African writers anticipate, almost apologetically, the incredulity of Western readers. Thus, after describing a magical preparation called Màgun ("Do Not Mount"), used as a means of preventing adultery, J. Omosade

Awolalu states: "This will sound fantastic to readers who are strangers to Yorubaland and to Africa, but it is the whole truth" (78). In Camara Laye's *L'Enfant Noir*, his account of his childhood in French Guinea, Laye expresses misgivings about speaking of the strange powers of his mother: "J'hésite un peu à dire quels étaient ces pouvoirs et je ne veux même pas les décrire tous: je sais qu'on en accueillera le récit avec scepticisme" (71).

In *Aké*, Soyinka makes no such concessions to non-African readers. In showing us the world of his childhood, he neither affirms nor rejects its beliefs, he merely presents them.. He has dedicated *Aké* to his parents and to three younger siblings "who do not inhabit the memory span of the years recounted in these pages." For the latter and for all readers of *Aké*, Soyinka has resurrected the world of those years in all of the mystical reality in which it immersed him and in which he participated fully. As he has later asserted to a Western audience, "[I]t was just *there*, the world one inhabited" ("Seminar" 518).

Notes

1. The incident of the beautiful "complete" gentleman derives from a well-known folk-tale. A version of this tale entitled "The Disobedient Daughter who Married a Skull" is included in Folk Stories from Southern Nigeria West Africa collected by Elphinstone Dayrell and published in 1910.

2. "In African societies . . . a great distinction is made between these two personages ['magician' and 'sorcerer'] who, viewed linguistically, most often answer to different names" (Zahan 92).

CHAPTER II

Water Spirits

In his inland home of Aké, Wole Soyinka as a child inhabited a world of forest spirits. For the peoples living along the rivers, lakes, and sea-coasts of West Africa, water spirits abound. In the words of Emmanuel Obiechina, "As a vital element in life, flowing water is deeply revered. It is invested with divine and spiritual essence, which is in turn woven into myths and the archetypal images of the traditional mind" (Culture 44).

In an account of a 1988 journey through the Western Region of Ghana, Thomas Cooke reports that this region "has more bridges per kilometre than any other region." The many bridges create a problem for the traveller

> if like most of the people of this area you believe strongly in the power of 'busoms'--gods. All rivers have gods in them. You are supposed to dip your lights and toot before traversing a river, otherwise the god in the river might be caught unawares on the bridge and freeze before your very eyes, making it impossible for you to carry on. It is not only in this region that such beliefs abound. ("Past" 203-04).

The power of such beliefs is evidenced by a report from the Enugu Police in October 1959 that "three men were charged with

stealing a boy to sacrifice him to the 'Mammy-Water', a 'nymph' or 'mermaid' in the River Niger at Onitsha, to appease her so that the proposed Onitsha-Osaba bridge might be constructed without any mishap!" (Arinze 90). More recently, in a June 1990 issue, West Africa entitled its cover-story "Mammy Water whizz-kid." The article tells of a seventeen-year-old computer genius who supposedly had an encounter with a mermaid in infancy, a good omen in Fanti folklore: "[T]he toddler smiled and waved at an unseen object in the sea. This continued until the baby's hand stretched out, following the unseen object out to sea. It was like a farewell wave to an acquaintance" (Quansah).

The autobiographies of West African government leaders indicate the significance of such beliefs during their own lives. In explaining the calculation of his birth-date, Kwame Nkrumah, first prime minister and President of independent Ghana, tells of the 1913 shipwreck of the Bakana that occurred when he was three or four years old. The stories circulated about the cause of the shipwreck involved water gods:

> [T]he god of the river Ama Zaule, wishing to visit his goddess of the neighbouring river Awianialuama, had planned this disaster in order that he should have a boat at his command. The superstition surrounding this was strengthened by the fact that the Bakana was actually dragged nearer and nearer to the mouth of the river until eventually she

> reached its mouth, where she lies to-day, firmly embedded in the sand. . . .
>
> In fact the people of Half Assini still say that they see the lights of a ship--believed to be the Bakana--as she sets out to sea at night and ploughs her way to Awianialuama. (Autobiography 2-3)

Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the best-known Yoruba leader of pre- and post-independence Nigeria, tells of how a belief in a river god deeply affected events in his mother's life:

> It was a condition precedent to the consent to her marriage with father [a Christian], stipulated by her parents, that she should not be baptised and admitted to the Christian fold. Her mother worshipped the river god (Oluweri, i.e. Owner and Ruler of the Rivers). When she gave birth to my mother, she had dedicated her to this god of the rivers, and she was not going to break her vow under any circumstances. Though mother, after her marriage, learnt to read in the vernacular and was, therefore, able to read the Bible, the Prayer Book, and to sing hymns, and though she continued to attend church after father's death, it was some years after her own mother's death that I succeeded in getting her to break her mother's vow to the river god, and become a baptised Christian. (Awo

5)

Among the Yoruba orisa (major gods) there are three important river-goddesses: Oya, goddess of the river Niger; Yemoja, goddess of the river Ogun; and Oshun, goddess of the river that bears her name. The major shrine of Oshun is at Oshogbo, through which the Oshun river flows, and she is the deity by whom much of the work of the Oshogbo School of Art is inspired. In a review of an exhibition of this group's work, Adeola Solanke reports: "The sense of devotion to the traditional religious pantheon emerges strongly from most of the work." For example, in the batik work of Nike Davies (née Olaniyi) "the marine theme is ubiquitous, with representations of the goddess and her watery kingdom stunningly, sometimes comically, made" ("Oshogbo" 2728).

Apart from specific gods and goddesses, Mammy-Water (variously spelled) is a folk-figure of contemporary West Africa. Elaine Savory Fido explains that the generic name "Mammy Water"

> covers water-deities of various sorts, including a mermaid-like creature. Cults spread all over the African diaspora, and the name is recognized in the Caribbean, South and North America and Africa. The deity is usually beautiful, seductive, powerful and can vary between malevolence and protective good nature. ("Okigbo's Labyrinths" 235 n.2).

Bonnie J. Barthold cites a West African highlife song popular

in the late sixties:

> I you see Mammy-Wattah, oh--
>
> If you see Mammy Wattah, oh
>
> Never, never you run away. (112)

Della Jenkins describes a "Mamy-Wata" cult that arrived on the coast of Igboland around 1900 in the form of a coloured print that has become an icon not only in Igboland but across much of West Africa (75-76). In this print, "Mamy Wata has olive skin, long billowing black hair, dangling gold earrings, foreign dress, and a magnetic stare" (75). Her worshippers believe that she "reigns over the oceans, rivers, and streams as a powerful, loving, fearsome, and charismatic spirit" (75). She is pictured with pythons moving around her body, and Jenkins suggests that her "control of snakes must have helped in establishing her cult, for they have long been messengers of water deities all over southern Nigeria" (75). Her cult is "famous for bringing wealth, success, good fortune, and children," but she can also be "responsible for inflicting laziness, madness, infertility, and sickness" (75). She is supposed to have, among her special powers, "the ability to help 'children born to die,' ogbanje, stay alive," and because she is a modern deity "she deals especially with modern problems, gaining entrance to a school or university, passing exams, getting a lucrative 'post,' purchasing a new automobile" (76). Often her priests and priestesses "hold colorful paddles or fans decorated with mirrors" (76) and she

"especially likes things that smell good, taste sweet, and shine and glitter" (76).

But there are more ancient traditions of Mammy-Water. J. Omosade Awolalu tells us that two sub-groups of the Yoruba, the Ijèbú and the Ilàje who dwell along the rivers, and the Ijaw of the Niger Delta "firmly believe that there are divine creatures living under the water . . .; [they] are thought to be light in complexion and gorgeously attired in coral beads and costly garments. People refer to them as '_Mammy-Water_'" (47). That these spirits are considered dangerous is evidenced by Ilàje old men "who bear on their bodies the mark of matchet-cuts claimed to have been received from these water spirits" (Awolalu 47).

Among the Kalabari people of southeastern Nigeria, each community has an _Ekine_ Men's Society that stages a cycle of thirty to fifty masquerade plays, each play associated with one or more of the water spirits. According to the myths that recount the origins of this institution, "dancing water spirits abducted _Ekineba_, a beautiful woman of a certain delta town, and took her to their home beneath the creeks" (Robin Horton 94). The spirits' angry mother commanded them to restore Ekineba to the land of men, but before doing so, "each water spirit showed her its special play; and when she returned to her home, she taught the people all the plays she had seen" (Horton 94). To begin the cycle, the _Ekine_ members most commonly "go down in canoes to a spot far out in the

creeks known as 'Beach of the Water Spirits.' Here they call in the spirits, telling them that their plays are about to begin and that they should come to attend them. The spirits are believed to return to the town with their invokers." When the cycle has been completed, a winding-up ceremony known as 'Stretching the Canoe of the Water People' is performed.

> Dancers representing every play perform together in a single morning, just before the ebb of the tide. At the ebb, all the maskers go down to a special beach known as the 'Pouring-Out Place of the Water Spirits,' where they strip off their costumes and bathe. In so doing, they are believed to be dispatching the spirits back to their creeks. (Robin Horton 95)

It is not surprising, then, to find water spirits figuring in both minor and major ways in much West African literature, both poetry and prose. In Achebe's short story "The Sacrificial Egg" a folk-belief is recounted of water spirits coming to the great market:

> Some of the beautiful young women you see squeezing through the crowds are not people like you or me but mammy-wota who have their town in the depths of the river. . . . You can always tell them, because they are beautiful with a beauty that is too perfect and too cold. You catch a glimpse of her

> with the tail of your eye, then you blink and look properly, but she has already vanished in the crowd. (45)

In Isidore Okpewho's realistic novel The Victims, the presence of or belief in a river goddess triggers one of many episodes that contribute to the disintegration of the male protagonist (92-96). At the other end of the scale from this use of the belief as a minor element in plot development is Elechi Amadi's use of it as the major element in the plot, structure, and characterization of his novel The Concubine.

It is the diversity of aesthetic and philosophical purposes for which water spirit concepts have been employed in the seven novels now to be discussed that is of interest in this study. The first two of these, Elechi Amadi's The Concubine and Flora Nwapa's Efuru, are village novels in each of which a water spirit is a central element.

The Concubine

In The Concubine, the main female character Ihuoma is the wife of a jealous Sea-King, who allows this best-loved wife to be incarnated but will permit her to be only the "concubine," not the wife, of a mortal. All three men who aspire to be her husband die sudden and painful deaths, deaths that are attributed by the village dibia Anyika to the powerful, relentless Sea-King. Ihuoma, Anyika says, is one of those few women in the world whom it is "death to marry" because they

are "dogged by their invisible husbands of the spirit world" (196).

Psycho-analytical analysis attempts to show that the mother-fixation of the third victim, Ekueme, contributes to his destruction (Gikandi 168; Palmer 120-24); sociological analysis, that Ekueme's and Ihuoma's transgression of the marriage traditions of their village society ensures the tragic outcome; and moralistic interpretation, that Ekueme's failure and death "means in ordinary language . . . that uncontrolled desire will not be allowed to have its own way, because this would be a recipe for chaos" (Gikandi 69). None of these ways of reading the novel accounts for the over-riding impression it gives that Amadi's Sea-King represents an inexorable fate against which human struggles are futile. In the novel's ironic ending, it is Ekueme's effort to bind the power of the Sea-King that precipitates his own death when an arrow shot at a lizard, the last item needed for the required sacrifice, strikes Ekueme instead.

Ekueme's downfall thus resembles that of Oedipus in Sophocles' Oedipus Rex. Both Oedipus and Ekueme believe that they can circumvent the will of the gods, as foretold by an oracle or vowed by a Sea-King, respectively. But the very effort to do so creates the circumstances that ensure that will's fulfilment. For the Greeks, the Delphi oracle of Apollo represented such fate; in West Africa, a Sea-King is more appropriate.

According to general West African belief, events have not only an immediate, easily observable cause, but also an essential metaphysical cause, discoverable only through the diviners. Such causes may include offenses to the gods in a previous incarnation as well as in the present one. Thus, in The Concubine, everyone knows that Ekueme's death has been caused by an arrow. But Ekueme has been in the arrow's path at precisely that moment because the Sea-King will not permit his marriage to Ihuoma. Both Ihuoma's husband Emenike and another aspirant to her favours, Madume, have died similarly. The dibia Anyika explains: "Ihuoma's late husband apparently died of 'lock-chest' but actually it was all the design of the Sea-King. As soon as Emenike married Ihuoma his life was forfeit and nothing would have saved him" (195). As for Madume, who hanged himself in despair after having been blinded by a spitting cobra, "he had a secret desire to make Ihuoma his lover or maybe marry her. All this was too much for the Sea-King and he himself assumed the form of a serpent and dealt with his rival" (195). Anyika's failure to learn all this earlier is also attributed to the Sea-King. In divining for both Emenike and Madume in their distress, Anyika had indeed discerned water spirits, but he explains: "Somehow their connection with Ihuoma eluded me. The Sea-King himself probably confused me at the time" (196).

A frequent criticism of this novel is that the revelation of the Sea-King's manipulation of events is sprung on the

reader almost at the end of the novel, in an improbable deus-ex-machina resolution. For example, Niyi Osundare asks why Amadi fails to clear the mystery until well into the close of the story:

> [T]he weakness of this kind of plot-pattern is that the reader is as ignorant as the characters. Although the discerning reader might develop some vaque suspicion about some happenings at the beginning of the story, the novelist never really takes him into his confidence. The result is that when discovery comes eventually, it explodes a volley of hidden truths, and we heave a retrospective sigh of grief for bygone victims. ("As Grasshoppers" 102-03)

A more careful reading shows that Amadi has skilfully intimated the presence and power of water spirits throughout the novel. Of primary importance in this regard is the characterization of Ihuoma. When Anyika, near the end of the novel, announces enigmatically, "Ihuoma is a little unusual" (195), the reader has already known this. The explanation that follows, though on one level surprising, on another has been carefully established and could have been recognized.

Amadi's preparation for the eventual revelation begins with the title. As the portrait of a model village wife develops in the opening pages, the title The Concubine should tease the mind. Why should this woman (who, it seems, is to

be the female protagonist) be designated as, or destined to become, a concubine? Obiechina's well-validated explanation of why the Sea-King refrains from interference during the six years of Ihuoma's "marriage" to Emenike is that he intervenes at the moment when Ihuoma is becoming more human and therefore her marriage is becoming a real marriage. Before that, "the Sea-King recognizes the situation as a concubinage between a spirit queen and a human lover" (Culture 98).

Like most water-goddesses, Ihuoma is beautiful, strangely different from other women, and magnetically attractive to men. Before her marriage to Emenike, she is "the most desirable girl in Omigwe village" (5). Her complexion is "that of the ant-hill" (10) and her hair is described as long and black (214). Very early in the novel, she is shown calling for a mirror to gaze at her own beauty (11). It seems as though the image of the fair-skinned 'Mammy-Wata' is being invoked in these details. As well, Ihuoma has "smoothly rounded" features (10) and a "fashionable" but natural gap in the upper row of teeth that make other women envy her (11).

As for her character, Obiechina asserts that it is "closely patterned on the Owu-worshippers' expectations of the behaviour of a mermaid queen in human form" (Culture 114). Ihuoma is "sympathetic, gentle, and reserved" (11). In six years of marriage "she had never had any serious quarrel with another woman" (12). The women recognize Ihuoma's difference from themselves so that she finds herself "settling quarrels

and offering advice to older women" (12). The wife of Madume likes Ihuoma, calling her "about the best woman of the village" (54), but for this very reason she does not want Madume to take Ihuoma as his second wife, asserting, "I would gladly be the second wife where she is the first; not the reverse" (55). This attitude is an unusual one, for the senior wife has privileges and power in her husband's compound. Ekueme's father also calls Ihuoma "easily the best woman in the village" (92). He thinks of her as "a young woman of great moral courage" who "would rather die than do anything that would hurt anyone seriously" (106). He praises Ihuoma: "your good behaviour has placed you a little above many other women in the village" (112). Thus set apart from others, she "bore her sorrows alone" (115), but not easily. "As her prestige mounted its maintenance became more trying. . . . The women adored her. Men were awestruck before her. She was becoming something of a phenomenon. But she alone knew her internal struggles" (153).

The third aspect of a water-goddess evident in Ihuoma is her magnetic effect on men. After the second burial rites for Emenike, her beauty returns: "The tired look on her face gave way to a sweet youthful expression, softly alluring, deeply enchanting, which had a bewitching subtlety that only deep sorrow can give. . . . Young men and even the old gazed at her again irresistibly" (36). Ekueme is the young man most "irresistibly drawn to her" (49). Even when he had decided to

pass by her compound, "[h]is feet steered him towards her" (83). When Ihuoma appears at Ekueme's bedside during his madness, he instantaneously changes for the better: "Ihuoma seemed to have absolute power over him" (185).

Hence the eventual disclosure that Ihuoma is an incarnated goddess should come as a confirmation of what the reader has subconsciously known. As Anyika points out at the moment of revelation: "Look at her . . ., have you seen anyone quite so right in everything, almost perfect? I tell you only a sea-goddess--for that is precisely what she is--can be all that" (196).

Indications of the presence and powers of gods and spirits are liberally provided. In the initial episode, when Emineke is seriously injured in a fight with Madume over a land dispute, it is explained that "a man's god may be away on a journey on the day of an important fight and that may make all the difference. This was clearly what had happened" (5). Amadi explicitly reminds us of the traditional belief that the apparent cause of events is never the real cause. When Madume fears possible retribution from the gods after Emenike's death, he reassures himself with the reflection that "people did not just die without reason. Invariably they died either because they had done something wrong or because they had neglected to minister to the gods or to the spirits of their ancestors" (53). Shortly after this, a very specific signal is given of what underlies the narrative events. When Madume

rips off his toe-nail in Ihuoma's compound and consults Anyika about the injury, the dibia informs him (and the reader): "You were lucky . . . to have come out alive. . . . Several spirits swore to kill you there and then. . . . Unknown spirits, some of them from the sea, teamed up to destroy you" (58). Anyika even explains their anger: "They don't want you to have anything to do with Ihuoma" (58). After a cobra spits into Madume's eyes when he is trespassing on land the village has agreed belongs to Ihuoma, Anyika judges immediately: "This thing is obviously the act of a god, probably a very powerful god" (70). And so it proves to be.

Before the death of the injured Emenike, he is visited by Nwokekoro, the priest of Amadioha, the god of thunder and of the skies. Amadi stresses the source of the priest's power: "Other rain makers stood in awe of him because he had the direct support of Amadioha" (8-9). Then the story is told of what happened to a rival rainmaker, Ogonda, who tried to make rain when Nwokekoro had been hired to dispel it during a wrestling match. Ogonda "was struck down on that very day by a thunderbolt while collecting herbs by the way side. It all went to confirm that a man could not wrestle with a god" (9). All the villagers recognized it as a fact that "if Amadioha insisted on taking a man's life, no medicine man could do anything about it and only a medicine man of great confidence would dare to try" (9). Here is a foreshadowing of the much later revelation of the will of the Sea-King in events and

Anyika's refusal to attempt to change that will: "He is too powerful to be fettered and when he is on the offensive he is absolutely relentless. He unleashes all the powers at his command and they are fatal" (196). The futility of the attempt by the over-confident dibia Agwoturumbe to bind the Sea-King is also foreshadowed.

Very early in the novel, too, we are told of the powers of the god of the stream that forms the boundary between Omokachi, Ihuoma's village, and a neighbouring village, Chiolu. Each village clears its own half of the path between the two.

> The worship of Mini Wekwu often coincided with the clearing of the path. Worshippers from the two villages would meet and offer their sacrifices jointly. It established goodwill and the god ensured that no evil crossed from one village to the other. For instance, no wizard from Chiolu would dare cross to Omokachi to make havoc. Mini Wekwu would certainly liquidate him. (15)

After Anyika refuses to give Ekueme's wife Ahurole a love potion for her husband because it might harm him, Ahurole's mother gets one from a medicine man in Chiolu, but the return to Omokachi worries her.

> She had to pass the shrine of Mini Wekwu. . . . It was believed that no one carrying any form of poison could cross it [the stream] unharmed. Many

> wizards were said to have perished there.
>
> As Wonuma approached the stream-god her fears grew until her legs quaked. (161)

Encouraging herself with the thought that the potion was not a poison but "medicine" that was meant "to build a home" (161), she passed safely--as it appeared. But the outcome is the opposite of the desired one: Ekueme becomes ill and then mad, and the home is destroyed. By implication, the river god has not been deceived, for no god can be deceived.

The imperviousness of the gods to human needs and desires is also suggested early. After Emenike's death, "Ihuoma wondered whether Amadioha was not blind at least part of the time" (21). Later, when she is greatly attracted to Ekueme, she feels compelled to refuse him because of his childhood betrothal to Ahurole and because of the village tradition against a man's taking a widow as first wife. Fatalistically, she reflects that "if the gods had been rather cruel there was nothing she could do about it" (127).

By the time that Ihuoma finally agrees to marry Ikueme, Anyika is the only person in the village who does not approve. Uneasy, he suggests that Ekueme's parents try a divination before the marriage takes place, and it is only at this late point in the novel that Ihuoma's true nature is unveiled. The discovery is a shock to her human associates, but the reader should not be equally shocked.

Ekueme's first reaction is not disbelief, but rather, in

his overwhelming love for Ihuoma, a determination to defy the god: "If I am her husband for a day before my death my soul will go singing happily to the spirit world. There also I shall be prepared to dare the wrath of four hundred Sea-Kings for her sake" (197). Later, more prudently, he is glad to accept the assurance of Agwotumbe that the Sea-King can be bound and thus rendered harmless by a munificent sacrifice carefully carried out in the middle of the river. But as the time for the sacrifice nears, Ekueme fears the canoe expedition and tries to avoid it: "As they say, the King is all out to destroy me. . . . The outing on the river gives him an excellent opportunity to deal with me. . . . No, I shall not step into the tiger's mouth just like that" (209). Ekueme therefore suggests an "alternative sacrifice that does not involve boating by midnight" (209). The dibia insists that "it is difficult enough to invoke the Sea-King at midstream" (209), but Ekueme thinks that "it would be far better to face death at home than to be drowned or disposed of in who knew what ways" (210). There is delayed irony in this thought.

In Amadi's novels, the gods' methods are not so direct as men expect them to be. Ekueme's directions to the children on how to shoot lizards for the sacrifice symbolically foreshadow the Sea-King's indirect attack on him and bring about the kind of death he has claimed to prefer: "Don't shoot directly. . . . Shoot along the wall and the wall will direct your arrows

to the lizards" (213). It is thus that the arrow of Ihuoma's son strikes Ekueme, and "shortly after midnight" (216) on the day that he had hoped to marry Ihuoma, he faces death in his own room at home, a fate he has unwittingly brought upon himself. For Geoffrey Finch, "Amadi's handling of the supernatural is usually very adept. The ending of The Concubine, for example, is delightfully ambiguous. We cannot say definitely whether Ekueme is killed by the Sea-King or whether he dies accidentally" (8). What we can say, however, is that it is unquestionably Ekwueme's effort to make his own human will prevail that brings about his death. It is on such ironic ambiguity of fate that Amadi's whole novel is structured.

No man, not even a dibia, can foresee or control man's destiny. The bragging and "swagger" (206) of the hubristic dibia Agwoturumbe are shown for what they are, man's empty pretensions. In reassuring Ekueme, Agwoturumbe has boasted:

> I have had to contend with several water and land spirits at the same time. I have journeyed to the abodes of the water spirits themselves to plead with them. What is more I can look into the future. As far as I can see we will all come back safely. (210)

But the future does not reveal to him what the Sea-King wants hidden, that they will not set out.

Ihuoma's challenge to the will of the Sea-King (or to her

destiny as his wife) dooms her as surely as it does her human lovers. Anyika explains her situation as follows:

> Against the advice of her husband she sought the company of human beings and was incarnated. The Sea-King was very angry but because he loved her best of all his wives he did not destroy her immediately she was born. He decided to humour her and let her live out her normal earthly span and come back to him. (195)

However, his terrible jealousy makes him destroy any man who aspires to marry her, and therefore any human happiness she achieves is fated to be short-lived. Her Sea-King husband will permit her at best to be "someone's concubine" but "as a wife she is completely ruled out" (196).

Near the end of the novel, during the brief period of happiness enjoyed by Ihuoma and Ekueme, Amadi draws attention to the meaning of their names. Ihuoma, Ekueme says, means "beautiful face" or "good luck," and his own name means "say and do," a name which he imagines describes him well: "I said I would marry you and I have as good as done it" (203). Shortly, the bitter irony of this dialogue makes its retrospective impact.

It should now be clear that Amadi's use of the Sea-King is integral to the novel, not just to its plot-structure but to its theme. The feminist claim that in The Concubine "Amadi's supernatural being provides another means of

confining his heroine to her sexual identity" and that it is "a further projection of his male perspective of African womanhood" (Naana Banyiwa-Horne 128) imposes an irrelevant perspective on a novel whose concerns are far different. Wole Ogundele sees "the intense conflicts generated between man and man or between man and god" within the closed societies of Amadi's novels as being really conflicts

> between the moral order--which gives man the comforting belief that he is in touch with and can influence the gods--and its stronger opposite, which shows that man's struggle is futile, casts doubt on the benevolence and even the existence of the deities, and promotes the reign of cruel and impersonal chance. In all the three novels [_The Slave_, _The Great Ponds_, and _The Concubine_] the moral order is consistently shown to be treacherous and a subservient ally to the absurdist force. (91)

In a note appended to the statement just quoted, Ogundele comments:

> Amadi's world view in general bears much resemblance to absurdists like Sartre, Camus and Genet. However, Hardy's influence looms largest; the novels and diarys [sic] all resonate with echoes of _The Mayor of Casterbridge_ and _Tess of the d'Urbervilles_. (202n.1)

Amadi may indeed be familiar with the writers and novels mentioned, but he did not need to go so far abroad to find this world view, only to his Igbo compatriots. In the words of Ernest N. Emenyonu:

> Tragedy in the Igbo situation is not in the feeling that nothing goes right for the individual, but the fact that any success he attains is followed sooner or later by a bigger and more terrible misfortune. This is a constant reality in Igbo life, which among some Igbo groups is described as the phenomenon of Ume. (31)

Ogundele sums up Amadi's themes in the novels mentioned as follows:

> [t]he perpetual thwarting of man's most cherished desires and the disjunction between intention, action and result; the role of chance and the gods in the affairs of men; man's mistaken understanding of his relationship with that which is other-than-man; and his helplessness before an overwhelming, blank cosmos. (189)

As a narrative proxy for "an overwhelming, blank cosmos," Amadi's Sea-King could not be bettered. Niyi Osundare complains that he is

> More Olympian than African--cold, indifferent and manipulative. He stays in his watery remoteness and toys with human lives. . . . Lost here are the

> principles of sane complementarity and coexistence that characterize African godheads and the human race. ("As Grasshoppers" 107)

But if, for Amadi, life appears to be, as he describes it in Sunset in Biafra, "a mad, futile, purposeless dance without spectators" (4), the gods of his novels cannot be expected to live in "sane complementarity and coexistence" with his human characters.

It must be stressed that the Sea-King is an invisible presence in The Concubine, and Ihuoma until almost the end is not aware of being "a daughter of the sea" (201). The novel presents its events in a wholly realistic manner. As Ogundele reminds us, "the metaphysical world of the novels and the beings who inhabit it are, for the Erekwi people, part of the material world of daily existence" (190), and Palmer concurs: "[Amadi] merely presents to us a group of people for whom the supernatural is important, and he tries to make their way of life as realistic as possible" (128). Finally, as Obiechina points out, "The cult of the watermaid is strongly held in the Niger delta where Amadi's story is set. So the story maintains a high degree of imaginative credibility in spite of its heavy magical and supernatural assumptions" (Culture 39-40).

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about to be discussed. Even when the water spirit motif is equally overt, as it is in Flora Nwapa's Efuru, it is employed quite differently.

Efuru

In Efuru, named for its major character, the protagonist is not a water goddess herself but the worshipper of one. She becomes a devotee of Uhamiri, the woman of the lake, after her dreams of this goddess are interpreted by her father and then by a dibia to mean that Uhamiri has chosen Efuru as one of her worshippers. Although Efuru has married twice before these dreams begin and in her first marriage has given birth to a daughter, by the end of the novel she is both husbandless and childless. Whereas in The Concubine Ihuoma's identity as water spirit controls the plot and structure of the novel, being the essential cause of all that happens, Efuru's dedication to the lake goddess is neither a consequence nor a cause of the other events in her life, as I shall endeavour to show.

According to Nwapa, the lake goddess occupies Ogwuta Lake and is real in the minds of Ogwuta people (Taiwo 52). The following account of this goddess is given by Cosmas Okechukwu Obiego:

> The spirit of the lake is called Uhamiri, but is often referred to as Ogbuide, the lady of the lake. Ogbuide is an attribute of Uhamiri and means "she

> that gives in plenty." Many Oguta girls bear this name. Stories abound of people who have seen, or spoken with her. Some people even claim that Ogbuide is responsible for their wealth. Such people give themselves such greeting and dance names as "Egosinamiri"--wealth from the water. (130-31)

In Efuru, the woman of the lake is, in some respects, a typical "Mamy-Wata" as described by Jenkins. Beautiful and wealthy (183), she gives the power of obtaining wealth to those whom she chooses to be her worshippers. Efuru's mother had dreamed of her and "whatever she put her hand to money flowed in" (187). In Efuru's dreams of Uhamiri a "Mamy-Wata" image emerges: "her long hair was loose on her shoulders and she had a huge fan in her left hand. She was fanning herself underneath the deep blue lake" (208).

However, Nwapa has introduced other elements that link Uhamiri with Efuru's problems. Uhamiri is the wife of Okita, the owner of the Great River, "but they governed different domains and nearly always quarrelled" (255). These quarrels are the villagers' explanation of the turbulence at the point where the brown river waters mingle with the blue waters of the lake (255), but they symbolically relate to Efuru's separations from her husbands. More importantly, whereas most West African goddesses are associated with fertility, Uhamiri and her worshippers are barren. We learn that no village

devotees of Uhamiri have had children after becoming her worshippers, and Efuru explains her own childlessness as follows: "She cannot give me children, because she has not got children herself" (208).

In O.R. Dathorne's reading of the novel, the relationship of Efuru with the woman of the lake is the narrative cause of events, just as Ihuoma's relationship with the Sea-King is in The Concubine. Efuru, says Dathorne, is "a select one of the gods and therefore she cannot marry or have children. . . . Efuru's tragedy is expected: because she is irrevocably bound to the goddess of the deep, she is doomed to a life of tragic isolation" (206). Feminist critics, on the other hand, interpret the woman of the lake symbolically. Like the goddess she worships, Efuru is kind, beautiful, wealthy, and childless. Naana Banyiwa-Horne correctly sees in Uhamiri "the spiritual embodiment" of Efuru's own identity (128). However, her further conclusion that Uhamiri is "a symbolic representation of her acceptance of herself as a person in her own right" (127) is not so obviously valid.

The fundamental disagreement of the critics on the meaning of Efuru's relationship with the woman of the lake hinges on their interpretation of Efuru's state of mind as expressed by the novel's ambiguous ending, which reads as follows:

> Efuru slept soundly that night. She dreamt of the woman of the lake, her beauty, her long hair and

> her riches. She had lived for ages at the bottom of the lake. She was as old as the lake itself. She was happy, she was wealthy. She was beautiful. She gave women beauty and wealth but she had no child. She had never experienced the joy of motherhood. Why then did the women worship her? (281)

Does this imply that Efuru is happy in her independence or that she is unfulfilled in her childlessness?

Oladele Taiwo, among others, infers the former meaning: "Because Efuru has all the attributes of Uhamiri she can, as a devotee, become a visible representative of the river goddess and be happy without a child" (52). Elaine Savory Fido also interprets Uhamiri as "a sort of divine role-model who helps her to decide that childlessness is not the end of the world" and sees Nwapa's use of the myth as a means "to make reality more workable and endurable" (226). Lloyd W. Brown, another feminist critic, assesses Efuru's character and the symbolic significance of Uhamiri as follows:

> Efuru's marriages fail, in part, because the conventional selfishness of men within the traditional marriage structure is incompatible with her sense of self. Her integrity as an individual is violated by her husbands' casual assumption that she will be the long-suffering, perpetually forgiving, and deferent figure upon which many women have customarily modeled their roles as

> wives. Consequently the Woman of the Lake is really Efuru's alter ego, a being who symbolizes her independent spirit, her superior talents as a businesswoman, and her general capacity for self-fulfilment. (142)

The novel does establish Efuru's strong "sense of self." She is shown as a woman who thinks for herself. If she believes that she has good reasons for what she does, she says, "Never mind what people would say" (15), and when she is criticized, she asks herself, "Who can please the world?" (17). When her first husband, Adizua, deserts her, she tells herself that "to suffer for a truant husband, an irresponsible husband like Adizua is to debase suffering. My own suffering will be noble [unlike the resignation of her mother-in-law in a similar situation]" (73). When Efuru decides to leave Adizua's house, she says, "Our ancestors forbid that I should wait for a man to drive me out of his house. This is done to women who cannot stand by themselves, women who have no good homes, and not to me the daughter of Nwashike Ogene. And besides . . . I am still a beautiful woman" (76). Her mother-in-law thinks of Efuru as "self-willed" but understands the positive aspects of this characteristic: "Life for her [Efuru] meant living it fully. She did not want merely to exist. She wanted to live and use the world to her advantage" (94). All of this supports Brown's conclusion that "[t]he Woman of the Lake is really a divine symbol of Efuru's sense

of self as an unusual woman" (22).

However, Brown's further claim that "Efuru's eventual decision to devote herself to being the deity's special worshipper signifies her acceptance of her own attitudes as a woman" (22) is not defensible, for Efuru's decision to worship Uhamiri comes as the result of her dreams during her marriage with her second husband Gilbert (Ebaniri) and long before that marriage is dissolved. At the most, one could argue, in a psycho-analytic reading, that Efuru's dreams of the woman of the lake arise from her unconscious desire for complete independence, but the text offers nothing to validate such a speculation. Moreover, Brown's argument that the question with which the novel concludes is really rhetorical is based on a further inaccuracy. According to Brown,

> women like Efuru who tend to be self-sufficient worship the Woman of the Lake because she represents what they have chosen to be. Faced with two choices--marriage and motherhood on the one hand, and independence on the other hand--Efuru elects a course that is suitable to her needs without breaking her relationship with the community as a whole. The emphasis is not on specific roles, but on the woman's need for a free choice of roles. (151)

But the plot-structure of Nwapa's novel does not give Efuru the choice of motherhood, and her rejection of her second

husband is not a rejection of marriage per se.

In fact, the weak plot-structure does not support such readings as those of Brown and Banyiwa-Horne, both of whom posit a stronger, more coherent, and more optimistic theme than Nwapa's novel actually conveys. In her first marriage, Efuru's independence is shown by her choosing her husband for herself, threatening "to drown herself in the lake if he did not marry her" (1). Then, as her choice is a poor man, she further flouts tradition by going to live with him without the dowry's having been paid. After this, she insists on trading, at which she is skilful, instead of assisting her husband on the farm, as expected of her. Because he does not like to be separated from her, her husband joins her in trading, but there is no suggestion that dislike of trading causes him to leave her. On the contrary, he and the "bad" woman with whom he departs continue to trade. On one of Efuru's river trading expeditions with her second husband, she asserts her will by refusing to paddle further because of weariness, and a dispute ensues (175-77). But this episode occurs several years before the marriage is irreparably destroyed. Before this, their relationship has been shown as one of much greater companionship than was usual in traditional village marriages: "They went to the stream together, there they swam together, they came back together, and ate together" (171). After the dispute, the novel skips two years, during which, it is later revealed, Gilbert has fathered a child by another woman. But

Efuru does not yet know this, and we first encounter the couple planning for her to consult the doctor about her lack of children (177). It is at this point that we are told for the first time of Efuru's dreams of the woman of the lake (182-83). As the plot has thus far been outlined, it seems to call for an anti-feminist rather than a feminist reading. In stubbornly refusing to follow her father's counsel, Efuru has chosen her first husband unwisely. In asserting her will against that of her second husband, she has perhaps alienated him.

However, confusingly, in many ways Efuru is portrayed as the perfect traditional wife. She never quarrels with her first mother-in-law. When she remains barren in her marriage with Gilbert, she encourages him to take a second wife, for she believes that it is "only a bad woman who wants her husband all to herself" (62). She is eager to accept the son her husband has fathered outside their marriage, and she has even been planning a third marriage for him at the time when he accuses her of adultery. Until this insult, Efuru has fulfilled all the duties expected of her except for the one which is not under her control: child-bearing. But the totally undeserved suspicion of adultery is more than she can bear, and she decides that "it is not possible" (281) for her to remain with Gilbert.

Fate seems to have doomed Efuru, as Dathorne suggests. Although she is beautiful and rich, and initially there is

love between her and each of her husbands, they desert her: the first one, physically; the second, emotionally. But Gilbert's insulting accusation arises from Efuru's serious, prolonged, and inexplicable illness, and Gilbert does not question the traditional belief that the cause must be unconfessed adultery, especially when this cause is confirmed by the dibia. In such a case, Gilbert believes, only confession can save the woman's life, and thus he urges Efuru to admit her fault. A similar suspicion, that of premarital misbehaviour, is visited on any young woman in the society who does not become pregnant in the first year of marriage, and we have heard the village gossip Omarima assert that in such a case it is the "duty" of the women "to probe her girlhood and find out why" (250).

Neither this plot nor the characterization of Efuru indicates that she is in any way responsible for her misfortunes. She is noted in the village for her goodness and generosity. Nor is her childlessness the cause of events, for her first husband Adizua leaves before the death of their baby girl, and in any case he could have taken a second wife, as Gilbert does. The explanation that Adizua's father behaved similarly is insufficient motivation for this plot development. Gilbert is less irresponsible. His failure to return home for the burial of Efuru's father, an omission considered a disgrace by the community, turns out not to have been caused by a rejection of Efuru but by his having been in

jail. He maintains that his imprisonment was for an act of foolishness, not for stealing, an offence held to be so unforgivable in Efuru's community that "a wife may abandon a husband who had become a thief" (Meek 202). Whether Gilbert was guilty of theft is never established. These weaknesses and contradictions in characterization and plot make Nwapa's theme difficult to fathom.

Textual support for concluding that the ending expresses Efuru's lack of fulfilment as a woman is present in the explanation that Efuru herself offers for finding herself alone in her dead father's house: "It is the will of our gods and my chi that such a misfortune should befall me" (280). Hence Maryse Condé, understandably, infers that "Efuru, for all her qualities and gifts, considers her life as valueless since she fails to have a child" (Bankya-Horne 128). Earlier in the novel, the village attitude to such a situation as that of Efuru is expressed by Omirima, who tells Efuru's second mother-in-law: "Your daughter-in-law is good, but she is childless. She is beautiful but we cannot eat beauty. She is wealthy but riches cannot go on errands for us" (205). Also earlier, Efuru is shown feeling the pain of her barrenness: "It was a curse not to have children. . . . It was regarded as a failure" (207).

If the state of Efuru's mind at the end of the novel is in doubt, the attitude of the author Flora Nwapa to the sufferings of African women is not. As Virginia Ola has

stated, Nwapa sees herself as a spokesman for the cause of women and writes to let people understand the life of women (Discussion-lecture UWO 1984). Much of Efuru is presented through the conversation of women and through Efuru's thoughts. As well, Nwapa shows the harmful effects on women of some traditional beliefs and practices, and her criticism of these is often indicated by having them expounded by the malicious Omarima. Conversely, as Taiwo points out, Efuru's friend Ajanapu "appears to be the hidden voice of the author in this work both in her assertion of the rights of women and the way she lashes out at men on every conceivable occasion: 'Some men are not fit to be called men. They have no sense'" (53).

But Nwapa offers no easy solutions. She makes Efuru a strong enough woman not to break under adversity, but she gives her no true choice. And the expression "the joy of motherhood" in the closing passage, later adapted by Buchi Emecheta as an ironic title, is not used ironically by Nwapa. Efuru is shown to be a loving mother to her baby daughter and to the ten-year-old girl brought into the home to care for the baby. As well, she "mothers" anyone in the village who needs her sympathy and care, such as the woman whom she takes to the doctor and later visits in hospital. She loves her husbands and her father. She is not a woman who feels no need for close human ties.

Taiwo claims that in this novel the lake-goddess, in her

beauty and independence, is "a symbol of hope for all women so that her devotees such as Efuru can taste of her kind of freedom and happiness with or without children" (52). Whether Nwapa intended such symbolism or not, it does not function in the way described. Although the woman of the lake, a deity, can be content with her beauty and riches in her cold isolation, one cannot assume analogous contentment for the warm-blooded Efuru. Both her similarity to and difference from the water spirit are symbolic, and fate is as impervious to human desires in Efuru as it is in The Concubine.

So far we have looked at two village novels, in which the female protagonists are respectively an incarnated sea-goddess and the worshipper of a lake-goddess. Through the first water spirit, plot, structure, and theme have been intricately and successfully developed. Through the symbolism of the second, only character and theme have been expressed, the latter somewhat ambiguously.

The five urban novels now to be considered are set in the early years of independence. Their protagonists all suffer the disillusionment and despair of those who had anticipated liberation and who now see their hope destroyed by a materialistic scramble for power and wealth in a corrupt society, a madness in which they refuse to participate. In all of these novels, water spirit figures play a major role, and in Kofi Awoonor's This Earth, My Brother . . . the water spirit is presented even more directly than it is in the

village novels.

This Earth, My Brother . . .

Like Nwapa's Uhamiri, Awoonor's woman of the sea originates in a specific deity believed in by the people of the region of Ghana where she first appears to the protagonist Amamu in his youth. In his mind, she becomes inextricably as·ciated with the human women in his life and is ultimately an expression of the ideal which he has glimpsed and endlessly seeks to rediscover. It is in the light of that ideal that all the experiences of his life must be measured.

To comprehend this allegorical novel, which begins and ends with a vision of the woman of the sea, one must begin by accepting Awoonor's own explanations of what he was trying to achieve in both the form and content of this "very long prose poem" as he also calls it (Palaver 54). The work is composed of alternating segments. A sequence of prose-narrative chapters, related by an omniscient, third-person voice, presents, not entirely chronologically, characteristic episodes in the life of the protagonist Amamu. Interpolated between these chapters are Amamu's interior monologues, in which distinctions of time and space vanish. However, the opening passage indicates that these are occurring during Amamu's hospitalization as a madman. In the published text, these poetic passages (except for the opening, unnumbered one) are identified by an a attached to the number of the preceding

prose chapter. This format is perhaps misleading to the reader, for Awoonor says that, in structuring his novel, he "wanted the chapters to slide on into the poetic interludes which would be indicated by the use of italics" (Palaver 61). The separation, Awoonor regrets,

> makes the poetry seem to be a comment on what has gone before, though it actually moves into a lot more important area than what has just been said in the story. The story is an attempt to illuminate what is said in the poetry. In fact, the story plays a secondary role to the poetry. (Palaver 61)

In the following discussion, then, I shall primarily focus on the poetry, using the story to illuminate it, as Awoonor intended.

The two unifying figures of the allegory are the realistic lawyer-protagonist Amamu and the mythical woman of the sea. In the external narrative, Amamu passes from his village birth, by way of a colonial primary-school, study in England, and a successful law practice in Accra, to his death in an institution for the insane. Internally, the movement is from his birth, through the first epiphany of the woman of the sea, her disappearance, and his endless search for her, to his reunion with her in her second manifestation that for him is a rebirth.

Most discussions of this novel have concentrated on the role of Amamu as priest-carrier (Priebe, Myth 68, Wright,

"Ritual"); and there is no need to reproduce this interpretation, particularly since Awoonor confirms it (Goldblatt 44; Palaver 62). However, these discussions have tended to over-emphasize the story-elements, seeking to find in Amamu's madness and death a personal sacrifice for the communal good. On this realistic level, it is almost impossible to discover any social regeneration or communal redemption accomplished by Amamu's death. Priebe offers the ingenious suggestion that Amamu, by spiritual reunification with the woman of the sea and thus journeying prematurely to the world of the ancestors, "is better able as an ancestral force to effect the changes he had not the power to effect while living" (68). But this attempt to find communal redemption in the narrative events is, I think, a mistaken approach. Awoonor's work, like that of Soyinka and of Achebe, is a guidepost to the direction in which redemption must be sought, not a blueprint for its accomplishment.

Awoonor insists that This Earth is "an allegorical tale" because he does not want it "to be confused with what other people might consider a realistic working out of the story" (Palaver 59). Since the work is an allegory, Amamu, as much as the woman of the sea, must be interpreted allegorically. The individual man of the narrative represents modern African man, as can be seen in Awoonor's explanation of his portrayal:

> When I finally decided to use this theme of the priest, the carrier, the man who bears his burden

> of the terrible truth, I decided it was very easy for me to go into traditional society to take a person from that society. . . . But rather I would choose a man who, by his upbringing and by his education, exists almost totally outside this world and its outlook. The Lawyer, the sophisticated international man is no longer a tribal African and would suffer a kind of claustrophobia when put back into his tribal origins. He is the one who is very much in need of this journey, in terms of the future and what the whole of Africa will become. He is the representative of the future in the sense that our people will change, our drums will be silent, the rural communities will change, and we will all be like this lawyer in some basic general sense. (Palaver 62)

Like the priest-carrier, the mythical woman of the sea must also assume a revitalized meaning in a changing, modern world, but a meaning that grows out of her original significance. Traditional beliefs about her are still extant in Awoonor's home area of Keta, as he has explained in an interview: "Right now in Keta there are magicians who can cure all kinds of diseases and it is believed that they have spent years in the waters with this woman. She is a very real woman" (Palaver 60). The woman of the sea, then, is a healer. In a later interview, Awoonor further clarifies her power:

> In my hometown right now there are stories of men whom this woman has taken into the sea with her. They fall in love and follow her. And sometimes, after seven years, they come back with a knowledge of life, a complete awareness. They then exist beyond the purely bodily level. (Goldblatt 44)

From "the imagery of that myth," Awoonor asserts, he was trying to create

> another symbol of Africa. Somewhere she does exist as the final repository of wisdom. She knows the answers. She knows what I must do, what Amamu must do, what we all must do. And I must go with her in order to acquire this knowledge and survive the truncation of the soul that society imposes. Unless we follow this path to wisdom, the Dance of Death will continue, onward and onward. (Goldblatt 44)

What the woman of the sea represents, then, is some kind of spiritual wisdom that is essential for man's survival and renewal.

As a lawyer, Amamu belongs to a group who have acquired a different kind of wisdom, a group ironically categorized by the narrator as "[t]hese brilliant children of our soil who have wrenched from the white man the magic of his wisdom" (16). In the slums of the city, a lawyer is thought of as being "next to God" because of his power (159). In the

opening stream-of-consciousness passage, the world's view of lawyer-Amamu--"He went to England, read books, big fat books of wisdom"--is juxtaposed with the "mad" Amamu's counter-affirmation: "I planted the tree of wisdom. I hoed the field of thorns, collected and burned the thistles on the outskirts, and planted the tree" (1).

The thorns and thistles that Amamu claims to have uprooted and burned are the life-destroying constituents of contemporary Ghanaian life that are later exemplified in the narrative episodes: "the pretentious suburbia of Kaneshie [where Amamu lives]" (154) and the "huge dunghills . . . called refuse dumps" (152) and the "huge open gutter" (151) of the slum-area of Nima, where "sharp land speculators" (152) build fortunes and where "the law is an enemy to these captive people" (158); police obsequiousness to the powerful and brutality to the poor (159-60); "potbellied children, perfect studies in malnutrition" (152) and the National Club, where senior civil servants and professional men like Amamu idle the afternoons away in drinking and womanizing (23-25).

At the time of the initial inner monologue, Amamu has been hospitalized, after having been found under the Indian almond tree on the beach of his home town, gazing out at the sea. Three days earlier, in the city, he has stepped out without shoes "in a pair of striped trousers and a sleeveless singlet" on the beginning of his three-day journey to the beach where the woman of the sea first appeared to him. By

shedding the outer garments of professionalism, urbanization, and sophistication, and walking away from his previous existence, Amamu has begun a life-enhancing process, symbolized by his once more being able to behold the woman of the sea. In this way, he has "planted the tree of wisdom." The three-day period between his disappearance from the city and his being discovered on the edge of the sea duplicates the period between Christ's death and resurrection. Amamu's "madness" is both a death and a rebirth.

All the experiences of Amamu's life intermingle in the monologues, so that his beloved cousin Dede who died at the age of twelve merges with his lover Adisa, and both merge with the woman of the sea. Adisa, like the water spirit, is associated with everything life-giving:

> Adisa came from the north. She possessed the silence and the quiet of the savannas, the smell of fresh earth upturned for the millet season in her native home. Her skin was the darkness of silent northern rivers which do not dry up, though they are not tributaries. (111)

Yet, in a society that has consigned her to the life of a city prostitute, Adisa has been as deprived of fulfilled womanhood as has the child Dede who died before she was old enough for her puberty rites.

Chapter 4 describes realistically a typical visit of Amamu to Adisa's bed-sitter and ends with their sexual union.

Interlude 4a then begins as follows:

> The smell of coital semen in the dry heat of a little room restores the shattered nerves jangled in a neat bundle upon a bed.
>
> My cousin Dede . . . my first love in the fields of wild flowers and butterflies long long ago she came from the dead in the shape of the woman of the sea. . . .
>
> Then she died. Then she returned, my woman of the sea with black nipples a tooth extracted by the dentist [details that identify Adisa]. (57)

In a later interlude, butterflies are associated with Dede and the woman of the sea: "So my woman of the sea was she that died in the death of my cousin when we were young in the butterfly fields in infant days years ago" (145). When Adisa learns that Amamu has disappeared, she is wearing "a simple frock with several yellow butterflies playing in a sunny field, there were a few children too, chasing the butterflies" (173). The butterflies are emblems of beauty and freedom, and therefore of happiness, all missing in the Accra life of Amamu.

Only with Adisa is Amamu "at peace" (53). Like Ihuoma of The Concubine, Adisa is described as Other. She unlaces Amamu's shoes "with a grace that was not of this world" (52). The words of Amamu's favourite record that she always plays for him speak of "a promised land" (53). Connected with

Adisa, as well, is the snake imagery that is frequently associated with water spirit figures. On the ceiling of her room, a rain-mark has taken the form of a serpent of which Amamu is constantly aware (54). Furthermore, Amamu's sexual union with Adisa is restorative: "This was the hour of their redemption washed clean by tears brewed from the anguish of their singular soul" (56).

In her relationship with Amamu, Adisa fulfils the dual role of goddess and priestess:

> 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. (176)

But Adisa is also the Accra prostitute whom Amamu first met in court where he was called to defend her and five other women, among whom she stood out for "her silent defiance of the law" (111). For Adisa, the love of Amamu has been a "journey out of degradation" (176). At the moment when she is convinced that she will never see him again, she has a strange experience: "Somewhere in the distance, across her memories of childhood and her native land, she heard a voice calling her home, to come home, hurry home now that evening had come" (176). When Amamu reaches the almond tree and sits down at

its feet, gazing out to sea, he experiences a "sudden calmness" (178) like the peace he has felt with Adisa, and we are told that "[he] had arrived home at last" (179). The tumult of the crashing waves "was the signal for the calm that was promised, it was the legend of a final peace" (179). The implication is that Adisa has heard Amamu's soul calling to hers, and that she is present in the woman who now rises from a "dream" sea that is also a "real" sea (179).

The woman is wearing "all the ancient beads" left by Dede's mother for her puberty rites. Although in the woman's first appearance she rose in moonlight, now she rises in a noonday sun that is "beating down hard and cruel" (179), yet whose radiance recalls "the bright sunshine of the butterfly fields" (179). And "one lonely gorgeous star" (179) accompanies her emergence. As she embraces Amamu, odours of cinnamon and wild flowers are "ancient smells of treasure well kept for the children of the future" (179). This vision, then, like the sea from which she rises, embodies all the possibilities of life and of time.

In the novel's opening passage that chronologically follows Amamu's reunion with the woman of the sea and precedes his physical death, Amamu hallucinates that he has strangled Adisa and expresses his utter penitence:

> And I would go on my knees and beg her that I would never kill her again as long as I lived; that I would die in her place should they want to kill

> her, beat her and shame her in this land of ours. I would take all the indignities and the shames intended for her. (3)

The ideal values symbolized by the woman of the sea/Adisa cannot be destroyed, but they can be hidden, suppressed, or distorted in many ways. For such attempted annihilation, Amamu accepts responsibility and makes atonement.

Then, in Amamu's mind, Adisa metamorphoses into mermaid, and he commits himself further:

> I would renew my oath, my promise that I would never kill her again; that it was my error. No, I shall let her live within me. Let her share my joy. My agony I shall keep away from her in the firm belief that she will never die. (3)

The vision or ideal can be kept alive only within Amamu--that is, within humanity, no matter what agony humanity endures.

That Amamu (man) has become both the protector and the devotee of this ideal is confirmed in the following thought: "Her corals and sapphires shall be planted upon my neck, incisors stamping marks I shall wear in little crosses of the thunder initiates till my dying day" (3). The image just quoted comes from the sign of initiation into the Yewe cult of Awoonor's grandfather. In his "Reminiscences of earlier days," Awoonor remembers the young boys and girls who were trained for a year "in the rituals and observance of the god" to become "his children and celebrants." These initiates

"bear his mark on their back till their dying day" (115). Similarly, Amamu is willing himself to be ineffaceably marked as a celebrant of the woman of the sea and the ideal that she represents.

In contrast to the life-fulfilling triple figure of this woman are Amamu's wife Alice and the other women whom he encounters briefly in his life-journey. To John Goldblatt's comment that Alice, Adisa, and the mermaid "seem to form some kind of trinity," Awoonor replied that they are "aspects of Amamu's consciousness" but "Alice least, because she is almost wholly outside of him" (Goldblatt 44). Alice appears in only one of the interior monologues (10a), in which Amamu remembers their courtship in London and "delusions of love's redemption" (132). The negative imagery of this interlude, including images of dirt ("sad days of dog shit on pavements" 132), death ("Okigbo the elephant is dead" 133), and war ("the age of bombs" 133), is threaded throughout with variations on inter-racial experience, beginning and ending with "Send the wogs home" (132; 137).

From the external narrative, we learn that Alice had remained in England when Amamu returned to Ghana, finally coming home after only five years abroad (120). Her anglicization is also suggested by her "deep scars of eyebrow pencil," and "pure and artificial" teeth (121). True, she dresses for her homecoming party "in a beautifully designed cloth with patterns of dancing butterflies" (125), but the

sophistication of her appearance distances her from Adisa in her "simple frock" decorated with butterflies and playing children and from the child Dede in the butterfly fields:

> The kaba shirt was cut low around the neck. The V shape revealed a pair of honey-coloured breasts pushed up in arrogance by a steady brassiere. Her hair was done into a dome, curled at the front and the rest held by a glinting silver bracelet. She held in her tiny hand a little wineglass which she twirled round in blissful remembrance of a faraway land. (125)

Rather than being another incarnation of the woman of the sea, Alice is the embodiment of all the false values that Amamu has initially chosen but finally discards.

Other women whom Amamu knows briefly are also associated through imagery with the woman of the sea, but like Alice they prove to be delusory counterfeits. The seemingly-endless procession of these women suggests Amamu's futile world-wide search for what is waiting for him at home in Africa, as he comes to understand only in the sanity of his madness: "Loving the memory of her my first love through all lands and all climes, searching for her who came out of the sea in the shadow of the almond tree" (59). These female figures, such as the Russian girl Tanya (83-84), seem to represent foreign ideologies briefly embraced and abandoned when their fraudulence is recognized.

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In such an interpretation, Alice becomes the essence of neo-colonialism, African-nurtured but equally far from the sought-after ideal. She is a Cape Coast girl, the daughter of a retired judge. In the interlude formerly described, in which Amamu thinks of her as "my new bourgeois love from my native land" (132), the following micro-allegory of neo-colonialism is inserted:

> What has Africa to contribute to the world? asked the learned professor.
>
> If you have no history create one, if you have no culture, invent one, for the question is being asked. . . .
>
> She [Africa] fell madly in love with a Swiss gentleman. Secretly she wanted a mulatto baby, fair with long hair. When the man left for Europe she pursued him. Two years after she came home with a fair baby girl with long hair. The species must be improved. They have stayed black for too long, and black is not beautiful. Her mother and her aunts in Cape Coast screamed over the baby, What a beautiful baby, and named her She Who Was Born in the White Man's Country. (134)

Alice's return from her marital home to her father's home in Cape Coast symbolizes a choice opposite to that symbolized by Amamu's return home. The latter means, Awoonor says, a return "to primal nature, the primal good nature of all

ourselves" (Palaver 55), incarnated in "the anthropomorphic female essence, the woman of the sea" ("Tradition" 170). In Awoonor's words, "She eliminates the dichotomized conflicts and the palpable contradictions. She is Earth. She is Africa" ("Tradition" 170).

In speaking of the role of the African writer, Awoonor also speaks of "the primal nature," but less metaphorically:

> We [Africans] are scattered to the four winds in terms of our own basic nature. The writer will provide the vision . . . an awareness of this nature. And he will as a man oppose those forces that will only be negative forces. By his work he will oppose them; as a human being who feels and loves and cries, he will be opposed to them. (Palaver 57)

Awoonor's woman of the sea originates in the physical and metaphysical African universe that for him and other African writers must be "the point from which to see the world" (Awoonor, "Tradition and Continuity" 72), but she symbolizes all the life-giving forces inherent not only in that world but in humanity. Amamu's reunion with her is an affirmation and a celebration of those forces.

In Chinua Achebe's Anthills and Ayi Kwei Armah's two novels Fragments and The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born, the water spirit figures are likewise regenerative archetypes.

Anthills

In both Anthills and Fragments, the writers have embedded a water-goddess myth that mirrors and comments on the novel's realistic characters and contemporary themes, setting up multiple resonances with the images and events of the embodying narrative. The invocation of these goddesses, like that of Awoonor's woman of the sea, suggests that the continuing presence and force of traditional wisdom must be drawn on to effect the revitalization of present-day Africa.

Anthills is set in Kangan, a fictitious West African country under the rule of a military dictator, who has achieved his position through a coup and who eventually dies in another coup. The novel focuses on a trio of former school-friends: Sam the Head of State; Christ Oriko, Commissioner of Information; and Ikem Osodi, a poet and crusading editor of the National Gazette; and on a woman friend of the three, Beatrice Okoh, Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance.

At the centre of this political narrative is inserted the Igbo myth of the water-goddess Idemili, introduced by the sentence: "That we are surrounded by deep mysteries is known to all but the incurably ignorant" (102). The story is free-standing, without hearer or teller, complete in itself. But its imagery and themes reflect both backwards and forwards in the embodying text, inviting the reader to interpret the characters and events of the realistic narrative by the

illumination of the myth. Thus Beatrice, an independent modern woman, is an Idemili figure, identified as such in many ways.

Like all the women modelled on water spirits in West African novels, Beatrice is beautiful. However, the emphasis in Anthills is not on her beauty but on her character. For Chris, "Beatrice is a perfect embodiment of my ideal woman, beautiful without being glamorous. Peaceful but very strong. Very, very strong" (63-64). She frequently and unconsciously assumes a goddess-like "pose of detachment--sitting somewhat stiff and erect, her arms folded firmly across her breasts" and often "staring fixedly away into median space" (146). On the night of her final parting with Chris, she sits thus "immobile as a goddess in her shrine" (196).

In the complex pattern of prefigurations in this novel, Beatrice is also another water-goddess, Idoto, muse of the Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo.[1] This latter identification is implicit in her relationship with Chris Oriko and Ikem Osodi, both of whom are patterned on the never-mentioned Okigbo whose early death in the Nigerian Civil War was, like theirs in the novel, a direct consequence of the corrupt leadership of the country. Both Ikem and Chris are close friends of Beatrice, the first in a brotherly way, the second as a lover. In reference to the Okigbo-Idoto association underlying this triangle, Fiona Sparrow describes Chris and Ikem as being "the two sides of the same coin. They

are both worshipper's [sic] at Idoto's shrine, and the goddess divides her favours between them. Ikem has been given the power of the word but Chris has been given her love" (61).

In patterning both Chris and Ikem on Okigbo, Achebe has used a technique referred to by John J. White as fragmentation, in which "a single prefiguration is refracted across a number of modern figures" (194). In creating the character of Beatrice, he has used the opposite technique of condensation: "a pattern where a number of separate prefigurations all relate to one modern event or a single character" (White 194). Three intermeshing prefigurations combine in Beatrice: Dante's poetic muse; Okigbo's poetic muse Idoto; and the water-goddess Idemili.

According to Robert Wren, Idemili has been revered "since time immemorial" by "all the clans of the region drained by a tributary of the Niger which has as its source the spring called ide" (215). Elsewhere in Achebe's writings, Idemili is spoken of as a male god, as in the novel Arrow of God and in the poem "Lament of the Sacred Python," in which Idemili is referred to as "great father" (Beware, Soul Brother 50). Anthills, however, presents this water spirit as female, Daughter of the Almighty.

The literal meaning of Idemili is "pillar of water" (Wren 215). On his way to see Beatrice for the last time, Ikem runs into a storm in a way that he describes as "literally like barging into a pillar of rain" (93). Immediately following

this scene comes the myth, in which the goddess Idemili is sent to earth by her father, the Almighty, in a "resplendent Pillar of Water" (102). Later, as the myth tells us, she "sent a stream from her lake to snake through the parched settlements all the way to Orimili [the Niger river]" (103). River-goddesses like Idoto, then, are daughters of Idemili. In speaking of Idoto, Okigbo once said: "This goddess is the earth mother, and also the mother of the whole family" (Whitelaw 36). By the end of Anthills, Beatrice too has become "mother of the whole family."

Included in the Idemili myth is a significant incident in which the royal python called Eke-Idemili, "Messenger of the Daughter of God" (105), warningly blocks the path of a handsome but randy man who, by breaking a ritual of sexual abstinence, has sought to deceive Idemili. Earlier in the novel, python and goddess imagery have occurred in the scene in which Beatrice dances seductively with His Excellency Sam in order to draw him away from a female American journalist who has been telling him how to run his country in the interests of hers. Beatrice recalls her success as follows: "The king was slowly but surely responding! . . . The big snake, the royal python of a gigantic erection began to stir in the shrubbery of my shrine as we danced closer and closer to soothing airs, soothing our ancient bruises together in the dimmed lights" (81). The ancient bruises are those inflicted by outsiders on the pride and integrity of the country's

people. Furthermore, the Idemili myth relates that "in rare conditions of sunlight" Idemili can be seen as "the resplendent Pillar of Water" rising majestically "from the bowl of the dark lake" (102). It is while facing "the breathtaking view of the dark lake" (81) that Beatrice upbraids Sam, Head of State and therefore "the sacred symbol" (80) of her nation's pride, for being taken hostage by an ordinary American girl.

On the narrative level, Beatrice is an independent, highly-educated woman, determined to put her career first (88) and holding a very responsible position. She has always disliked her second name Nwanyibuife because of its meaning: "A female is also something" (87). Through her modern role, as well as through her prefigurations as Idoto and Idemili, Beatrice acts as a focus for one of the major themes of Achebe's novel, African feminism. It is Beatrice who sees that "giving women today the same role which traditional society gave them of intervening only when everything else has failed is not enough" (91). The converted Ikem, in his love-letter to Beatrice, concedes that women must define their own role:

> I can't tell you what the new role for Woman will be. I don't know. I should never have presumed to know. _You_ have to tell us. We never asked you before. And perhaps because you've never been asked you may not have thought about it; you may

not have the answer handy. (98)

After admitting, in the same letter, that women are "the biggest single group of oppressed people in the world," Ikem lists other oppressed groups: "rural peasants in every land, the urban poor in industrialized countries, Black people everywhere including their own continent, ethnic and religious minorities and castes in all countries" (98). Immediately following the reading of this letter, the story of Idemili provides an enriching commentary on it in the myth's warning to men who seek power over others. According to the myth, Idemili has been sent "to bear witness to the moral nature of authority by wrapping around Power's rude waist a loincloth of peace and modesty" (102). Therefore when a wealthy man wants to buy admission into "the powerful hierarchy of ozo [an Igbo title]," (103), he must take a daughter with him "to inform the Daughter of the Almighty of his ambition" (103). If Idemili "finds him unworthy to carry the authority of ozo she simply sends death to smite him and save her sacred hierarchy from contamination and scandal. . . . Such is Idemili's contempt for man's unquenchable thirst to sit in authority on his fellows" (104). Similarly, His Excellency Sam, who has withheld water from the drought-stricken Abazonians to punish them for denying him the President-for-Life status that he craves, is found unworthy of exercising authority and is struck down. Achebe is saying that men (epitomized by the trio of friends) have failed their country. Earlier,

Beatrice-Idemili has chastised Chris: "[Y]ou fellows, all three of you, are incredibly conceited. The story of this country, as far as you are concerned, is the story of the three of you" (66). Since the three represent not only the male intellectual elite, but also the "soldiers-turned-politicians, with their cohorts in business and the bureaucracy" (141), the criticism has wide ramifications.

However, the novel ends not with the deaths of these three men but with a new life. When Ikem's girlfriend Elewa almost has a miscarriage, Beatrice devotes herself to the care of the bereaved girl, so that it is under the protection of Beatrice-Idoto, the Earth-Mother, that Ikem's child is born safely--a girl, as it has to be in this most feminist of novels.

Gathered in Beatrice's flat for the child's naming-ceremony is the commingling of sexes, religions, social classes, occupations, and ethnic groups from which a West African nation-family must grow. Present along with the mother Elewa, a half-literate salesgirl, are the university graduate Beatrice; Adamma, the student nurse rescued from rape by Chris, at the cost of his own life; Emmanuel Obote, President of the University of Bassa Students Union; the taxi-driver Braimoh and his wife Aina, a Muslim from Abazon; the domestic servant Agatha, an evangelical Christian; and Captain Abdul Medani, a reluctant, and ultimately subversive, tool of the military government. The deaths of Chris and Ikem have

drawn these diverse people together in a "defensive pact" (218) with Beatrice-Idoto, "the mother of the whole family."

At the naming-ceremony, contrary to patriarchal custom, it is a woman who chooses the baby's name. Moreover, Beatrice gives to Ikem's daughter what has hitherto been a boy's name: Amaechina--"May-the-path-never-close" (222). When Elewa's paternal uncle arrives too late to perform his traditional office, Beatrice informs him that the baby has been named by all of those gathered and all of them are her father and mother. Thus, around Ikem's daughter a society is being re-formed in the way that Ikem has said it must be, "around what it is, its core of reality; not around an intellectual abstraction" (100).

In the abiding strength of Beatrice-Idoto-Idemili, Achebe has made two positive affirmations: that women must function as full participants in society and that the present must grow from the strengths of the past. During a 1989 panel discussion in London at the annual PEN lectures, Achebe was asked whether Beatrice was "representative of the African woman who combined her African past with European influences" (Oyortey 422). In his reply, Achebe declared that Beatrice's strength "was in her ability to draw her power from the past when goddesses walked the earth--and that she was using 'full power'--not making a simplistic separation between past and present, but utilising the totality of heritage and history" (Oyortey 422).

Similarly, in Anthills, Achebe has used "full power." The traditional myth of Idemili illuminates the novel's present-day concerns, including as it does an emphasis on "the moral nature of authority" and the essential role of women (daughters) in tempering Power. At the same time, the myth provides a pattern for the narrative. Just as the character of a completely modern African woman is superimposed on the prefiguration of traditional goddesses, the novel's fictional events, reflecting actual occurrences in the recent history of Africa, and in particular of Nigeria, are superimposed on the events of the myth as Achebe tells it. The drought of Abazon is both the "parched settlements" through which Idemili sent her refreshing waters and the terrible Sahel drought of recent years. Sam, in his self-aggrandizement and misuse of power, is not only the ozo-seeker found unworthy by Idemili, but also all those African rulers who have assumed power under the pretext of freeing their people, only in their turn to victimize further those already victimized. Hence allusions to African rulers such as Amin and Bokassa are scattered liberally throughout the novel.

By functioning in these multiple ways, the Idemili myth in its totality illustrates the truth of another major theme of the novel: society's need for the story-teller, the artist. This theme is made explicit in a speech by the white-bearded elder of the Abazon delegation, in his insistence that in any struggle the story is of paramount importance:

> The sounding of the battle-drum is important; the fierce waging of the war itself is important; and the telling of the story afterwards--each is important in its own way. . . . But if you ask me which of them takes the eagle-feather I will say boldly: the story. (123-24)

Significantly, his reason for this choice is once more associated with daughters:

> [O]ur people sometimes will give the name Nkolika to their daughters--Recalling-Is-Greatest. Why? Because it is only the story can continue beyond the war and the warrior. . . . The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. . . . [I]t is the story that owns us and directs us. (124)

The self-reflexive insistence of Achebe's text on the primacy of story begins when Beatrice, after the deaths of Ikem and Chris, feels compelled to record "the still unbelievable violences" (83) that she and her friends have experienced. Here Achebe invokes the presence of the god Agwu, "the capricious god of diviners and artists" (105). The Christian upbringing and English schooling of Beatrice have left her ignorant of "her forebears and the divinities with whom they had evolved" (105); but such ignorance is irrelevant, for "as a newly-minted proverb among her people has it, baptism (translated in their language as Water of God) is no antidote against possession by Agwu" (105). Thus

Beatrice-Idemili finds herself "seized . . . by the forelock" (83) by a "single idea or power or whatever" (82), and "under a strange propulsion" (82) she begins to write the "tragic history" (82).

Like the political themes, this theme of the indispensability of the story-teller, presented symbolically through the integration of the Idemili myth with the fictional characters and events, is reinforced on the realistic level by frequent allusions to illustrious African writers, such as Senghor, Mazrui, Kunene, and Ousmane, and even to Achebe's own earlier writings. Through this brilliant fusion of traditional myth with present-day reality, Achebe has told a story of contemporary Africa that needs to be heard.

In two of Ayi Kwei Armah's novels, Fragments and The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born, a water spirit figure also functions as a regenerative archetype to ameliorate an otherwise devastating portrayal of modern Ghanaian society.

Fragments

Half-way through Fragments, Armah explicitly draws the reader's attention to the water-spirit figuration of the psychiatrist Juana, by having the protagonist Baako tell her the myth of "Mame Water and the Musician," (120). Unlike Achebe's unheralded insertion of the Idemili myth in Anthills, the telling is instigated through the narrative action, and the figures in the myth are analogues for the teller and the

listener. Baako and the musician are both lonely artists; Juana, from Puerto Rico, has come out of the sea like the beautiful Mame Water, and she and Baako make love on the beach and in the sea.

Baako has returned to Ghana from overseas study with the dream of speaking to the people through the medium of film. But his family anticipate increased prosperity and enhanced status from the return of their "been-to"; and Ghanavision, where he works, reserves its film for government ceremonies and other such VIP occasions. Moreover, available TV sets are not distributed to the villages but to the land's highest officials. In frustration, Baako resigns and burns all of the film-scripts that he has created. At the end of the novel, he, like Amamu, has been hospitalized as a madman.

The name Baako Onipa means "lone person" (Anyidoho 27), an identification that not only describes the protagonist's isolation from his family and colleagues but the universal situation of the artist. In the myth, as Baako tells it, the singer's separation from Mame Water is unbearable but "it is this separation itself which makes him sing as he has never sung before" (120). In other words, the greatness of art comes from the artist's aloneness. Baako's former art-teacher, Ocran, insists that to accomplish anything Baako will have to work alone at first, a requirement that Baako for a long time resists.

To Juana's reservation that "salvation is such an empty

thing when you're alone," Ocran counters: "You have to be alone to find out what's in you. Afterwards . . ." (276). His uncompleted "afterwards" suggests that although the solitude is necessary, it may be only the preliminary condition for the communal participation and service that Baako seeks. In his telling of the myth, Baako emphasizes the singer's fear of losing Mame Water, "the fear that one night he'll go to the sea and Mame Water . . . will not be coming any more" (172). Since Mame Water is the singer's muse, the fear is the artist's fear of loss of the power to create. On the narrative level, however, it is Baako's fear of losing Juana, the only stabilizing force in his life, and therefore also fear of the loss of his desire to create. It is during separation from Juana, when she goes on leave, that Baako destroys his work and becomes ill.

Once, while waiting for a ferry at a river-crossing, Baako and Juana see a madman gazing into the water. Baako translates for Juana what the man is saying: "Something about the water. . . . He says it's beneath the water. Everything. The sky. Anyone who looks deep can see it. Down below the water" (135). Among the Ashanti and some other West African peoples, the supreme god is a sky god (Busia 192; Parrinder 15, 19). Thus the singer's intercourse with Mame Water, who has emerged from the depths that also contain the sky, symbolizes the artist's communion with all the cosmic forces and therefore his heightened understanding of life. Hence the

myth says of the musician: "Now he knows all there is to know about loneliness, about love, and power" (120).

Like Awoonor's woman of the sea, Juana is a healer and strengthener. She understands Baako's dilemma, expressed in his contrast between the old mythic heroes who "turned defeat into victory for the whole community" (103) and the contemporary "been-to" hero who is "supposed to get rich, mainly at the expense of the community" (103). It is the clear-sighted Juana who elucidates the conflict: "There are two communities, really, and they don't coincide" (193).

As an artist, Baako has sought to serve the wider community. A major theme of this novel, as in Anthill, is the community's need of the artist, unrecognized and unacknowledged though that need may be. In an emblematic episode, witnessed by Baako and Juana, a boy who is trying to help fishermen to pull in a very heavy net is knocked down. But then the boy begins to strike a double gong; and the strong men, who have been "moving all at once in too many undecided directions" (127), become quieter and move into "a clearer pace" (128) as the sounds settle into "a definite rhythm" (128). When the boy begins to sing, others join in, and the pulling takes "a rhythm from the general song" (128). Afterwards, Baako observes, "That boy, he was giving those men something they didn't have" (129), and Juana joins, "They pushed him around pretty badly, I'd say" (129). As does the singer in the Mame Water myth, the boy represents Baako (the

African artist), sorely needed to provide the rhythm, the pattern, the cohesion through which the people can accomplish their aims, and capable of giving them this even though they reject him or misuse him.

What precedes and occasions Baako's telling of the Mame Water myth is an ironic counterfeit of it. At a farcical literary soirée, the woman presiding, Akosua Russel, reads a short narrative poem that she terms an "epic" (112). Baako tells Juana that this "horrible poem" (120) is Russell's variation on the myth of "Mame Water and the Musician." In Russell's poem, a "stranger from strange lands" (113) marries the daughter of the queen, after which the "dynamic couple" (113) bring literacy, work, and civilization to the area, "Reigning with new light o'er adoring subjects" (114). Charles Larson has claimed that Akosua Russell is a satiric portrait of the Ghanaian writer and arts promoter Efua Sutherland and that the poem is a parody of Sutherland's "New Life at Kyerefaso" (273n).

However that may be, the importance of this episode is not in its ridicule of specific individuals, if that is intended, but in its attack on neo-colonialist attitudes. Russell's verse perverts an African myth by invoking a <u>western</u> outsider to bring salvation, just as the poet Russell and the frustrated novelist Lawrence Boateng are looking for western financial support. In the poem, the stranger "from beyond the seas" (113) has "shiny flaxen hair,/ Limpid pools of blue for

eyes,/. . ./skin like purest shiny marble" (113). On the platform, listening, is a visiting American who has, in Boateng's words, "the smile of a guy with foundation money" (109). For artists to look for and depend on foreign support is just another manifestation of the "cargo-cult" mentality of Baako's family, who expect bonanzas to arrive with him from the skies. Baako has perceived that his family is "only a closer, intenser, more intimate reflection of the society itself, a concave mirror" (102).

The folly of allowing foreign interests to distort history and to determine contemporary priorities is further demonstrated in <u>Fragments</u> through the fate of a film-script on slavery, filed and destined never to be used until a British Council woman turns it into a play in which the white enslaver is "replaced by a brutish whip-swinging African" (132) and a filmed version becomes "purely a free-for-all among yelling tribal savages" (132).

This incident and the whole episode of the soirée express Armah's antipathy to neo-colonialism, which he has elsewhere denounced as being "profoundly destructive" ("One Writer's Education" 1753). The chapter of which the soirée forms the centre section begins with Baako's first meeting with Juana and ends with the telling of the Mame Water myth. The chapter's title "Osagyefo," which means "Redeemer," carries both positive and negative connotations. It refers ironically to self-styled redeemers, the outsiders whose presence

encourages the perversion of traditional values. Moreover, as the best-known praise name of independent Ghana's first ruler, Kwame Nkrumah, the title has ironic reverberations which suggest the whole betrayal of independence by neo-colonialism. But "Redeemer" suggests as well the redemptive roles of traditional myth and of Juana.

When Baako tells Juana that she does not behave like the atheist she claims to be, but like a Catholic and a pagan, she has to admit to herself that she is "concerned with salvation still" (177), and she thinks wryly that the meaning of her life remains "in her defeated attempts to purify her environment, right down to the final, futile decision to try to salvage discrete individuals [such as Baako] in the general carnage" (177). Despite continual discouragement, Juana never does succumb to despair. Nor does she permit Baako to do so.

At the end of Fragments, Baako is improving, and Juana is preparing for him to stay with her when he is released from hospital. In his illness, Baako thinks of Juana and his grandmother Naana as "women saving," and then reminds himself, "Ocran too" (257). The sane and saving voices of Ocran, Juana, and Naana, along with the dying Naana's plan to call stronger ancestral spirits than herself to Baako's aid as soon as she enters their world, are the positive forces that dispel the reader's doubt that Baako will continue to write (sing) and that his art will have value for others.

In a novel that paints an otherwise depressing picture of

contemporary West Africa, Fragments, just like This Earth, My Brother . . . and Anthills, uses the water spirit archetype to insist on the possibility of revitalization. So too does Armah's first novel, The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born, in which the water spirit motif manifests itself through a character of only minor narrative importance, but of major symbolic significance.

The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born

In the present time of Beautyful Ones, the 1960's, a character identified only as Teacher is living alone, without hope, "a human being hiding from other human beings" (78). It is through Teacher's memories of the years between World War II and Ghana's winning of independence in 1957 that we are introduced to Maanan. She is presented realistically as a poverty-stricken drifter haunting the shores of the sea and eking out an existence as a prostitute: "Sister Maanan found refuge in lengthening bottles, and the passing foreigner gave her money and sometimes even love" (66). She is a friend of Teacher and of Kofi Billy, a veteran who, on his return from the war, had been lucky enough to be employed as a dock-worker, "picked to do work that was too cruel for white men's hands" (65). Through the incompetence of a young and inexperienced white boss, Kofi Billy had had his right leg cut away beneath the knee. Maanan exerts a strange power over Kofi Billy and Teacher, realistically through her access to

wee (marijuana), but symbolically as Mammy Water. As Teacher remembers it, "[w]e followed Maanan as if she had been our mother, Kofi Billy and myself" (70). It is on the breakwater that Maanan teaches the two men to smoke wee, the effects of which are described by Teacher as follows:

> Wee can make you see things that you might perhaps not really want to see . . . all through life we protect ourselves in so many ways from so many hurtful truths just by managing to be a little blind here, a bit shortsighted there, and by squinting against the incoming light all the time. . . . The destructive thing wee does is to lift the blindness and to let you see the whole of your life laid out in front of you. (70)

Through wee, Maanan is able "to make those she taught to smoke come out of their hiding-places within themselves" (74). But this is a dangerous power, and Kofi Billy sees his situation so clearly that he soon hangs himself (70).

Throughout the novel, excrement is a symbol of the rottenness pervading society. The beach below the breakwater is "used by everybody . . . as a lavatory and as a bathroom" (71), and the night air carries "the smell of mixed shit" even into their blood (71). From the breakwater, then, they move to the water's edge where the air is "clean and moist with salt water" (71). Hence Maanan is associated with the cleansing sea, and the sea is associated by Teacher with the

ancient past:

> [T]he water and the sand were alive for me then; the water coming in long, slow movements stretching back into ages so very long ago, and the land always answering the movement, though in our dead moments we do not have eyes to see any of this. (72)

Along with this reminder of the sea's ages-long existence comes mention of the beauty of Maanan: "We all knew that Maanan was one of the most beautiful women" (72). But in her face, too, Teacher could see that "this was a woman being pushed towards destruction and there was nothing she or I could do about it" (72). These first hints that Maanan may be a symbol of Ghana itself are strengthened by Teacher's feeling of being

> accused by a silence that belonged to millions and ages of women all bearing the face and the form of Maanan, and needing no voice at all to tell [him he] had failed them . . . through all the ages of their suffering. (71)

Teacher attributes to Maanan a kind of supra-human wisdom, forged by suffering:

> I would have said something to Maanan if the things to say had not been so heavy, but even then I was sure she understood, that she had understood long before I had ever seen enough to ask her

> forgiveness and that she had forgiven me as much as it was possible for the suffering to forgive those who only remain to suffer with them and to see their distress. (73)

In his own despair, Teacher shrinks from the love that might have increased the pain of living, as it does for the novel's protagonist, the man. Teacher recalls that "in response to her look my mind and heart opened themselves up to the pain of deep feeling" (73), but "we said nothing about love itself . . . and that one moment passed, I did not know then how irretrievably" (73).

By shrinking from Maanan and retreating into his own private world of books and music from "other places and other times" (93-94), Teacher is one of those who despairs of the country's seemingly-futile struggle and refuses commitment to either the present or the future. In this way he escapes pain, but only to live on as a "dead nature" (73).

Unlike Teacher, Maanan reaches out towards life instead of withdrawing from it: "Maanan was trying after happiness again, in those ways that were to destroy her utterly in the end" (73). When a new leader arises, she becomes a believer and has a "strange look of happiness in her" (84). For a time there is hope for the dispossessed. Even Teacher concedes it: "The promise was so beautiful . . . at last something good was being born. It was there. We were not deceived about that. . . . The beauty was in the waking of the powerless" (85).

Other self-styled leaders had come speaking to them, as Teacher says, "in words designed not to tell us anything about ourselves, but to press into our minds the weight of things coming from above" (82). In contrast, the new one tells them, "Let us look inward. What are we? What have we? Can we work for ourselves? To strengthen ourselves?" (86). Maanan recognizes that the thoughts are not new to her: "Only I have never seen anything to go and fish them up like that. He was reading me. I know he was speaking of me" (87). This leader is speaking both to and for the people and is thus giving a voice to the spirit of Ghana.

Only at the end of the novel is this leader identified by name as Nkrumah, but the pre-independence Nkrumah is unmistakable. In his 1953 Independence motion (which came to be known as "The Motion of Destiny"), he asked for self-government for Ghana in order to create "a glorious future . . . in terms of social progress and of peace," through battles "against the old ideas that keep men trammelled in their own greed" (Autobiog. 198). Furthermore, he claimed that "self-government . . . is the means by which we shall create the climate in which our people can develop their attributes and express their potentialities to the full" (Autobiog. 204). In Beautyful Ones, Armah depicts a post-independence society driven by its greed-obsessed pursuit of the "gleam," in which people of integrity like Teacher and the man have no hope of developing or expressing their potentialities, and in which

Teacher wonders how the promise "could . . . have grown rotten with such obscene haste," (88) and postulates: "It is possible that it is only power itself, any kind of power, that cannot speak to the powerless" (88).

The novel suggests that there has been, for a time, a personal relationship between Maanan and the new leader. At a rally, he speaks of his poverty: "A few here know where I live. Not much is there. And even what is there is not my own. It is the kindness of a woman, one of you now here. Before she saw me I did what we all do, and I slept on the people's verandas" (87). Moreover, Maanan's former associates could see "happiness in the movement of her body itself, and it was beautiful. She was a woman in love then" (87). She says that the leader looks "helpless" and needs "a woman to look after him," and when one of the men quips, "Preferably Maanan," she agrees (87).

Through these intimations, Armah creates in Maanan a figure who represents all those Ghanaian women who sacrificially supported Nkrumah in the early days and whom he lauded in his autobiography for their tremendous contribution to the success of his political party, as follows:

> Much of the success of the Convention People's Party has been due to the efforts of women members. From the very beginning women have been the chief field organizers. They have travelled through innumerable towns and villages in the role of

> propaganda secretaries and have been responsible for the most part in bringing about the solidarity and cohesion of the Party.
>
> So fervent were these women, in fact, that while I was in gaol and the party organization was at its most critical period, I learned that at a rally in Kumasi a woman party member who adopted the name of Ama Nkrumah ('Ama' being the female equivalent of 'Kwame') got upon the platform and ended a fiery speech by getting hold of a blade and slashing her face. Then, smearing the blood over her body, she challenged the men present to do likewise in order to show that no sacrifice was too great in their united struggle for freedom and independence. (Autobiog. 109)

Maanan's anguish at personal betrayal is the anguish of these Ghanaian women and of Ghana itself.

It must be remembered that all of these events concerning Maanan have been revealed through Teacher's memories. She appears in only one episode of the novel's present time. After the coup that ousts the leader, the man helps Koomson, a former schoolmate and a corrupt member of the government, to escape by boat from the avenging anger of the people. Contaminated by their initial escape route through a latrine, but more by the association with Koomson, the man swims back to shore through the purifying sea and falls asleep on the

beach. When he awakes, he sees a madwoman coming over the sand. It is Maanan. Her face looks "like something that had been finally destroyed a long time back. And yet he found it beautiful as he looked at it" (180). Similarly, Ghana is beautiful but its beauty has been eroded, first by the cruelties of colonialism and then by the continuing cruelties of its own leaders, grown bloated and insensitive with power.

Maanan and the country, although they seem to have gone mad, are still searching for what has been lost. On the beach, as the man watches, Maanan takes in her hands "as much of the morning sand as they could hold" and then lets the sand "drop fine and free through her fingers to drift away with the soft breeze in the clear sunlight" (180). This beautiful image cannot be intended to be read pessimistically. Maanan, unlike Teacher, is still searching for what has been lost. Urgently, as the sand falls from her hands, she is saying: "They have mixed it all together! Everything! They have mixed everything. And how can I find it when they have mixed it all with so many other things?" (180). In her search she is trying to separate the grains of sand--the dreams, aspirations, and visions of the country's people and leaders--from the materialism and power-hunger that have become so inextricably intermingled with them.

Basing his interpretation on the prefiguration of Maanan as a water spirit, Richard Priebe offers an interesting and positive reading of the novel's ending. First, he says of

Maanan, "Her beauty, her regenerative powers, and her association with the water make her appear as Mammy Water" (35). Then he links her madness with West African traditional belief:

> [T]he gods draw their strength from the worship of men, just as men in turn draw their strength from the gods. Man can thus create or destroy gods; there is no concept, as in the West, of a deity having an existence independent of man. Manaan [sic] has been neglected by man, and in that neglect lies the cause of the madness by which the man finds her possessed. Her madness is a correlative to the corruption in society. . . . The man's involvement in the ritual process [of cleansing society] was implicitly an act of faith in this goddess of regeneration. Her existence has been extended by this action, but it still remains for the Beautiful Ones, yet to be born, to restore her and the community to a healthy state. (Myth 36).

For Derek Wright, on the other hand, the man's condoning of a bribe to ensure Koomson's escape and his later observation of a bribe-giving-and-taking by a driver and policeman indicate that "the evacuation of the regime's decay has not restored the social body to a more normal functioning" ("Motivation" 130). In this interpretation, Maanan can be

Mammy Water only in an ironic sense:

> In the novel's final chapter the unburdened carrier returns from the delirium of his sea-purgation to the unredeemed world which he left and meets Maanan, here an ironic Mammy water whose power of madness in her sea-element is not the traditional healing, regenerative process but an affliction beyond cure and recovery. It is implied that what is expelled or "gets out" from the man at this meeting is the illusion that there can be permanent expulsions of ills of the kind managed by the ritual task which his own act has just simulated. (Wright "Motivation" 131)

Although making no reference to Maanan in the following comment on Armah's novel, Wole Soyinka rejects the idea that the ending is one of total pessimism, seeing in the novel a "subtly subversive" social vision:

> The vision of <u>The Beautyful Ones</u> is perhaps no more than an aspiration, a pious hope symbolised in that final image of the novel--"a single flower, solitary, unexplainable, very beautiful" in the centre of the inscription on the back of a mammy-wagon which reads: THE BEAUTYFUL ONES ARE NOT YET BORN. This pessimistic suggestion bears the possibility of its own hopeful contradiction. (<u>Myth</u> 116)

I would add to Soyinka's comment that the lone figure of Maanan beside the sea, still searching for the lost spiritual values and hopes of Ghana's people, is also that single flower "solitary, unexplainable, very beautiful" and therefore, like the inscription that gives the novel its title, a "hopeful contradiction." The man has never seen Maanan before, nor has he seen a Ghana of greatness and splendour except in the visionary words of leaders who all too soon destroy their own vision. But because Maanan in her madness still retains a remnant of that envisioned beauty, the man is able to recognize her, for as woman-goddess she embodies the memory of the country's vibrant past, the desolate wreckage of its present, and a stubborn aspiration for its future.

Margaret Folarin comes close to the interpretation that I have just offered when she says that Maanan is "in some ways the most potential force in the novel" (127), and appends the following note: "The figure of Maanan is so like that of the woman who represents Africa in Armah's African Fable [sic] it is hard not to see Maanan too as such a symbol" (129).

The four regenerative water spirit figures just discussed--the woman of the sea, Beatrice-Idemili, Juana, and Maanan--all fulfil the thematic function of insisting on the survival and strength of life-giving forces in an otherwise blighted society. In Wole Soyinka's novel The Interpreters, the courtesan Simi, like Maanan, Juana, and Beatrice, is a realistic character who is nevertheless associatively

patterned on a water spirit. Unlike the other three, however, the power of Simi is not that of regeneration.

The Interpreters

The Interpreters, like the Ghanaian novels, is set in the post-independence sixties, but in the Nigerian cities of Ibadan and Lagos. Here five young intellectuals, former school-friends, all of whom have studied abroad, live and work. Egbo, the one who is enamoured of Simi, is a civil servant in the Foreign Affairs office, but he is also the grandson of the chief of Osa, whose people are urging Egbo to assume the responsibility of his inheritance.

From Egbo's first sight of Simi holding court in a night-club, she is described in terms connoting a water spirit, beginning with the jibing of Egbo's secondary-school friends at his instant fascination with her: "She has the eyes of a fish, Egbo murmured and the boys said, Oh, the creek man has found his Mammy Watta" (52). The "cold, gelatinous depths" of Simi's eyes fixed on Egbo's send "the blood whirling through his head" (52). Walking back to the school, he "reeled with the wanton strike of a snake and welcomed the poison through his veins" (53). Both Simi's magnetic stare and the snake imagery confirm the Mammy Watta equivalence, later reinforced by reference to a Yoruba river-goddess. When Egbo single-mindedly, through hard work and self-denial, has saved sufficient money to storm Ibadan "where Simi still held court"

(53), he mentally addresses her as this goddess: "Your face is so smooth, the even silt of tidewash but no crab has thought to walk on it, no wanton child has thought to scrawl on the daughter of the rivers when she bathes . . . Ayaba Osa [Queen of the Sea] . . . Omo Yemoja (daughter of Yemoja] (57). The Yoruba praise-names suggest that the prefiguration underlying the character of Simi is that of a generic water-goddess rather than of any particular one. Although Yemoja is the goddess of the Ogun River (Bascom 88), she is also "the goddess of waters generally, and from her body, according to the people's belief, all rivers, lagoons and the sea flow out" (Awolalu 46). Therefore the praise-name "daughter of Yemoja" is equivalent to "daughter of the waters."

Moreover, the novel does not explicitly state which of the Yoruba river-goddesses Simi represents in the pantheon of the gods being painted by Kola, another of the major characters. Yemoja is black-skinned (Basom 90), whereas Simi is described as having "the skin of light pastel earth, Kano soil from the air" (51). In this she resembles not only the Mammy-Waters previously described, but the river-goddess Oshun, "the Yoruba Venus, renowned for her beauty . . . light skinned, and with beautiful breasts" (Bascom 90). Simi also resembles Oshun in her effect on men: "Because of her great beauty, Oshun is desired by all the gods, and she took many of them as husbands or lovers." Her worshippers not only take

pride in Oshun's amorous adventures "because they add to her reputation for beauty and desirability," but they "even describe her as a harlot" (Bascom 90). Egbo, in his boyhood, was drawn to the shrine of Oshun. He tells his friends:

> I remember when I was in Oshogbo I loved Oshun grove and would lie there for hours listening at the edge of the water. It has a quality of this part of the creeks [where his parents drowned], peaceful and comforting. I would lie there, convinced that my parents would rise from the water and speak to me. That they had turned into waterman and wife I had no doubt, so I expected they would appear wherever the conditions were right. . . . [N]ight after night I went and called to them and placed my ear against the water, on the line of water against the bank. . . . I only got beaten for my pains. My guardians thought I had become an Oshun follower. What use, I ask you, would I have for Oshun? (8-9)

In the light of Egbo's obsession with Simi, the last question becomes ironic.

After Egbo's sexual initiation by Simi, he finds and consecrates a personal shrine on the Ogun river--the river of which Yemoja is the goddess. Thus all three of these prefigurations--Yemoja, Oshun, and Mammy-Water--contribute to the characterization of Simi and to the meaning of Egbo's

relationship with her.

Not only men but women see the beauty of a goddess in Simi. The English girl Monica, on seeing Kola's painting of her, thinks that he must have idealised the model, only to retract that judgment when she meets Simi: "I don't think your goddess in the flesh could be any more beautiful. Honestly, Kola, now I've seen her, your painting doesn't do her justice" (226). The beauty of Simi, like that of a goddess, inspires poetry, for "the poet saw, and burst forth in song" in "an act of spontaneous homage" (51), and men who are not poets pay for her praises to be sung. Conversely, she inspires songs of abuse "not on Simi, never on Simi, but on the women who dared profane the goddess of serenity, Simi, Queen Bee" (51).

Both metaphors--water goddess and Queen Bee--suggest a female presence simultaneously magnetic and destructive to the male, for divine power accompanies divine beauty. To Egbo, it seems as if Simi miraculously knows everything about him, and he wonders "are all women like this, that they know men on sight" (59). After his first sexual experience with her, he thinks of her as "the sorceress Simi" (125).

But her sexual power is destructive: "Simi remained the thorn-bush at night, and the glow-worms flew fitfully around and burnt out at her feet" (56). Men drawn into her orbit "lost hope of salvation, their homes and children became ghosts of a past illusion, learning from Simi a new view of

life, and love, immersed in a cannibal's reality" (50). In an interview before the publication of The Interpreters, Soyinka spoke of his realization that human beings all over the world are "simply cannibals . . . so that their main preoccupation seems to be eating up one another" (Pieterse & Duerden 173). Then he added that his forthcoming novel was where his "feeling of a sort of personal-relationship cannibalism comes pretty much to the fore" (Pieterse & Duerden 175). Egbo's awareness of his danger of being cannibalistically absorbed and annihilated by Simi emerges very near the end of the novel when he speaks of Noah's "refusal to be a living being, like a moon," and then replies to Simi's incomprehension of his remark: "If you weren't a cannibal you would probably have gone the same way . . ." (232).

As well as Simi's beauty and power, a third divine attribute is emphasized--that of Otherness. Always she "kept her mystery . . . her frozen eyelids betraying nothing" (51). She "smiled within the placid framework of her enigma" (226). For weeks she disappears from her nightclub haunts in "near mystical desertions" (57). She is "remote and unfluttered" (54), untouched by human experience:

> As if there never had been contact between her and the world, and these men with whom she slept experienced nothing but desperation, for they must see afterwards that they had never touched her. . . . And so men could not tire of her whom they

had never possessed. (54)

Consequently, too, Simi cannot be judged by human concepts of fidelity, loyalty, and guilt: "each man felt that he betrayed her, never that she had done him wrong" (51); she "was cast in the mould of distance, and it made her innocent" (54). She is Other also in her immunity to time and change. "Simi never fell to the knowledge of age" (51), so that Egbo eventually began to wonder "if Simi truly fulfilled his growing needs, if Simi did not remain unchanged while he . . ." (128).

Throughout the novel, Simi is associated with water. At Egbo's shrine on the Ogun river, "the light-filled waters in rockpools were the weave of Simi's eyes," and Egbo feels that it is "good to bathe in Simi's tears" when he is able to, for "those eyes looked like eyes which never wept." The thunder of the train passing overhead raises "tremors in the pools of Simi's griefs" (126). At the climax of the novel, when Egbo finds himself torn between the suprahuman magnetism of Simi, "eyes ocean-clams with her peculiar sadness," and the humanity of the girl who carries his child, he feels his torment as "a choice of drowning" (251).

This prefiguration of Simi as water spirit is essential to our understanding of Egbo's relationship with her and therefore to our evaluation of him as a character and our interpretation of the novel's ending. Yet even when critics have recognized the water spirit nature of Simi, some of them have still looked outside Africa for her significance.

Richard Priebe, in Myth, Realism and the African World, refers briefly to the appellation ayaba osa, omo Yemoja (Mammy Water) as a clue to Simi's role, but interprets her relationship to Egbo as that of an Oedipal mother-figure who "represents his maternal roots, infinitely warm, gentle, and dangerously seductive" (86), and finds her affair with Egbo analogous "to what Campbell has called "a mystical marriage of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the World" (87). He then interprets Egbo's union with Simi in Campbell's terms as "representing the hero's total mastery of life" (87). But of the five protagonists in The Interpreters, Egbo surely has the least mastery of life. The problem here is that Priebe has attempted to read this aspect of the novel in terms of a universal myth explicated by a Western thinker, instead of in terms of the African myth underlying Soyinka's characterization of Simi. It is no wonder that Priebe does not attempt to grapple with the novel's ending, except to say that "his [Egbo's] affair with the co-ed is the situation that draws him back into the mundane world, though as the book ends this is not very clearly resolved" (87). More strangely, the African critic Obi Maduakor speaks of Simi in both Jungian and Hollywood terms as "the seductive anima and sex goddess" (89), with no reference to her uniquely African mystique. He offers the information that Simi's name means "drag me into (sexual?) well-being" (89), but makes no attempt to evaluate her significance for Egbo and no comment on Egbo's possible

response to his "choice of drowning."

Adekotunba Pearse correctly attributes a water spirit prefiguration to Simi (41) but makes no use of this insight to explore the significance of Egbo's relationship with her or to explicate his final dilemma. Stephen Larsen, for reasons unexplained, specifically couples Simi with the river-goddess Oya, and partially bases his interpretation of the ending on a misunderstanding of the nature of Oya. Larsen argues as follows:

> To Egbo, choosing Simi is like choosing to drown. To give in to the entreaties of the messengers from Osa, to go with them to the kingdom of his grandfather, would also be like choosing to drown. Egbo associates Simi, the representative of Oya, with the calm waters of his home district, under the surface of which lurk the deeps of responsibility, commitment, and self-sacrifice. By choosing Simi, Egbo chooses to accept his obligations towards the past, and to give up his futile attempts to pretend it does not exist. In this manner, Egbo finds and recognizes his roots. (160)

So far, Larsen's conclusion is untenable on several grounds. Oya, as the first and favourite wife of Sango, the thunder-god, is associated with turbulence, not with the calm waters spoken of in Larsen's interpretation. Bascom reports that

"Oya manifests herself as the strong wind which precedes a thunderstorm" (87); and according to Awolalu, "Whenever there is a heavy gale, with trees uprooted or heavy branches broken off and the roofs of buildings blown off, the Yoruba believe that Oya, the wife of Sango, is at work" (46). Thus Egbo's acceptance of Simi-Oya could not mean the acceptance of "the deeps of responsibility, commitment, and self-sacrifice."

Larsen then attempts a thematic resolution for the novel:

> Egbo has obligations not only towards the past, but also towards the present and the future. The present is symbolized by the girl student. . . . He becomes fully aware of his responsibility for this girl, who symbolizes the present, and for her unborn child, which symbolizes the future. . . . Egbo is now prepared to devote himself to shaping a better present and a more promising future, without turning his back on the past. Each in her own way, Simi and the girl student both remind Egbo of his obligations. He chooses them both, which can be regarded as a token of his newly-gained insight of the absolute oneness of past, present, and future. (160-61)

This resolution ignores the realistic level for which the mythical substratum is merely an illumination. Egbo's failure throughout is his refusal to choose, to commit himself to life. To imagine that Egbo can have both Simi and the girl is

a repetition of Egbo's mistake in keeping the chieftaincy open as a possibility while still refusing to accept it, feeling "his own overwhelming need to retain that link with some out-of-the-rut existence" (119-20). Larsen also ignores the strength of the girl. She knows that Egbo's relationship with Simi has continued because she has seen them together, and she has therefore sent Egbo the message: "When you are sure what you want to do you are to tell [Bandele] . . . you are under no obligation" (242). Egbo can no longer evade choice, even though the literary critic may do so.

Emmanuel Obiechina, by recognizing that Simi has been "conceived and patterned" on the well-known folk myth of Mammy Watta, is able to account for the intensity of Egbo's internal conflict:

> the attraction of Simi to Egbo cannot altogether be explained at the surface level of sexual attraction; it has deep roots in a certain mystical contact which the true creek man makes with a true water-sprite. Egbo's deltaic origin and Simi's association with the watermaid provide the credible link. (<u>Culture</u> 115)

This mystical attraction, Obiechina believes, is almost unbreakable: "For in spite of his deep sense of obligation to the girl he has made pregnant, he cannot easily wave away an association formed on the mystical and imaginative planes as well as on the purely emotional level" (115). Obiechina

refrains, however, from speculating on the outcome of Egbo's conflict or attributing any wider thematic meaning to it.

Of the critics with whom I am familiar, Mark Kinkead-Weekes seems to understand best the thematic implications of the water spirit figuration in The Interpreters. Kinkead-Weekes shows how Egbo's "adolescent sexuality and romanticism" becomes "something deeper, more dangerous, and also potentially more creative" (226). In the episode in which Egbo "absurdly tries to pull Simi from her table," Kinkeed-Weekes says, he has

> a genuinely reverent intimation of the divinity within the courtesan's human form. 'Ayaba Osa, Omo Yemoja' (p. 57) . . . She mediates a cosmic force which can drown . . . but can also give riches in abundance. (226)

Kinkead-Weekes goes on to suggest that Egbo "dares to experience, through sex, the forces of the cosmos . . . wind, water, darkness. . . . He experiences a kind of agony and death, but one in which he finds a Lawrencian rebirth and fulfilment" (226). But afterwards, in the shrine at the river, he feels that he has defied the gods, and "it is in the daring rather than the contact or communion that he now places the rebirth, redefining the earlier experience" (227). With the girl student, however, "there is the possibility of human relationship" (227).

Like Larsen, though, Kinkead-Weekes denies to Egbo a

definitive choice between the two women and what they represent, because for him, by the end of the novel, Egbo has become the "travesty" of the god Ogun portrayed by Kola on his canvas of the pantheon, with the positive aspect of the god missing.

> The failure to be god-like . . . is the commitment to destruction and disease. . . . And "only like a choice of drowning" . . . is the confirmation that, for Egbo, the commitment to anything beyond himself means only self-extinction. The creek, the surf, Oshun, the unfettered waters of the suspension bridge, the river Ogun, have all been subsumed into the nauseous blackness of the "dye"-pit, reduced to "that which means I must drown, horribly." Yet these waters all bear the names of Gods who contain something violent and potentially destructive, but who can give new life in abundance. . . . Egbo has chosen, but not Simi, not the girl. He has chosen to drown both his humanity and his godliness: the full definition of apostasy. (236)

For me, this pessimistic evaluation of Egbo's final state is unsatisfactory, and I should like to offer a somewhat different one, beginning, however, with my agreement with Kinkead-Weekes that Egbo's affair with the girl student offers "the possibility of human relationship" (227). Egbo's chance meeting with the girl occurs on the day he wakes up "wondering

if Simi truly fulfilled his growing needs" (128). Simi's power over him has already weakened. His retreat has become "the last stronghold" (130) of his sexual initiation by her, and now he is aware of his "need to commit the sacrilege" of sharing that retreat and his experience there "with some human sympathy" (130). Only sacrilege, a defying of the sacredness of the shrine, can break the spell of the water-goddess. By making love to the girl in the goddess's domain, Egbo is surely, even if still unconsciously, challenging Simi's power over him by declaring himself no longer her devotee. Worship of water spirits "takes place on the bank or at the sources of the waters and offerings are cast into them for the divinities" (Idowu, Olodumare 127). The blood of the deflowered virgin that Egbo washes off for her in the river (134) may, of course, be the completion of the sacrilege. But paradoxically, it may also be seen as a sacrificial offering accompanying a petition. At the shrine of Yemoja is kept "a pot filled with the 'sacred' water from the River Ogun which is given to barren women begging for children from Yemoja" (Awolalu, 46). It is as if Egbo has spiritually willed into being the child with which he has physically impregnated the girl.

A possible objection to interpreting the Simi/water spirit configuration in this way still poses itself. When Egbo longs to show his retreat to someone, he knows that

Simi could never be that one. Although the direct

> cause, Simi never once in all that time appeared to be part of this retreat. Her response would be profane, seeing nothing of the different phases of its character, from bright quick running water to a burial-ground of gods, large granite gravestones above blue-grey lawns of water. (130)

When Egbo once made Simi a necklace of dried crystals--"Brown golding gum crystals" from the forest--her response was only, "You are a funny boy" (130). Egbo has learned to leave Simi "in her own environment for there she was infallibly the one and all-time queen" (130).

For the earthly courtesan Simi, this environment comprises "four walls, a radiogram, a rich carpet of Kurdish pile" (130). In a "Mamy-Wata" shrine, Jenkins reports, "most shrine appurtenances are modern or imported. They advertise Mamy Wata's powers, lure and captivate her worshippers, and placate her capricious spirit when she is disturbed" (76). Thus Simi lives materialistically insulated from the suffering of the lives around her. Egbo's longing for his grandfather's world is a desire for insulation. He remembers that world as "an interlude from reality" (10). With the canoe hovering in the creek on the outskirts of the town, Egbo has felt he is "waiting to go on shore and grapple with his failure to insulate" (12). He acknowledges that Osa is a "place of death," but that he is "drawn to it as a dream of isolation" (12). The underlying currents of the creek-water are

described as "sluggish veins beneath a sleepy coil of python" (14), and this Mammy-Water image is reinforced by the creek-men's saying that the water "strokes you with voluptuous mermaid arms to the deepest caves, infinitely coy and maternal" (14). All of this suggests that if Egbo chooses not to free himself from Simi's spell, he will be choosing a dream-life of insulation and isolation, regression and dependence--a life of "drowning." If he chooses the girl "the new woman of her generation," he will be accepting the struggle of mature life in his own era, uninsulated from its inevitable pain--thus "drowning" of another kind.

Hence, in The Interpreters the water spirit motif has only a superficial narrative function but a fundamental symbolic one, as it does in Armah's The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born. In both these novels, the themes that are expressed through the realistic narrative and characters are reinforced by metaphysical associations. In The Beautyful Ones, the latter are confined to the Mammy Water figure of Maanan, but they are manifold in The Interpreters as is shown in detail in Chapter V ("Wole Soyinka and the Yoruba Pantheon").

Nature spirits, no matter how their relationships with human beings are depicted, are always conceived of as external forces. In a very different category are metaphysical concepts that seek to account for the inner nature and development of the individual. These concepts of destiny, as I have called them, are of immense significance in a number of

West African novels, including the five which will be examined in the following chapter.

Note

1. The relationship of the poet Okigbo to Idoto is explained in his own words as follows:

> I am believed to be a reincarnation of my maternal grandfather, who used to be the priest of the shrine called Ajani, where Idoto, the river goddess, is worshipped. This goddess is the earth mother, and also the mother of the whole family. My grandfather was the priest of this shrine, and when I was born I was believed to be his reincarnation, that is, I should carry on his duties. And although someone else had to perform his functions, this other person was only, as it were, a regent. And in 1958, when I started taking poetry very seriously, it was as though I had felt a sudden call to begin performing my full functions as the priest of Idoto. (Whitelaw "Interview" 36)

CHAPTER III
Concepts of Destiny I: *Chi*, Reincarnation, *Osu*

Chi

Reincarnation

Things Fall Apart

The Joys of Motherhood

Osu

No Longer At Ease

The Bride Price

The Slave

Concepts of Destiny I: Chi, Reincarnation, Osu

Whereas the forest and water spirits described in Chapters 1 and 2 are thought of and presented as external beings, the metaphysical concepts of destiny to be explored in Chapters 3 and 4 concern the person's inner being.

In Western scientific discourse there is much discussion of and disagreement on the relative importance of heredity and environment in determining how an individual develops into a mature person. In African metaphysics, the direction of this development is also partially determined before birth, but through the agency of a kind of spirit-double or proto-self; chi (Igbo), ori (Yoruba), teme (Ijaw), se (Ewe); kra or okra (Akan). Furthermore, reincarnation may play a role in the person's character and destiny. Finally, the bonds of lineage may limit freedom of choice and action. The most important of the three and the most difficult for a non-African reader to understand is the concept of chi. In two novels by Igbo writers, Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Part and Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood, the concepts of the chi and of reincarnation are of paramount concern. However, in Elechi Amadi's The Slave, the protagonist's destiny arises from birth into a family owned by a god; that is, an osu family. The Igbo tradition

of osu, which stems from a desire to placate the gods, also determines lives in Chinua Achebe's No Longer at Ease and in Buchi Emecheta's The Bride Price.

The Igbo, as Donatus Nwoga explains, are not a homogeneous group:

> "Igbo" stands for a recognized ethnic unit in Nigeria but it is important to point out that due to ecological, historical, and other factors, Igboland contains a wide variety of peoples, manners and linguistic dialects. Some anthropologists have even gone to the extent of identifying five culture areas among the nearly 15 million Igbo-speaking peoples. . . . [T]he sense of separateness may even be noticed in some of the recent creative literature (like the fiction of Buchi Emecheta). ("Changing Identity" 75-76)

Hence it will not be surprising to discover that the concepts we are studying receive different interpretations and emphases in the works of the different writers.

In his 1972 essay "Chi in Igbo Cosmology," Achebe stresses that the "elusive and enigmatic" concept of chi is "central in Igbo psychology" (93). This centrality of chi is indicated by the following proverb: "No matter how many divinities sit together to plot a man's ruin it will come to nothing unless his chi is there among them" (Achebe "Chi" 96). Unfortunately this concept has no exact equivalent in

Western language or thought. Any single-word or phrase translation of it misleads by a reduction of the complexity of the concept through emphasis on only one aspect of its significance. In his essay, Achebe points out that chi "is often translated as god, guardian angel, personal spirit, soul, spirit-double, etc." (93). Not only are these terms not synonymous, but they carry multiple and contradictory connotations that have been historically, linguistically, and theologically engendered. A further difficulty in understanding chi, Achebe warns, is that up to 1972 "no study of it exists that could even be called preliminary" (93). Nevertheless, he asserts, "[w]ithout an understanding of the nature of chi one could not begin to make sense of the Igbo world-view" (93). Therefore, to appreciate fully Igbo novels in which this concept figures, it is essential to attempt to gain some insight into its meaning.

From pre- and post-1972 writings by anthropologists, theologians, and literary critics, it becomes apparent that although belief in chi exists throughout Igboland, there are wide variations in both the metaphysical concept and in the physical shrines and ritual customs associated with it. Achebe states that "there are many minor--and occasionally even major--divergences of perception about chi from different parts of Igbo land" ("Chi" 98). Arinze reports that "[i]n some localities there is a rather hazy notion of Chi and some may in a vague way almost regard him as an

emanation of Chukwu [the supreme God], but in Arinze's opinion, this is "only a deviation, and a local one at that" (15). I. Chukwukere points out that even some well-educated native speakers of Igbo make the error of "uncritical assimilation of Igbo religious categories into their probably more familiar Euro-Christian belief and practice" ("Chi in Igbo Religion" 522), and D.I. Nwoga, too, suggests that "[t]he problem with much of the discussion on chi arises from the supervening picture of the personalized Christian or Hebrew or even Islamic God" ("Chi Individualism" 118). For example, the American critic Austin Shelton has had the temerity first to insist that chi is "God Within, not 'personal god,' as Achebe blasphemously refers to chi" ("The Offended Chi" 36), and then the presumption to interpret Achebe's novels Things Fall Apart and No Longer at Ease on the basis of his own definition, assigning the downfall of the Okokwo lineage depicted in these works to offenses against Chukwu, the High God. Such an exercise is more than just an act of disrespect towards the author; it sabotages the novels. The Igbo scholar Donatus Nwoga, in his defence of Achebe and refutation of Shelton's argument, asserts: "From my childhood I had been made to think that one's chi was his personal god, within, without, individual and with distinct personality" ("Chi Offended"). Nwoga's memory confirms the following observation by Arinze: "The ordinary Iboman regards his Chi

as his guardian spirit on whose competency depends his personal prosperity" (15).

As will shortly become apparent, not every Igbo novelist interprets _chi_ in the same way. Therefore, in assessing its significance for the characters in Achebe's novels, one is well-advised to adhere to Achebe's perception of its place in Igbo thought. Even if one were to agree with Emmanuel Okoye's unsubstantiated conclusion that "there is much difference between the idea of _chi_ in his [Achebe's] novels and the concept of _chi_ in his essay" (90), one would still expect the novels to be better illuminated by Achebe's own tentative reflections on the meaning of _chi_ than by the punditries of others. The world of the novels is the traditional Igbo world as Achebe conceives it, and no other.

The concept of _chi_, among other things, is the Igbo way of accounting for the uniqueness of each human being. In the essay just referred to, Achebe asserts that among the "dominant and persistent concepts" regarding _chi_ are these: "every person has an individual _chi_ who created him" (98); "no two people . . . are created by the same _chi_" (98); and, more significant for this study, "a person's fortunes in life are controlled more or less completely by his _chi_" (98).

Moreover, Achebe relates the concept of _chi_ to "the central place in Igbo thought of the notion of duality. Wherever Something stands, Something Else will stand beside

it" (94). He explains this further:

> The world in which we live has its double and counter-part in the realm of spirits. A man lives here and his *chi* there. Indeed the human being is only one half (and the weaker half at that) of a person. There is a complementary spirit being, *chi*. (94)

There are puzzling and controversial questions concerning *chi* on which Achebe refuses to speculate, such as "what happens to a person's *chi* when the person dies, and its shrine is destroyed?" and "what happens at the man's reincarnation?" (93). We can reasonably assume that these questions, however great their theological interest, will be of no relevance to our understanding of Achebe's novels.

Elsewhere, Achebe has acknowledged that *chi* is the Igbo way of answering some of man's unanswerable questions concerning the mysteries of life and death:

> The Ibos have few abstract words because we prefer to deal with the concrete. And we create "chi", for instance, to deal with a whole range of abstract notions, in other words, we move from rational explanations into the realm of poetry to explain something which is hard to understand. . . . it's not really an explanation. It's a way of putting your mind at rest. (Int. with P.A. Egujuru *Towards African Literary Independence*

One further question regarding the concept of _chi_ requires consideration before an examination of its role in _Things Fall Apart_. Is the concept a fatalistic one, as Meek supposes (55), one that detracts from an individual's sense of responsibility for his actions and that lessens his ambition to achieve individual and communal goals? It is helpful here to remember that Christian theologians have struggled to reconcile the concepts of free will (human responsibility) and predestination (God's foreknowledge of each person's destiny) without arriving at any more satisfactory resolution than the Igbo have found in the paradoxical nature of the individual's _chi_. The most fatalistic form of the Christian doctrine concerning predestination is found in the writings of John Calvin, yet Calvinism not only did not deter human endeavour but according to some historians actually spurred it. The following comparison of the beliefs of Calvinism with the concept of _chi_ may assist a Western reader to comprehend better the Igbo attitude towards the latter.

In his _Institutes of the Christian Religion_, Calvin states:

> We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he determined with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is fore

> ordained for some, eternal damnation for others. (Institutes 926 [III.21.5])

In Igbo belief, before a man's birth "his chi had joined in council with the creator spirit to apportion his fortune to him" (Ilogu 163). In neither Calvinist nor Igbo belief is this destiny dependent on the person's character and behaviour after birth. Calvin insists that both eternal salvation and eternal damnation come about entirely by God's will and grace (Institutes 921 III.21.1). The chi too may be quite separate from an individual's worth, as Achebe explains:

> A man of impeccable character may yet have a bad chi so that nothing he puts his hand to will work out right. Chi is therefore more concerned with success or failure than with righteousness and wickedness. ("Chi" 97)

In his introduction to an edition of Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion, John T. McNeill explains Calvin's teaching on the outward signs of election to salvation in this way:

> The fruits of election are in no respect visible in any outward advantage or prosperity enjoyed in this life, where impiety prospers and the pious are forced to bear a cross. The blessing of the elect lies rather in their assurance of God's sufficiency and unfailing protection amid their

> afflictions, and in the happy anticipation of the life to come. (Introd. *Institutes* lix)

But for the Igbo, only outward advantage or prosperity enjoyed in this life can manifest a good *chi*, for one's life in this world determines not only one's entrance to and position in the spirit world but also achievement of one's ultimate goal of reincarnation. Hence, as Ilogu explains, after birth a person's *chi* "goes on 'revealing' to him through practical activities in historical situations what the will of God or the gods is for him" (163).

Yet both of these seemingly fatalistic beliefs can be strong motivating forces in daily life. The nineteenth-century Canadian preacher George Christie explained the effect of the Calvinist doctrine as follows:

> The doctrine of Election becomes a powerful incentive to diligence in seeking salvation and then again, those who have already been made partakers of Christ find, in the doctrine, that kind of assurance which nerves them for the discharge of the duties which devolve upon them--and at the same time imparts new joy and strength. (17)

Likewise, in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, R.H. Tawney observes that according to Calvinism" [G]ood works are not a way of attaining salvation, but they are indispensable as a proof that salvation has been attained"

(109).

Similarly, as Ilogu explains, "Because individual Chi differs, every man is expected to prove of what kind his own Chi is, by various economic and social activities. This is the background of the strong achievement motivation said to be possessed by Ibo people" (36-37). Moreover, Metuh points out that the Igbo regard the chi as an active force:

> Chi, like a guardian angel, accompanies and watches over a person all through his life. With paternal care, it judiciously dispenses the contents of the parcel of fortune for the overall welfare of the child. The Igbo believe that Chi is good and goads a person on to good conduct by admonitions, rewards and punishments. (69)

In all societies, people know that there is much in their lives over which they have little or no control, and yet they are conscious of making choices and decisions that affect the course of their lives. W. J. Harvey speaks of this universal sense of partial freedom as follows:

> Few of us can imagine, let alone maintain that we exist in, a state of complete freedom and most of us would resist the notion that we are completely governed by necessity genetic, economic, psychological or metaphysical--that denies us all freedom. (130)

Thus, in the Igbo world-view, as Achebe explains, "a man is

not entirely without authority in dealing with the spirit-world not entirely at its mercy" (Beware, Soul Brother 66).

Both the Calvinist doctrine of predestination and the Igbo belief in chi, then, give rise to what Austin Farrar calls "the sharp paradox of human responsibility and divine predestination" (245), and it is this paradox that creates the controversy over how to interpret the downfall of Ogbuefi Okonkwo, the protagonist of Achebe's first novel Things Fall Apart.

Inherent as it is in the concept of chi, the paradox reveals itself most clearly in many conflicting proverbs. As Achebe has stated, Igbo proverbs are one of the best sources for gaining an understanding of the Igbo world-view; and in keeping with the Igbo belief in the duality of things, these proverbs often seem to be mutually contradictory. In a note to his poem "Misunderstandings," Achebe emphasizes this peculiarity: "Take any proverb which puts forward a point of view or a 'truth' and you can always find another that contradicts it or at least puts a limitation on the absoluteness of its validity" (Beware, Soul Brother 66). So it is with proverbs concerning chi; for example, Achebe translates two such opposed sayings as follows: "If a man agrees his chi agrees" but "his chi does not agree" ("Chi in Igbo Cosmology" 96,97); and Metuh cites, "If a man is determined his Chi will support him" (41), along with "You cannot change your unfortunate lot by being

industrious" (41) and "You cannot escape bad fortune by resourcefulness" (23).

As Nwoga stresses, most proverbs have three meanings: "the literal meaning, the philosophical statement, and the contextual relevance" ("Appraisal" 188). In the following discussion of Things Fall Apart, then, I shall refer to only those proverbs concerning chi which Achebe has chosen to include in the text, since only those can have contextual relevance, and it is those that carry the sense of chi that the reader is intended to consider.

Before looking at Achebe's novel, however, we must first examine a second concept of destiny that is pertinent to it, the belief in reincarnation. Uchendu explains that in the Igbo view "neither the world of man alone nor the world of the spirits is a permanent home. The two worlds together constitute a home" (15). Chief K.O.K. Onyioha speaks as follows about the strength of the belief in reincarnation throughout West Africa:

> Old Africa was so mature in philosophical thinking that our ancestors believed only what they had experienced about life. They believed in reincarnation because in their experience they had seen a person with a cut on his face or with his two fingers cut off born again into the same family with the same mark. . . .
>
> I have a cousin who at the age of five

dragged his father to an old dilapidated house in quite a distant village from ours; there he started to dig into a spot, and his father followed him to dig. They dug deep into the floor of the old house till they got at a covered earthen pot buried in the ground. The father opened it and found plenty of cash in it. And the boy said to the father: "I lived in this house in previous life and I buried this money here." Stranger than fiction to you, isn't it? But it is a common experience with Africans in Nigeria. The Ibos call this drama "Iku uwa," which means declaration of one's reincarnation. Because of these experiences old Africans believe in reincarnation and give names to their children that confirm this belief. Ibos call a child "Nnanna," and Efiks call him "Ete-ete" to declare that the child is the reincarnation of their grandfather--for Nnanna or Ete-ete means "my father's father." Yorubas call a child "Iyabo" to declare their belief that the child is a reincarnation of their mother. (African Godianism 77)

Innocent C. Onyewuanyi recounts the circumstances of the death of his father's aunt in 1946:

When the woman died, a surgery was performed to

> remove the "bag of cough" so that she would be free of this deadly malady in her next life. The chest was stitched back. . . . When my mother had a baby-girl months after this woman's death, the marks of the stitches appeared on the child's chest and can be seen to this day. For the villagers no further proof was needed to prove that my sister is a reincarnation of my father's aunt. To this day, the children of that deceased woman call my sister Nna=mother. (160)

However, Onyewuanyi believes that the term reincarnation is a misleading one applied to West African belief, for the children of his father's aunt "still render traditional ancestral filial duties to their deceased mother who still retains her role as their mother" (161). Moreover, another member of the extended family is also regarded "as a reincarnate of the same woman" (160).

Therefore, Onyewuanyi suggests the substitution of other terminologies for the belief under discussion: "Instead of saying that a newborn child is a 'reincarnate' of an ancestor, we should rather say that he is the 'vital influence' or the 'life-share' or 'personal ray, or 'living-perpetuation' of the ancestor" (167-68). Such terms, Onyewuanyi maintains, clearly represent the nature of the interaction between the dead ancestors and the living:

> What interacts with the living is "the man

> himself" who is now essentially "force." Vital force grows and/or weakens through the interaction of forces. . . . Due to their preoccupation with immortality and deathlessness, the ancestors are concerned with the increase of their and their descendants' vital force for the well-being and continuity of the clan.
>
> One of the ways of increasing the ancestor's vital force is by sacrifices and prayers from the living descendants. Hence the wish of Africans to have many children who will offer sacrifices to them after death. By an inverse movement the "force" of the ancestor flows into the sacrifices and into the community which he embodies and the living receive the "strengthening influence" of the ancestor. (165-66)

Onyewuanyi concludes that "the ancestor who is now pure dynamic force can influence and effect many births in his clan without emptying his personality" (166).

However, the West African concept of reincarnation is not commonly understood in such abstract terms. For example, during the Nigerian Civil War, one of my male students whose brother had recently been killed on the warfront responded to my congratulations on the birth of a son with the words: "It is my brother come back." Richard C. Onwuanibe gives the following account of how the belief

is manifested among the Igbo:

> Belief in reincarnation is so strong that dying parents or relatives console their children or relatives that they will come back to them. The dying parents often tell the family what kind of life and personality they hope for when they reincarnate. There are instances where the predictions of dying relatives with regard to their reincarnation are said to have come true. An interesting case is one which my friend Dr. Felix Ekechi, a professor at Kent State University, told me about a relative who reincarnated in his body. He said that those who knew this relative of his said that when he reincarnated he would be intelligent, scholarly, and be born in the family of a relative who is well-to-do. When Dr. Ekechi was born and was growing up as a boy, he was said to resemble exactly the dead relative in gait and intelligence. (191-92)

Whatever reincarnation means, throughout West Africa it is generally held that it occurs within the extended family, and investigators report that it may occur within either the patrilineage or matrilineage, with the former being more usual. Uchendu asserts that for the Igbo, the dead "are organized in lineages with patrilineal emphasis just as are

those on earth" (12), and Meek speaks similarly: "Persons who are reborn are usually reborn into the families of their fathers, but some are reborn into the families of their mothers" (54). We have already seen that the Igbo poet Christopher Okigbo was believed to be the reincarnation of his maternal grandfather (145). Meek gives the following example of a supposed matrilineal reincarnation: "A case was cited of a new-born baby dying immediately after a visit by its mother's relatives. It was stated that the child was a reincarnation of one of the mother's relatives, and died because it could not bear to be left in the father's group" (54). A further example cited by Meek shows how the divination of reincarnation can affect the behaviour of the living:

> A woman who was known to be devoted to her sons but disliked her daughters, died. When her favourite son became the father of a baby girl it was declared by a diviner that the baby was the reincarnation of the father's mother. The father's sisters were accordingly forbidden for a considerable time to go near the child, but permission was eventually given, after the sisters had offered sacrifice to the father's ancestors through the <u>okpara</u> or senior elder of the extended family. (54)

In Igbo novels, characters often make the assumption

that reincarnation must occur within the male line. For example, in John Munonye's novel Obi, a childless Christian couple are harassed by the women of the umunna (patrilineage) who keep urging the husband, Joe, to take a second wife, although this is forbidden by his religion. Joe's mother upbraids the couple for remaining childless when "spirits of the righteous dead move about looking for where to get re-incarnated" (Obi 32). As well, a seer declares that a child just born to another male member of the extended family is the reincarnation of Joe's uncle, who has been waiting for years to return as Joe's child to make amends for a disagreement he had had with his nephew; tired of waiting, he has decided to go into another family. We shall see this assumption that reincarnation must be patrilineal expressed by characters in Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood, but in the same novel, both a matrilineal and a non-lineage reincarnation are claimed to occur.

Beliefs concerning the laws of reincarnation seem to vary as widely as those concerning chi. Meek concludes that the object of refusing burial to certain classes of persons "was to cut them off from their living descendants and to deter them from seeking to be reborn" but notes that "the denial of burial was not always considered a sure preventive or reincarnation, for those who throw the body into the 'bush' sometimes use the formula: 'If you are born again

may you not behave in a manner that will bring about a similar fate'" (307). Metuh reports, "It is strongly believed that all those who suffered violent death must reincarnate to complete their term of life and achieve their destiny" (140); and yet suicide, a violent death, is listed by everyone as one of the abominations that forbids the customary death and funeral rites.

Despite the differences of opinion on who may reincarnate, all are in agreement that reincarnation is the ultimate goal of life. Metuh says, "The greatest evil is to be thrown out of the life cycle through denial of reincarnation" (154); and Achebe, in a note to his poem "Remembrance Day," affirms: "Life is the 'natural' state; death is tolerable only when it leads again to life--to reincarnation" (Beware, Soul Brother 64). It is in this light that the real tragedy of Okonkwo's suicide in Achebe's Things Fall Apart may be perceived.

At the beginning of Things Fall Apart, at a time before the white man has reached the nine villages of Umuofia, Ogbuefi Okonkwo is one of the most highly-respected men of his community, having succeeded in all its socially-valued activities:

> Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things. He was still young but he had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams, and

> had just married his third wife. To crown it all he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two intertribal wars. (6)

When the clan meets to settle the problems of its members, nine egwugwu, "nine of the greatest masked spirits in the clan" (63), each representing one of the nine villages, participate in the deliberations as "the dead fathers of the clan" (64). Okonkwo bears this responsibility for his village. When a war-or-peace ultimatum must be issued to the enemy clan of Mbaino, it is Okonkwo who is sent as "the proud and imperious emissary" (9). Moreover, his wives have borne him many children, including sons.

However, in the progress of the novel, he must endure a seven-year exile owing to his accidental killing of a clansman. During this time, the missionaries arrive and Okonkwo's oldest son Nwoye defects to the Christians. By the time Okonkwo returns from exile, the clan "had undergone such profound change . . . that it was barely recognizable" (129). Soon a conflict with the Christians results in a great humiliation. Six leaders of Umuofia, including Okonkwo, are imprisoned by the white authorities and subjected to the added indignities of handcuffs and shaven heads. When, after the release of these elders, court messengers arrive to halt a meeting called by Umuofia to discuss its response to the outrage, Okonkwo kills the head messenger. Then, realizing that Umuofia will not go to war,

he hangs himself; thus he commits the abomination of suicide that prevents burial by one's clansmen and therefore may deny one acceptance into the spirit company of the ancestors, the _ndichie_, and the possibility of reincarnation.

The narrative thus outlined follows the pattern of classical Greek tragedy: a great man at the height of his fortunes suffers a reversal that eventuates in his downfall and death. But Okonkwo is within the world of the Igbo and therefore, as would be expected, he, his clansmen, and the narrator attribute various stages of his rise and fall to his _chi_.

Of Okonkwo's early tribulations, caused by the idleness and poverty of his father, the narrator comments:

> Anyone who knew his grim struggle against poverty and misfortune could not say he had been lucky. If ever a man deserved his success, that man was Okonkwo. . . . At the most one could say that his _chi_ or personal god was good. But the Ibo people have a proverb that when a man says yes his _chi_ says yes also. Okonkwo said yes very strongly; so his _chi_ agreed. And not only his _chi_ but his clan too, because it judged a man by the work of his hands. (19)

After Okonkwo has been exiled, however, he doubts the validity of this proverb:

> Clearly his personal god or chi was not made for great things. A man could not rise beyond the destiny of his chi. The saying of the elders was not true--that if a man said yea his chi also affirmed. Here was a man whose chi said nay despite his own affirmation. (92)

This is an expression of Okonkwo's state of mind, not an objective statement by the narrator, for it is followed immediately by the comment: "The old man, Uchendu, saw clearly that Okonkwo had yielded to despair and he was greatly troubled" (92).

Okonkwo likewise blames his son's becoming a Christian on a bad chi: "Why, he cried in his heart, should he, Okonkwo, of all people, be cursed with such a son? He saw clearly in it the finger of his personal god or chi. For how else could he explain his great misfortune and exile and now his despicable son's behaviour" (108). However, when Okonkwo begins to prosper again, his hope in his chi rekindles: "As the years of exile passed one by one it seemed to him that his chi might now be making amends for the past disaster. His yams grew abundantly, not only in his motherland but also in Umuofia, where his friend gave them out year by year to share-croppers" (121).

Yet all is for nought. Despite Okonkwo's overweening drive to be entirely different from his unsuccessful father Unoka, their destinies are eventually the same. We are told

early in the novel:

> Unoka was an ill-fated man. He had a bad chi or personal god, and evil fortune followed him to the grave, or rather to his death, for he had no grave. He died of the swelling which was an abomination to the earth goddess. . . . He was carried to the Evil Forest and left there to die. (13)

By the end of the novel, Okonkwo is the "ill-fated man," the abomination is suicide, and he will be buried by the white strangers he hated.

Unoka's lack of success in providing well for himself and his family was a self-imposed failure rather than the effect of his having a bad chi, as shown by the answer given to him when he consulted Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves. The priestess Chika silenced his self-justifying complaint as follows:

> Hold your peace! . . . You have offended neither the gods nor your fathers. And when a man is at peace with his gods and his ancestors, his harvest will be good or bad according to the strength of his arm. You, Unoka, are known in all the clan for the weakness of your matchet and your hoe. When your neighbours go out with their axe to cut down virgin forests, you sow your yams on exhausted farms that take no labour to clear.

> They cross seven rivers to make their farms; you stay at home and offer sacrifices to a reluctant soil. Go home and work like a man. (13)

But the swelling sickness that required Umuofia to consign Unoka to a lonely death in the Evil Forest must be attributed to his possession of a bad chi.

Although Okonkwo's friend Obierika, in an outburst of grief after Okonkwo's suicide, blames the white men for the fate of his friend, in the long run Umuofia may conclude that Okonkwo, like his father, had a bad chi. But what does Achebe want the reader to conclude?

As in Shakespearean tragedy, Okonkwo, although a great man, is flawed. In his fear of resembling his gentle, music-loving father, he over-values the masculine strengths. As a child, he had been told by a playmate that his father was agbala: "That was how Okonkwo first came to know that agbala was not only another name for a woman. It could also mean a man who had taken no title" (10). Although Unoka was valued in his own village and surrounding villages for his ability in playing the flute, he was considered to be "lazy and improvident" (3), as well as "a coward" who "could not bear the sight of blood" (5). When he died, "he had taken no title at all and he was heavily in debt" (6). Okonkwo's character has been warped by this heritage. He is "possessed by the fear of his father's contemptible life and shameful death" (13), and this fear controls him, as the

narrator further explains:

> Perhaps down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father. . . . Okonkwo was ruled by one passion--to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness. (9-10)

In Okonkwo's mind "[n]o matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and especially his women) he was not really a man" (37). Moreover, he has a fiery temper which he makes no attempt to control. He fires a loaded gun at a wife whom he has overheard mocking his lack of hunting prowess (28). During the Week of Peace observed just before planting, he beats his youngest wife, thus committing a serious offence against the great goddess of the earth, Ani. This offence endangers the whole clan, as Ezeani (the priest of Ani) reminds him: "The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give

us her increase, and we shall all perish" (22). Although he is inwardly repentant to the extent of offering a greater sacrifice at the shrine of Ani than the priest has ordered, Okonkwo's pride prevents him from publicly admitting fault:

> [H]e was not the man to go about telling his neighbours that he was in error. And so people said he had no respect for the gods of the clan. His enemies said his good fortune had gone to his head. They called him the little bird _nza_ who so far forgot himself after a heavy meal that he challenged his _chi_. (22)

In his essay on the _chi_, Achebe recounts the cautionary tale that lies behind that saying:

> [T]he little bird, _nza_, . . . ate and drank somewhat more than was good for him and in a fit of recklessness which inebriation alone would explain taunted his _chi_ to come and get him if he could. Whereupon a hawk swooped down from the clear sky and carried him away. (96)

Achebe appends the comment that "_chi_ need not come in person to act directly but may use one's enemy who is close by" (96).

Hence, although the fatal explosion of Okonkwo's gun during the funeral ceremonies for Ezeudu is seemingly an accident, the seven-year exile that it brings on him may be seen, in the Igbo scheme of causation, as his _chi_'s indirect

response to the challenge of Okonkwo's offenses committed earlier.

As in Shakespearean tragedy, too, Okonkwo is destroyed by the conjunction of his flaws with circumstances over which he has no control. The coming of the white man to Umuofia while Okonkwo is in exile is the most important of these. Because of his absence, he has no opportunity to adapt slowly to the changed circumstances as they occur, but on his return is confronted with a "barely recognizable" society (129), in which a Umuofian Christian dares to unmask an ancestral spirit, an _egwugwu_. At the meeting of the clansmen to decide what they should do about this sacrilege, "one of the greatest crimes a man could commit" (131), Okonkwo speaks "violently" to them, and they listen to him "with respect" (136). As a result, they agree to burn down the church, but this in turn leads to the imprisonment of the elders and then, after their release, to Okonkwo's killing of the court messenger followed by Okonkwo's suicide.

Okonkwo's rage against the Christians is no doubt inflamed by the previous defection of his eldest son Nwoye to the new religion, to which Nwoye has been driven by his father's harshness and in particular by Okonkwo's participation in the killing of Nwoye's much-beloved foster-brother Ikemefuna.

Ikemefuna belongs to the clan. He has been given to it

by the village of Mbaino as part of the compensation for the killing of a Umuofian woman. For three years, Ikemefuna has lived in Okonkwo's household and has become one of the family. But his death is ordered by the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves, through its priestess, and Okonkwo cannot save the boy. Nevertheless, he does not have to play an active role in carrying out the order, and in fact is warned against doing so by Ezeudu, the oldest man in his quarter of Umuofia, who tells him: "That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death" (40). Even Okonkwo's closest friend, Obierika, refuses to participate, afterwards denying that he questions "the authority and the decision of the Oracle" (46), but reminding Okonkwo that "the Oracle did not ask me to carry out its decision" (46), and reprimanding his friend: "If I were you I would have stayed at home. What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families" (46). Obierika would have acted more wisely: "[I]f the Oracle said that my son should be killed I would neither dispute it nor be the one to do it" (47).

Okonkwo has not wanted to participate in the killing of Ikemefuna. At the signal to strike the boy, Okonkwo withdraws to the rear and looks away. But when Ikemefuna runs toward him for help, crying, "My father, they have killed me!" (43), Okonkwo's fear of "being thought weak" (43) makes him deliver the final matchet blow. Robert Wren

suggests that none of Okonkwo's overt crimes against Ani "is so great as his violation of his inmost self" (Achebe's World 44), pointing out an interesting corollary to the proverb that if a man says yes, his chi will agree:

> The converse of the proverb about affirmation might be that if a man says "no" strongly enough, his chi says "no" also. Okonkwo had that within him which said "no" to the killing of Ikemefuna, and said "no" very profoundly. Ani, it may be, asks no one to defy his own chi, and abominates whoever does. (Achebe's World 44)

All through his life, Okonkwo has been defying his chi by suppressing the feminine side of his nature. That it exists is evident in his growing affection for Ikemefuna and in his tenderness towards his daughter Ezinma, caring for her when she is ill and following protectively, although such is forbidden, when the Priestess of the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves carries the girl to the shrine in the dead of night at the Oracle's behest. Solomon Iyasere speaks of Okonkwo's "inability to comprehend the fact that these feminine attributes he vigorously suppresses in himself are necessary for greatness" (85).

It has been frequently observed that Okonkwo's overvaluation of masculine qualities is not sanctioned by the mores of Umuofia in which the masculine and feminine principles are balanced. Bu-Buakei Jabbi, for instance,

notes "the more or less consistent pattern of every male deity mediating with the people through a priestess and every female deitv through a male agent" (138); for example, the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves is thought of as male but speaks through a priestess, whereas a priest serves the earth-goddess Ani. In a well-argued essay "The Male-Female Motif" in Things Fall Apart, Donald Ackley stresses "the potent irony of the fact that Okonkwo's violent nature leads him to offend the Earth Goddess--the edification of natural love, protection, comfort, fertility, and productivity--time and time again" (3). Through a "recurrent pattern of allusion and imagery which is manifested in the associations various characters attach to masculinity and femininity" (1), Ackley points out, Achebe shows "the male and female roles as conceived by traditional Igbo thought" (1), and therefore "the attentive reader comes to see that Okonkwo's concept of male and female is distorted, cutting him off from a natural, healthy side of human nature, and estranging him from his family, from his society, and ultimately, from his humanity" (2).

All of this means, in the context of the present discussion, that Okonkwo's distorted concept of male and female cuts him off from the support of his chi. In refusing to foster or even to recognize the feminine side of his nature, Okonkwo has indeed challenged his spirit double, trying to force it to be something other than itself.

Okonkwo, then, cannot be seen as a martyr, dying to defend the values of his society against foreign intrusion. He is not, as Eustace Palmer has described him, "a personification of his society's values" (53), or, as Emelia Oko claims, "the epitome of what old Umuofia stands for" (27). Achebe makes this clear by paralleling Okonkwo with the Rev. Smith, who is obviously not a personification or epitome of Christian values, and then by contrasting these two intransigent and blinkered opponents with their more flexible and clear-sighted brethren: Obierika, for the Igbo, and the Rev. Brown, for the Christians. Okonkwo, like the Rev. Smith, is an extremist, and as Donatus Nwoga observes, "the Ibos hold that virtue is in the keeping of the mean between the extremes" ("Chi Offended" 5).

In considering the meaning of Okonkwo's fate, we cannot stop at his death, since that ought to be only a phase in the continuing cycle of life. Death should mean birth into the spirit life of the ancestors, leading to reincarnation into earthly life once again. But for Okonkwo, as for his father Unoka, this cycle may have been disrupted by the manner of his death. Like Unoka, Okonkwo may be denied the full funeral rites of his clansmen. Metuh explains that there is a difference between "death rites" and "funeral rites":

> [T]he purpose of the "death rite" is simply the interment of the corpse, whereas the purpose of

> "funeral rites" is to assure the deceased of entrance to the spirit-land. The Igbo say . . . "so that he may reach home." It is therefore a rite of passage. (142)

Therefore a person for whom funeral rites have not been performed "becomes a wandering ghost and an evil spirit and the peace, status and honour due to the ancestors are lost to it forever" (143). It was the possibility of such a fate which has so horrified Okonkwo when his eldest son Nwoye joined the Christians: "Suppose when he died all his male children decided to follow Nwoye's steps and abandon their ancestors? Okonkwo felt a cold shudder run through him at the terrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation" (108). Metuh, in explaining that "[e]lders who have no surviving male issue may not get to Ala Mmuo [spirit-land]," continues: "A colleague told me how his father did everything he could to prevent his first son from becoming a Christian so that he could give him the proper funeral rites and thereafter feed him daily" (142).

The death of Okonkwo is in stark contrast with that of Ezeudu, described earlier in the novel. Ezeudu's reincarnation is assured, as indicated by the guttural words of the egwugwu as he views the corpse during the funeral rites:

> Ezeudu! . . . If you had been poor in your last life I would have asked you to be rich when you

> come again. But you were rich. If you had been a coward, I would have asked you to bring courage. But you were a fearless warrior. If you had died young, I would have asked you to get life. But you lived long. So I shall ask you to come again the way you came before. (86)

A death like Ezeudu's, coming in the fullness of age, is called by the Igbo onwu chi, God's death, and is often claimed to be a requirement for continuing in the cycle of life; for example, Metuh says, "Good moral conduct, ripe old age, an onwu chi and full funeral rites are all essential requirements before canonization to the ranks of Ndichie--the ancestors in the after-life" (151).

According to such accounts, only the Ndichie can be reincarnated. In John Munonye's novel Obi, it is explained that the spirits of those consigned to the evil bush "must be left to wander about in agony, for endless ages, since they received no burial or funeral obsequies; they would never be reincarnated to this world" (133). Thus Okonkwo's act of hanging himself is one of total despair, a wilful attempt to exile himself permanently from the clan in which he has lost all faith.

But the clan may not yet have abandoned Okonkwo. A spokesman tells the District Commissioner: "His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it. . . . When he has been buried we will then do our duty by him. We shall make

sacrifices to cleanse the desecrated land" (147). The body is evil, but not the spirit of Okonkwo, and the possibility is left open that the "second burial" permitting his spirit to pass to the land of the ndichie may yet be performed. However that may be, in Achebe's second novel No Longer at Ease, one Umuofian claims to see the reincarnation of Okonkwo in Obi, the son of Nwoye/Isaac (49).

What is not left in doubt is that suicide offends Ani. The earth must be cleansed; the earth-goddess must be appeased. Donatus Nwoga speaks of the earth-goddess Ala (Ani) and the chi as "the two central tenets of Igbo religion" ("Changing" 88), elucidating their significance as follows:

> the chi, or god of the individual, which determines that person's prosperity or failure, good fortune or bad (on the understanding that the person puts in the fullness of his personal effort), and Ala, the Earth, on which human beings live and make their living, which constitutes the guardian deity for the actions that hold a community together--their morality. Indeed, immoral actions of gravity are said to be "abominations rejected by the Earth," and it is the earth that has to be purified in order to restore peace and harmony in the community. ("Changing" 87)

Acknowledging that both these concepts are "vividly brought out" (87) in *Things Fall Apart*, Nwoga adds that they "still hold true today and even modernity and Christianity have not shifted them" (87-88).

Hence these metaphysical concepts in no way detract from the realism of Achebe's novel. W.J. Harvey observes that the "mimetic adequacy of a novel will . . . depend on the novelist's ability to create the sense of man as simultaneously both agent and patient, free and not free, capable of choice yet limited in innumerable ways" (130). In depicting the Igboman Okonkwo living at the moment of colonial intrusion into his society, Achebe has created just such a sense. Whether Okonkwo is seen as a tragic hero--a great man, greatly flawed, destroyed by his own freely-willed acts in conjunction with circumstances beyond his control, or as a man who foolishly challenged his *chi* and thereby offended the goddess of the earth, the novel achieves not just mimetic adequacy but mimetic conviction.

The concept of reincarnation, which is of implicit and peripheral concern in *Things Fall Apart*, provides a central symbol in a very different Igbo novel, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*. Whereas Achebe's interest is in the realistic portrayal of a vibrant, cohesive traditional society at the moment of Western intrusion on it, Emecheta's interest is in the realistic portrayal of the oppression of women in traditional and modern Nigerian society, in both of

which, she shows, male-established values prevail. Therefore, in The Joys of Motherhood she represents the chi of the female protagonist Nnu Ego as the spirit of a slave girl who is reincarnated in her. In this way, Emecheta employs the cycle of reincarnation to symbolize the continuing cycle of women's enslavement.

None of the theological and anthropological studies of chi that I have read indicate any consistent way of integrating it with reincarnation as Emecheta does in her novel. The problem lies in reconciling the two beliefs, since each individual is supposedly created by a different chi and is therefore unique. Thus, Ilogu in Christianity and Ibo Culture asserts: "Early in a young man's life the parents help him to discover by divination which of the dead ancestors had possessed the kind of chi with which their child is now endowed" (37). A more elaborate account is given by W.R.G. Horton in his study of a Northern Igbo Village-Group. He reports a belief according to which chi enters the body at the moment when the baby leaves the womb and at the same time as "a heart-soul (mmuo) which is usually thought to be the reincarnation of an ancestor" ("God" 20). The two have different functions: "Although the mmuo is believed to determine the baby's potentialities, it is the chi which controls their expression" (20). Neither of these connections between chi and reincarnation is similar to that found in The Joys of Motherhood, in which

the protagonist thinks of the spirit reincarnated in her as her chi, controlling and directing her life. As I have suggested, Emecheta's interest is not in giving an accurate presentation of these metaphysical concepts but in employing them to symbolize the fate of Nigerian women.

Whereas Things Fall Apart ends with the suicide of its male protagonist, The Joys of Motherhood begins with the attempted suicide of its female one. In despair at the sudden death of her month-old son, her only child, Nnu is determined to throw herself from a Lagos bridge and confront her chi who is making her life "a catalogue of disasters" ([illegible]).

Having begun thus in medias res in 1934, the novel reverts to the events surrounding the conception of Nnu twenty-five years earlier in her home village of Ogboli in the larger community of Ibuza. Three women are affected by the circumstances of this conception: Ona, the favourite mistress of the village chief, Agbadi; Agbadi's senior wife Agwuna; and Agwuna's unnamed slave girl who, through reincarnation, becomes Nnu's chi. All three are enslaved victims of men's expectations of women.

Agbadi is a charismatic man who has "had many women in his time" (10). When Nnu is conceived, he has seven wives, three of whom are captured slaves, and two mistresses, one of whom Ona, the best-loved of all his female companions, refuses to live with him. Oni suspects that "her fate would

be the same as that of his other women" (15) with whom he soon becomes bored. The nickname Ona, meaning "priceless jewel," has been given to her in her childhood by Agbadi because her father, also a chief, always refers to her as "his ornament" (11). Moreover, her father, who has no living sons, has decreed that she shall never marry, having dedicated her to the gods "to produce children in his name, not that of any husband" (18). Loving both her father and Agbadi, Oni is torn between the two but supposes that "she should regard herself lucky for two men to want to own her" (25).

Before Nnu's birth, Ona makes a bargain with her lover that if the child is a boy he will belong to her father (for Agbadi has many sons); but if it is a girl, she will belong to Agbadi. Thus, even before her birth, Nnu's destiny is decided by the wishes of two men. Bragging that "she is a beauty and she is mine" (26), Agbadi names her Nnu Ego meaning "twenty bags of cowries," to express his pride of ownership.

But Ona's father refuses to accept any bride price from Agbadi, and therefore by tradition Ona cannot go to live with him. Even after her father's death, she still refuses to leave her father's compound. It is only when the baby becomes ill and a <u>dibia</u> brought by Agbadi divines that the child is the reincarnation of the slave woman who is buried in Agbadi's compound and who must be appeased that Ona's

concern for the safety of her child causes her to give in. Agbadi insists that Nnu "can't worship her *chi* from a foreign place; she must be where her *chi* is until all the sacrifices have been made" (27-28). In this way, it is established that the slave woman is also Nnu's *chi*.

When Ona dies after a second pregnancy and a premature birth, her last wish is that her daughter should have a freedom that she herself has not experienced. She tells Agbadi, "[S]ee that however much you love our daughter Nnu Ego you allow her to have a life of her own, a husband if she wants one. Allow her to be a woman" (28).

Before looking at why her mother's hopes for Nnu are unfulfilled, we must understand the circumstances of the death of the slave woman who becomes Nnu's *chi*. Nnu is conceived in Agbadi's compound where Ona has come to nurse him after an almost fatal hunting accident. As he begins to recover, his passion for Ona awakes, and her own for him enslaves her in a way in which he takes delight. Because she attempts to resist him, he wants her "completely humiliated in her burning desire" (20). Their love-making wakens the whole courtyard, and then he leaves her unsatisfied: "Having hurt her on purpose for the benefit of his people sleeping in the courtyard, he had had his satisfaction" (21).

It is not only Ona whom he has humiliated. His senior wife Agunwa, already worn out with the strain of his

illness, becomes ill herself that very night (21), perhaps, according to some, because "it was bad for her morale to hear her husband giving pleasure to another woman . . . and to such a woman who openly treated the man they all worshipped so badly . . . who had the audacity to fight with her man before letting him have her: a bad woman" (21). Here Emecheta is showing how some women not only accept their own oppression but insist on equal subservience from other women. Agbadi rejects any blame for the illness of his wife, insisting to a friend:

> You are wrong . . . to suggest she might be sore or bitter just because last night with Ona I amused myself a little. Agunwa is too mature to mind that. Why, if she behaved like that what kind of example would that be to the younger wives? (22)

When Agunwa dies twenty days later, she is buried with full honour in her husband's compound because she has died a "complete woman" (21); that is, she is the mother of grown sons.

Custom requires that her personal slave go with her and be laid inside the grave first. As Meek reports, in many Igbo groups, "It was customary for the son of the deceased to kill a slave at the burial-rites of his father or mother. At Eha-Amufu the body of the slave was placed in the grave first" (308-09). The novel informs us: "A good slave was

supposed to jump into the grave willingly, happy to accompany her mistress; but this young and beautiful woman did not wish to die yet" (23). During her struggle to avoid her fate, the girl is given a sharp blow on the head with a cutlass by Agunwa's eldest son who insists that his mother must have " a decent burial" (23). Just before a final blow silences her, the girl declares bitterly: "I shall come back to your household, but as a legitimate daughter. I shall come back . . ." (23).

On the day of this burial, the first signs of Ona's pregnancy with Nnu are seen. At Nnu's birth, a lump is noticed on her head, and she is "fair-skinned like the women from the Aboh and Itsekiri areas" (27). When she develops a severe and strange headache that holds "her head and shoulders together" (27), the dibia discoveres that the lump is very hot; and after he arranges his divining tools, he goes into a trance from which he speaks to Agbadi as follows:

> This child is the slave woman who died with your senior wife Agunwa. She promised to come back as a daughter. Now here she is. That is why this child has the fair skin of the water people, and the painful lump on her head is from the beating your men gave her before she fell into the grave. She will always have trouble with that head. If she has a fortunate life, the head will not play

> up. But if she is unhappy, it will trouble her both physically and emotionally. My advice is that you go and appease the slave woman. (27)

Hence, as we have seen, Nnu is taken to live in her father's compound, where the slave woman is then "properly buried in a separate grave" (28), and Nnu is given an image of the woman to carry with her. Meek and Chukwukere, among others, report that usually only adults establish <u>chi</u> symbols and/or shrines, either upon marriage or upon the birth of a first child (Meek, 56; /Chukwukere 525); but Meek appends a note to the effect that "in some localities (e.g. at Abo) boys and girls may be given their <u>chi</u>-symbols at the age of seven or eight, though their fathers and mothers perform the rites until the children set up homes for themselves" (56 n.1). Nnu, then, has acquired her <u>chi</u>-symbol in the image of the slave-girl.

Thus far in Emecheta's novel, we have been shown that women are treated with respect only in death. Agbadi's senior wife, while living, is expected to be an example to the younger wives by accepting with equanimity even the most outrageous behaviour on the part of her husband. Only in death is she honoured. The slave woman, as a slave, is buried alive in another's grave. Only when she becomes the guardian spirit of Agbadi's daughter is she "properly buried" (28). This pattern of a woman's being disregarded in life and honoured in death is to be repeated for Nnu, as

we shall see.

When Nnu does not conceive during her first arranged marriage, the _dibias_ whom she consults claim that her _chi_ will not give her a child "because she had been dedicated to a river goddess before Agbadi took her away in slavery" (31). Consequently, Nnu's husband takes a second wife, who becomes pregnant within a month; and he treats Nnu as farm help, not with the respect due to a senior wife. When Nnu in her child-hunger is caught breast-feeding the other woman's child, her father is summoned and she returns home. Thus ends her first marriage.

But as I. Chukwukere explains, "good or bad _chi_ is not an absolute gift. A bad one can be prayed to and propitiated in order to reverse the ill hands of fate; in the same way, a good _chi_ has to be regularly sacrificed to and placated in order to keep up its benevolence" (526). Thus Nnu's father renews "his expensive sacrifices to her _chi_, begging the slave woman to forgive him for taking her away from her original home" (35). He does more, telling her of his reforms:

> [H]e had stopped dealing in slaves and had offered freedom to the ones in his household. He even joined a group of leaders who encouraged slaves to return to their places of origin, if they could remember from where they came. All those in his own compound who refused to go were adopted as his

children. (35)

(Later in the novel, however, Nnu Ego says "my father released his slaves because the white man says it is illegal" [51]. Even so, Agbadi makes every effort to propitiate Nnu's _chi_).

Nnu herself blames her _chi_ for all her troubles: first, for her barrenness; then, for the death of her first child; and later, when she is the mother of many children, for her continuing hardships and lack of the expected but elusive "joys" of motherhood. Before the birth of Oshia, her first child to survive, Nnu has a dream in which, after finding an abandoned baby by a stream, she sees her _chi_ on the other bank laughing at her and telling her that she can have all the "dirty, chubby babies" that she wants. This dream foreshadows her later discovery that the anticipated ease of old age in which her children will be a support to her will never be hers. Her greatest disappointment is in her oldest son Oshia, for whose schooling much is sacrificed in the belief that he will help his parents and the other children. Instead, he continues on through university and then proceeds to the States for further study. The only "help" he gives to his mother is a lavish second burial for which he goes into debt "to show the world what a good son he was" (224). Hence, like her _chi_ and like Agbadi's senior wife, Nnu is shown consideration and honour only when her life is ended.

Although after death a shrine is made in Nnu's name, she never makes fertile the descendants who appeal to her (224). A brief examination of her life in Lagos with her second husband Nnaife explains why. Eventually they have nine children, seven of whom survive, including two sets of twin girls. On the death of Nnaife's elder brother in Ibuza, Nnaife also inherits responsibility for his brother's three wives and their children. The youngest wife joins him in Lagos with her four-year-old daughter. In the village, each wife would have had her own hut. In Lagos, with low pay and high rent, all must live in one room. Moreover, in Lagos a wife had to work: "She provided the food from her husband's meagre housekeeping money, but finding the money for clothes, for any kind of comforts, in some cases for the children's school fees, was on her shoulders" (53). When Nnaife's white employer returns to England at the beginning of World War II, the family must subsist on Nnu's trading activities, including the heavy labour of collecting, cutting, and selling firewood. During Naife's long absences, first while working on a ship and later as a soldier, all the family responsibilities fall on Nnu, whose life is a "routine of scraping, saving, counting every penny" (190). All the while she consoles herself that the future will be better "when Nnaife returns from the war" or "when Oshia returns from college" (190), but these hopes are never realized.

Throughout most of this life, Nnu not only accepts but perpetuates the male-established beliefs concerning men's and women's roles. At first she despises her husband for being proud of his work as a washerman for white people, work that she considers not fit for a man. When her suicide is prevented by an Ibuzi friend of her husband's, Nnu cries out, "But I am not a woman any more! I am not a mother any more" (62). The onlookers "all agreed that a woman without a child for her husband was a failed woman" (62). When Nnu gives birth to twin girls, she fears Nnaife's displeasure, saying: "One can hardly afford to have one girl in a town like this, to say nothing of two" (127). But on being reminded by her junior wife Adaku that "these girls when they grow up will be great helpers to you in looking after the boys. Their bride prices will be used in paying their school fees as well" (127), Nnu thinks, "This woman knows a thing or two" (127). Later, while the boys are kept in school and encouraged to put time into their school-work, the girls are required to trade after school-hours even during the "couple of years" of schooling that they are given (189). To justify this unequal treatment, Nnu constantly reminds them that they are girls (176) and that they need to master a trade (180). She accepts the traditional aim for girls: "The most important thing is for them to get good husbands" (189).

In all of this, Nnu is mirroring the attitudes of men.

Nnaife pays little attention to his daughters. To him, girls exist "to help in running the house and be disposed of as soon as possible" (204) for their bride-price. He is "in a hurry to get as much money as possible from his children before retiring" (203). The well-educated man who marries one of the twins wants a wife without much education, telling himself that "as long as the wife could bear children, keep his room clean and wash his clothes, he was perfectly satisfied. That Taiwo was beautiful and quiet he calculated as an added bonus" (203).

The converse of this under-valuation of girls is the over-valuation of boys. The junior wife Adaku tells Oshia that he is worth ten of her daughter. Nnu perpetually assures him that he is handsome and clever and instils in him his importance as the eldest son "the heir and the future owner of the family" (122), thus contributing to the self-centredness of this son who is at first her greatest hope and later her greatest disillusionment.

Adaku is not valued because she has no sons. During Nnaife's war absence, when a serious conflict arises between his two wives, for which Nnu is the more at fault, a male kinsman who is called to settle the dispute makes Adaku feel "that since she had no son for the family she had no right to complain about her senior's conduct" (166). Moreover, she is admonished as follows:

> [Y]ou have children, but they are girls, who in a

> few years' time will go and help build another man's immortality. The only woman who is immortalizing your husband you make unhappy with your fine clothes and lucrative business. If I were in your shoes I should go home and consult my chi to find out why male offspring have been denied me. (166)

In this criticism of Adaku, the common belief that reincarnation must be patrilineal emerges. But earlier, when Nnu's father Agbadi is dying, he promises his pregnant daughter, "I shall come again into your home, but this time I shall bring your mother" (153). When a boy is born, the senior woman of Nnu's family, who is assisting at the birth, screams, "It's Agbadi! He is back!" Others agree, including the oldest of Nnu's half-brothers, who exclaims: "'Nnamdio!' meaning: 'This is my father'" (155), and gives the child that name. This inconsistency in Emecheta's treatment of beliefs in reincarnation is attributable, I think, to the fact that her only interest in the concept is as a method of berating men's treatment of women. Thus both Agbadi's reincarnation as the son of Nnu and the male criticism of Adaku's failure to bear sons show that men perceive and value women merely as conduits for their own continued existence.

Adaku, realizing that she is looked on as "only a lodger" because, without sons, "her position in Nnaife

Owulum's household had not been ratified" (167), chooses to leave and become a prostitute, telling Nnu: "I'm going to be thrown away when I'm dead, in any case, whereas people like you, senior wife, have formed roots, as they say: you will be properly buried in Nnaife's compound" (169). Adaku here is referring to the tradition whereby women without children are refused ritual burial so that they will not reincarnate. Materially, however, Adaku prospers in her single life and is able to send her daughters to a convent school. Nnu remains respectable but poverty-stricken and often ill from lack of food.

Whenever Nnu attempts to rebel at her situation, as she does when, after the war, Nnaife brings a sixteen-year-old wife from Ibuza to their one room in Lagos, she is reminded that she is the "daughter of Agbadi," and must behave as such (185). Even after his death, "Nwokocha Agbadi ruled his daughter" (185). And during his lifetime, Nnu has never felt free to return to her father, who has accepted bride-price for her and who would consider her return a "disgrace" to "the name of the family" (119). She knows that if she were to claim ill-treatment from Nnaife, "she would be chased in disgrace back to her responsibility" (137).

Nnu sees herself as "a prisoner, imprisoned by her love for her children, imprisoned in her role as the senior wife" (137), and she feels that the men cleverly and unfairly use "a woman's sense of responsibility to actually enslave her"

(137). As daughter, wife, and mother she is in bondage: "She belonged to both men, her father and her husband, and lastly to her sons" (185). At a moment of despair, Nnu imagines this slavery continuing after death:

> Yes, I have many children, but what do I have to feed them on? On my life. I have to work myself to the bone to look after them. I have to give them my all. And if I am lucky enough to die in peace, I even have to give them my soul. They will worship my dead spirit to provide for them: it will be hailed as a good spirit so long as there are plenty of yams and children in the family, but if anything should go wrong, if a young wife does not conceive or there is a famine, my dead spirit will be blamed. When will I be free? (186-87)

In life she has known only blame. Although her "love and duty for her children" are "like her chain of slavery" (186), she receives no gratitude for her life of service. Oshia, as a child, blames his failure to win a scholarship to grammar school on his having had to help her in her work. He sees his father as a soldier-hero, but his mother as only "a nagging and worrying woman" (185). Similarly, when Oshia goes to the States on scholarship instead of assuming the family responsibilities so that Nnaife can retire to Ibuza in leisure, and when Kehinde, one of the twins, announces

that she wants to marry a Yorubaman, thus depriving Nnaife of the bride price he has been arranging, Nnaife blames Nnu: "Why, he had thought the woman's children were a blessing to him. Now he was beginning to see that they were a curse" (205). Then when Kehinde runs to the man she loves and Nnaife is jailed for threatening to kill the man's father and for injuring another relative with his cutlass, he upbraids his wife: "You see, you see, Nnu Ego, you see what you have done to me! One of your daughters is responsible for their taking me to jail" (210). When she returns to Ibuza because she can no longer pay rent in Lagos, Nnaife's people brand her "a bad woman" (223), and she has to go to live with her own people. Help comes from her daughters sometimes, but she never hears from her two oldest sons, the second of whom goes to Canada. Only when she dies quietly by the roadside "with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her" (224) do all her children, even Oshia, come home.

The novel ends with the same kind of bitterly ironic question that concludes Nwapa's _Efuru_ from which the title derives. _Efuru_ reminds us that the woman of the lake "had never experienced the joy of motherhood" and asks, "Why then did the women worship her?" (281). At Nnu's death, the narrator comments:

> [M]any agreed that she had given all to her children. The joy of being a mother was the joy

> of giving all to your children, they said.
>
> And her reward? Did she not have the greatest funeral Ibuza had ever seen? . . . That was why people failed to understand why she did not answer their prayers, for what else could a woman want but to have sons who would give her a decent burial?
>
> Nnu Ego had it all, yet still did not answer prayers for children. (224)

Nnu, supposedly a free woman, has been as much a slave to men's whims, purposes, and demands as was the slave girl who is reincarnated in her.

If Emecheta is to be faulted, it is for over-stating her case. Nnu's day-by-day struggles to earn a living are shown in great detail; Nnaife's work on board ship and later as a grass cutter cannot have been much easier or more rewarding, but this is barely touched on. We are shown Nnaife's delighting in the arrival of a second wife, whom Nnu very much resents; his wasting needed money on drink; and his beating both his wives. But we are not shown Nnaife's war experiences in Burma, only a brief reference being made to water-snake bites (178) and to his looking ill and yellowish (182) on his return home. Granted, the novel is telling Nnu's story, not Nnaife's, but the scales are weighted against him. Moreover, when Nnaife is abducted and coerced into enlisting in the army through promises of

regular income for his family during his service, and of promotion to a better job after the sure-to-be-brief war. Emecheta then devises a bureaucratic bungle to prevent Nnaife's army pay from reaching Nnu regularly, so that Nnu's worst sufferings come through no fault of Nnaife (though, perhaps, Emecheta would have us believe they come through Nnu's illiteracy, typically a female deprivation, through the male-governed world in which wars and bureaucratic mix-ups occur).

Nevertheless, The Joys of Motherhood, like almost all of Emecheta's novels, is a powerful presentation of her theme that the life of a woman is that of a slave. The strength of Emecheta's sense of injustice to women is understandable in view of her own experience. Married and a mother in Nigeria at the age of seventeen, she moved to England with her student husband, only to find life with him so intolerable that she left him to raise her five children alone while achieving a university degree in sociology. Her first two novels, In the Ditch (1972) and Second-Class Citizen (1974) are semi-autobiographical accounts of this experience, the title of the second referring to her situation in England as a woman, an alien, and a black person. Three later novels set in Nigeria--The Bride Price (1976), The Slave-Girl (1977), and Double Yoke (1982)--all continue the theme of women's slavery, as their titles indicate. In the first, the protagonist dies in child-

birth, ostensibly for flouting tradition by marrying against her family's wishes and without bride-price being paid; in the second, an orphaned girl is sold to distant relatives by an older brother and spends nine years as a virtual slave; and in the third, a female undergraduate discovers that she is expected to live under "the old yoke of motherhood and wifehood and with the new academic one" (97), the double yoke of "two sets of civilization" (13).

For Emecheta, then, the fate of a woman in male-controlled society is that of a slave. In The Joys of Motherhood, the fusion of the metaphysical concepts of the chi and reincarnation represents this reality. Also concerned with enslavement as destiny are three novels illustrating the past and present social consequences of the Igbo belief in osu: Emecheta's The Bride Price, already mentioned, Chinua Achebe's No Longer At Ease, and Elechi Amadi's The Slave.

Throughout West Africa, priests of the important gods, such as Ezeani in Things Fall Apart, function as essential, highly-respected members of the community. In Igbo tradition, however, there developed also a unique form of priesthood known as osu, in which a person was dedicated or consecrated to a god and thereafter, along with all his descendants in perpetuity, was ostracized by the community. The person so dedicated was considered to be the property of the god but acted as a priest in the sense that he lived at

the deity's shrine and tended or helped to tend it.

Traditions concerning the origin of the *osu* system are conflicting, but the most commonly reported *diala* (freeborn) tradition suggests reasons for the shunning of *osu*:

> A village, a lineage, a family, or an individual dogged by illness, bad luck, or calamities and misfortunes would consult a diviner to find out what was wrong. In such a case, the diviner would recommend the dedication of a slave who would then become the deity's servitor and carry the sins of the dedicator. Such a servitor became an *osu*. He is feared because the *diala* do not know how to interact with him without offending the deity. He is hated because the *osu* remind the *diala* of their guilt. (Uchendu 89)

The person thus dedicated to a god was, as Basden calls him, "a living sacrifice" (246) given to propitiate the deity.

A second way of becoming *osu* was for a person in a time of dire extremity to seek sanctuary:

> A man or woman, labouring under the impression that he or she was in danger could flee to the shrine and claim protection. In return for benefits of sanctuary, such a one forfeited liberty and became an "osu", the property of the deity. In some areas, terms could be stipulated. A person might claim sanctuary on condition that

> he or she might be redeemed by the exchange of a cow or something of an acceptable value. If, however, the person demanded safety for life, the choice was irrevocable; such an one could under no circumstances be redeemed. (Basden 247)

In thus voluntarily becoming _osu_ a person surrendered his or her life as a free citizen for physical safety:

> All persons and animals so dedicated are sacred and inviolate. Anyone injuring an "osu" exposes himself to serious trouble and, should death ensue, the guilty person must provide a substitute and, in addition, make fitting recompense for the misdeed, whether committed accidentally or with criminal intention. (Basden 247)

At the same time, in becoming _osu_ one predestined one's descendants to life as outcasts. _Osu_ had the lowest status in the Igbo social system, being treated as pariahs to the extent that a sexual relationship between an _osu_ and a _diala_ (a freeborn) was considered to be an abomination against the earth goddess (Ilogu 125).

Writing in 1965, Uchendu says that although the "cult-slave status of the _osu_ was legally abolished in 1956" (90), their social status had not changed:

> The _osu_ lineages are a living social reality; their residential segregation has not been abolished by law. . . . There is no generally

> acknowledged intermarriage or willingness to intermarry between diala and osu, even among the most acculturated Igbo. However, sexual relations which were tabooed between the two groups do occur, especially in cities. (90)

Arinze speaks similarly of the failure of either law or Christianity to change the attitude of osu:

> Today [1970] no new osu is being dedicated but many pagans and some half-hearted Christians still observe these practices towards the descendants of the ndi osu, and still hesitate or refuse outright to have any marital connections with them. (92)

This contemporary social reality is reflected in two Igbo novels, Chinua Achebe's No Longer At Ease and Buchi Emecheta's The Bride Price, whereas the functioning of the osu system in the past is portrayed in Elechi Amadi's The Slave.

In Achebe's No Longer At Ease, Obi Okonkwo, the son of Christian parents and a university graduate, educated in England, nevertheless finds that it is impossible for him to marry the equally well-educated osu girl whom he loves. When Clara first tells Obi that she is osu, there are "seconds of silence, when everything had seemed to stop, waiting in vain for him to speak" (64). Almost immediately, Obi is able to overcome his initial shock, but it has thus been established that he has an ingrained emotional aversion

to the *osu*, even though his reasoning about the situation is flawless:

> It was scandalous that in the middle of the twentieth century a man could be barred from marrying a girl simply because her great-great-great-great grandfather had been dedicated to serve a god, thereby setting himself apart and turning his descendants into a forbidden caste to the end of Time. (65)

When the Umuofia Progressive Union in Lagos, representing Obi's village which has paid for his education, attempt to advise him against the *osu* girl, he rejects both their advice and their fellowship.

But he cannot treat his parents so cavalierly, and they are appalled at the proposed marriage. His father Isaac (Nwoye of *Things Fall Apart*) says, "We are Christians. . . . But that is no reason to marry an *osu*" (120). Obi answers from the Christian perspective, in "the very words that his father might have used in talking to his heathen kinsmen" (121):

> Our fathers in their darkness and ignorance called an innocent man *osu*, a thing given to idols, and thereafter he became an outcast, and his children, and children's children for ever. But have we not seen the light of the Gospel? (120-21)

Isaac, however, is not persuaded. He admits that Clara's

father, a retired teacher, is "a good man and a great Christian" (121), but he reminds Obi: "Osu is like leprosy in the minds of our people" (121) and if he married Clara, all his descendants will be osu. The marriage becomes impossible for Obi when his sick mother, whose favourite child he has always been, declares, "[I]f you do the thing while I am alive, you will have my blood on your head, because I shall kill myself" (123). The young man, loving both his mother and the now-pregnant girl, tries to resolve his dilemma by postponing the marriage and paying for an abortion. As a result, Clara almost dies and will have nothing more to do with him.

Although the Umuofians expect Obi to adhere to such old traditions as that of osu, they demand as well that he live according to new, westernized standards. As the only Umuofian yet in a "European post" (6) in the "senior service" (72), he must live as befits his rank, with a flat in the elite section of Lagos and an automobile. At the same time, he must regularly send money home to help his parents and to pay a brother's school fees, as well as pay off his debt to the Umuofia Progressive Union. Moreover, he is expected to use his position to help other Umuofians get government jobs. Through the conflicts thus created in Obi and the fate that befalls him because of them (imprisonment for taking bribes), Achebe shows the disastrous effect of the simultaneous demands of incompatible social customs on

even the most idealistic and well-intentioned young man.

In No Longer At Ease the conflict arising from the osu taboo is only one of the problems that the protagonist confronts and fails to resolve successfully. In Buchi Emecheta's The Bride Price, set in the community of Ibuza, the entire plot is based on the taboo against marriage between slave and free.

In The Bride Price the slave family from which the school-master Chike is descended is referred to as an "'oshu' family" (83), but the narrative clearly shows that his ancestors were ohu as described by Uchendu: "Slaves [ohu] were the victims of either intergroup wars or of economic circumstances. They may have been captured, kidnaped [sic], or sold to meet pressing indebtedness" (88). Emecheta fails to make a distinction between such slaves, owned by men, and osu, owned by deities, perhaps because they were equally social outcasts. Chike's grandmother had been a princess, captured from a town fifteen miles from Ibuza "in the days when there were no roads but only footpaths made by warriors" (83). As she was very beautiful, her master kept her and bought a man slave to keep her company. When it became illegal to keep slaves, her owner sent her sons to the European missionaries. One of these sons is Chike's father, a plantation-owner who is still shunned, despite his prosperity, because of his slave ancestry.

Chike and the protagonist Aku-nna love each other, but Aku-nna's step-father will not give his daughter in marriage to a slave. However, he is willing to accept bride-price from the family of a school-failure who have attempted to marry Aku-nna to their son by kidnapping her. After Chike rescues Aku-nna from this intolerable situation she and Chike marry, but her step-father repeatedly refuses to accept any bride-price from Chike's father.

A social taboo against marriage between the freeborn and slaves of the ohu type existed in some parts of Igboland, as W.R.G. Horton explains in his 1954 study of a northern Igbo village-group:

> Marriage rules in Nike preclude absolutely any form of marriage between an Amadi (free-born) and an Ohu; whether such a marriage would incur supernatural or secular sanctions it is impossible to say, as the case seems never to have arisen. In pre-Government times the owner of adult male Ohu chose and purchased wives for them in the slave-markets of the group, just as he bought mates for his livestock. More recently Ohu have exercised free choice in the selection of mates so long as the choice was confined to persons of Ohu status. ("The Ohu System" 317)

It is quite possible that Ibuza, although in western Igboland (Niteki 46), had a similar custom. However, the

designation of Chike's family as <u>osu</u> is clearly inaccurate. That <u>osu</u> were regarded differently from other slaves is evident from Arinze's statement that the <u>osu</u> "were regarded as the lowest in the social ladder, and as even more despicable than slaves" (92).

In <u>The Bride Price</u>, as in <u>The Joys of Motherhood</u>, Emecheta uses Igbo belief and custom not in the interest of historical accuracy, but in order to portray the difficult lives of women. Realistically, Aku-nna's death in childbirth has physical causes: her youth, her narrow hips, her years of malnutrition. But in the eyes of Ibuza, it occurs because the bride price has not been paid. This traditional belief is a very convenient one for keeping girls in subjection:

> Every girl born in Ibuza after Aku-nna's death was told her story, to reinforce the old taboos of the land. If a girl wished to live long and see her children's children, she must accept the husband chosen for her by her people, and the bride price must be paid. If the bride price was not paid, she would never survive the birth of her first child. It was a psychological hold over every young girl that would continue to exist, even in the face of every modernisation, until the present day. Why this is so is, as the saying goes, anybody's guess. (168)

In that last sentence, Emecheta implies the stranglehold of male-established social custom.

Custom-induced bondage is also the theme of Elechi Amadi's The Slave, a novel set in a pre-colonial village. The novel begins with the return of the protagonist Olumati to his father's ancestral homestead from the shrine of Amadioha (the thunder god) where his father had been an osu, and it ends with Olumati's leaving the village to take refuge once again at the shrine. The course of events that leads to this foreordained outcome dramatizes the permanence of being osu, described by Basden as follows:

> Once devoted to a god, there is practically no prospect of such a slave regaining freedom, and, formerly, his movements were restricted to the precincts of the shrine to which he was attached. Redemption is possible, but of extremely rare occurrence; even then the fact is remembered against the one redeemed. (246)

Olumati's fate is determined by events that began far in the past. He is the only remaining male member of the Echela family of the community of Aliji (composed of eleven village-families). Long ago many members of the Echela family were carried off in a slave raid, and those remaining accused the Okani family, "for long their opponents over land disputes" (24), of complicity in the raid. Although divination cleared the Okanis of the charge, and although it

was believed that no man in Aliji would commit such an act because it was forbidden by Ali, the earth-god (24), the few Echela survivors continued to blame the Okani.

Consequently, both families "invoked evil spirits and gods to kill the other" (24). Moreover, "Whatever befell one family was blamed on the other" (24). Finally, members of the Echela family "began to sicken and die fast," (25) until only one man and wife and their son and daughter-in-law were left. When the father died suddenly, the frightened son with his wife took refuge at the shrine of Amadioha at Isiali, after which "only a ransom could release him from the shrine" (25). But because his mother Nyege was very ill, the ransom was not paid, and after one year he became a slave of Amadioha, an _osu_.

Before the son fled, he had had a daughter, but while at the shrine he had a son, Olumati. When, after his father's death, Olumati returns to Aliji to restore his father's homestead, the people of Aliji want to eject him. At a village meeting, the Eze Minikwe explains the situation thus:

> Now by custom this son is also a slave of Amadioha. He cannot be anywhere else except at Isiali where he is expected to serve at the shrine. . . . Allowing an Osu of Amadioha to stay here is to invite the terrible anger of the god. (25)

However, Olumati's aged grandmother Nyege argues that Olumati's mother was already three months pregnant when her husband fled to the shrine, and therefore Olumati does not belong to the god. When the villagers consult the priest at Isiali, the priest's reply is an enigmatic one: "Amadioha does not take what does not belong to him" (27). What this means can be interpreted only by a seer, and the local seer Ajohia pronounces that Olumati does not belong to Amadioha and may stay in Aliji (27).

For all that, Olumati's bid for life as a free man is doomed to fail. The Okani family remain hostile, especially after Olumati, in a fair wrestling match with his age-mate Aso of the Okani, throws his opponent in such a way that Aso develops a hump and can no longer compete. When the grandmother Nyege dies, Olumati's mother, living at Isiali, still refuses to come to Aliji to help her son and daughter because of her fears of the Okani. As a result of overwork in looking after both her husband and her brother, Olumati's sister dies in premature childbirth.

During all of this, Olumati has worked very hard at tapping palm-trees, trapping, and farming to accumulate enough wealth to seek his sister's friend Enaa as a bride, only to discover that Enaa is to marry his friend Wizo, the carver. Only then does Wizo's sister Adibe explain to Olumati: "Many in Aliji are still not sure you are not a slave of Amadioha. I know you are not, but people are

stubborn" (156). When Olumati asks, "Does Enaa think so?" Adibe replies: "I can't say, but I doubt that her father could have let you marry her" (156).

After all his struggles, Olumati has lost everything he values. When he returns to the shrine of Asmadioha, he leaves behind the hoard of manillas that he has accumulated. That he does not take the money with him indicates that he does not intend or desire to be ransomed. He has succumbed to the destiny he had struggled so hard to escape, that of being the slave of Amadioha.

As well as portraying the inescapable destiny of an osu, The Slave presents characters who are seemingly predestined to suffer the wrath of the earth-god Ali. Through Minikwe, the Eze of Aliji, and his son Nyeche, we learn that limitations are placed on the priests of Ali. In Ethics in Nigerian Culture, Amadi explains that Eze was the name given to the head of the community, who was usually the most senior of the elders. Sometimes he was also the priest of the Earth-god (as Minikwe is in The Slave, but "such a situation was the exception rather than the rule" (Amadi, Ethics 94).

In Aliji, Ali always chooses his priest from either the Okani family or Minikwe's family (76). Therefore, since the god may choose Nyeche, Minikwe demurs at his son's wish to marry Olumati's sister Aleru. From his own experience, Minikwe knows that such a marriage may be ill-fated:

> A priest of Ali could not marry just anyone. The community had to ensure that the priest's wife had the necessary family background. She had to come from a family that was not in any way linked with deformity, crime or insanity. Moreover, her parents and grandparents had to be natives of Aliji.
>
> Minikwe had, against advice, married a woman who did not meet the requirements. Her father, a native of Chiolu, was known to have killed a man by accident. . . . Minikwe's wife bore him five sons in quick succession. None of them attained the age of seven. The seer revealed that Ali the earth-god was angry. Minikwe had to send the woman back to Chiolu. (74)

Similarly, Aleru may not meet the requirements, for in the past corals and ivory tusks had been stolen from the shrine of Ali, and there was "a very strong rumour" (101) that a rich trader of the Echela family had stolen them to sell to the white men. "The seer who looked into the affair was afraid to mention names and so the matter remained in doubt" (101). To Nyeche's argument that, in any case, Aleru was not responsible, Minikwe reminds his son that "the gods do not reason that way" (102):

> If indeed a member of Echela family stole the tusks and corals, then it is likely that one or

> more other members of the family knew about it. If so, they ought to have come forward to condemn the thief who would have been punished and forced to offer very costly sacrifices to placate Ali. Since the entire family kept quiet, every member shared the blame. (102)

Those not living at the time, like Aleru, are not exonerated because "the present members of the family are reincarnations of their ancestors. If one escapes the consequences of one's misdeeds in this world, one may not escape in the next or the one after" (102).

This argument is unanswerable because other villagers are believed to be reincarnations of their ancestors. Olumati is the reincarnation of his grandfather Wakwakata, nicknamed the Spider because of his great wrestling prowess (114). Enaa is the reincarnation of her paternal grandmother, and for this reason Enaa's father will not go against her wishes in choosing a husband for her, as he explains to Minikwe: "Enaa is my mother reincarnated. She was very good to me, the best mother anyone ever had. Now I too have a chance to care for her. I shall not force her into anything she does not like" (77). Hence Nyeche cannot deny that his father's reasons for objecting to his marriage to Aleru are powerful ones. However, he clings to the possibility that the accusations against the Echela family may have been unfounded, and if so Aleru's misfortunes have

been accidental, not signs of the anger of Ali. Therefore, the marriage goes ahead, only to result in the deaths of Nyeche's wife and child.

As in the childbirth death of Aku-nna in The Bride Price, the novel shows that Aleru's death has natural causes. She keeps weeding on Olumati's farm to the point of exhaustion, planning to rest in the last two months of her pregnancy. "Weeding was hard work. One had to have the energy to hoe and the endurance to maintain a stooping position for hours on end in the sun. And the sun could be fierce even in the middle of the wet season" (137). On the last day of weeding, Aleru works from early morning till night and returns home with her waist aching "cruelly" (138). As a result, she miscarries and loses so much blood that she eventually dies. Nevertheless, Minikwe's fears that the Echela family is subject to the wrath of Ali have been realized.

As we saw in our discussion of The Concubine, Amadi shows us the world as a place in which man's utmost efforts are destined to be futile. Whether this is so because man's destiny is controlled by the gods or controlled by a combination of natural and social laws and blind chance is ultimately irrelevant. Of all the writers considered in detail in this study, Amadi is the most pessimistic.

Although only an osu is deemed to be physically owned by a god, other individuals may be just as inescapably fated

to serve the gods as mediators. This service, through priesthood, divination, or healing, may be demanded by lineage commitment, as was Minikwe's or by spiritual affinity. The novels considered in Chapter 4: Concepts of Destiny II: Priests and Healers are structured around some of these mediators.

CHAPTER IV

Concepts of Destiny II: Priests and Healers

Priests and Healers

<u>The Arrow of God</u>

<u>The Land's Lord</u>

<u>The Healers</u>

Concepts of Destiny II: Priests and Healers

Included in the personae of all West African novels that portray traditional societies are priests, diviners, and healers. It is necessarily so because these were the professionals of their world, as much a part of its everyday life as the clergy who inhabit George Eliot's novels were part of the life of nineteenth-century England, the people who were called upon for their services in all the critical moments of human life. In this regard, Emmanuel Obiechina offers the following observation:

> Every novel set in the traditional environment attends to the movements of the characters' minds from empirically apprehended realities to the deep metaphysical dimension. Characters faced with serious problems attempt to resolve them by asking such questions as, what is the will of the gods in these matters? How did the ancestors handle these problems when they were confronted by them? Or how would they have handled them if they had had to ? What forces are at work here and how can they be harmonized, conciliated, diminished, increased for the benefit of man? Beyond the metaphysical perception lies the need for action, for restoring balances and assuaging ruffled feelings, so the people of Umuofia consult the Oracle of the Hills

> and the Caves about whether or not to go to war.
> (*Culture*, 131-32)

To discover the metaphysical forces at work requires the services of an intermediary: a priest, a diviner, a healer, or a person who is invested with the powers of all three. Diviners and healers function as mediators between human beings and the whole spirit-world, whereas a priest, as Arinze explains, is "the official servant of a determined spirit, who offers sacrifice to the spirit and in general ministers at his or her shrine" (63). Moreover, Benjamin C. Ray states:

> the distinctive mark of a priest is his ritual and symbolic authority. The main task of a priest is to sustain and renew the life of the community he serves. Often the priest contains within himself the life-force from which he seeks to mediate to his people. (116)

A priest may also be a diviner and/or herbalist, and diviner/herbalists are common. When the responsibilities of these intermediaries are carried by three separate individuals, the diviner is necessarily the first to be consulted, for reasons given by Edmund Ilogu as follows:

> When a diviner prescribes sacrifice he also names the proper priest that should perform the function. . . . In all cases no cure is carried out entirely by the *dibia* (herbalist) without consulting diviners. Divination in the case of illness,

nearly always, leads to finding out what spirit had been wronged and what human relationship had been strained. Sacrifice and propitiation accompany whatever herbal medicine is given to ensure proper care. (53)

Although the Igbo word _dibia_ is frequently used to refer to all three types of practitioner, the Igbo language provides phrases that indicate a _dibia_'s specific role. A professional priest is a _dibia-na-achu-aja_ or _dibia-na-ago-mmu_; a diviner, a _dibia-na-agba-afa_; and a healer, a _dibia-na-agwo-ogwu_ (Obiego 127-28). In Igbo novels in English, the context makes clear in what capacity or capacities a _dibia_ is functioning. A priest is more often called _eze_ followed by the name of the spirit he serves, such as Ezeani in _Things Fall Apart_.

To become a priest, diviner, or healer is not a matter of personal choice. In ministering and sacrificing to the shrines of family gods and ancestors, the head of the family serves as priest. Service to a community god is usually the responsibility of a particular lineage from which one person is designated as priest. V.C. Uchendu gives the example of _Amadioha_ or _Kamalu_, god of thunder, who is recognized in almost every Igbo community but whose worship is usually the responsibility of one lineage or lineage segment which "has the prerogative of appointing a priest who ministers to the needs of other people needing the service of the deity" (96).

Such an appointment is never arbitrary. In one way or

other, the spirits choose their own mediators. For example, in Things Fall Apart, when the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves summons its priestess Chielo to bring the child Ezinma to it, the implication is that Ezinma has been chosen by the Oracle as its next priestess.

The choice may be revealed by divination, as G.C. Meek recounts:

> Many priests of Ala [the earth-goddess] are chosen by divination (from particular families). It may thus happen that the official priest is a mere lad. In such cases he receives instruction from an uncle or elder brother or cousin. The latter may even act as the lad's deputy, and, before offering sacrifice, would explain to Ala that he was acting on his young relative's behalf. During the sacrifice the lad places his hand on his relative's arms as a sign that he is conferring the necessary authority. (28)

We have already observed in the discussion of Achebe's Anthills the example of the Igbo poet Christopher Okigbo who was born into a lineage that provided the priest for the water-goddess Idoto. Because Okigbo was believed to be the reincarnation of his maternal grandfather, who had been priest of the shrine of Idoto, the grandson was expected to carry on these duties (Whitelaw int. with Okigbo 36). Even when he went to secondary school, he had to send something home from

his pocket-money regularly for his maternal uncle who was standing in for him to perform the periodic rites (Okigbo, int. with Serumaga, 145).

In the novel Anthills itself, as we have also seen, Achebe stresses that Agwu, the god of healers, diviners, and artists, chooses its own servitors. Uchendu gives the following account of the experiences of those called to serve Agwu (or agwo) as dibia:

> [T]he only Igbo willing to discuss agwo extensively are the servitors, who talk of their early horrible encounter with agwo, their long struggle to avoid it, and how they finally agreed to serve it.
>
> Agwo is a most proselytizing spirit always in need of servitors. It is very envious of people's wealth, which paradoxically, it claims to bring. To serve agwo is to enter the long rites of ordination which may eventually make one a dibia. Not many people have the wealth and patience to attain this height. Some stop after the initial rites or at any stage of the ordination process where they feel they can confidently challenge agwo to provide the economic resources necessary to complete the rites. But to refuse agwo's call to its service is to face a long trial and temptation, involving loss of property, loss of children, barrenness, and, in many cases, ara agwo,

> psychosomatic syndromes. The effective weapon with which to combat ara agwo is performance of igwo aja--rites of priestly ordination. (Uchendu 98)

However, according to Arinze, the office of the dibia is also largely hereditary:

> Particular families invariably perform the ceremonies of agwu and tell fortunes. This does not contradict the fact that possession [by agwu] is a necessary sign of vocation, for it almost always comes to a son of a dibia. . . . Agwu has no preference for the first-born son. . . . Sometimes the candidate is already known from boyhood when he picks up certain seeds . . . (seeds for divining). This, however, is not necessary. (65)

In the Igbo novels already discussed, dibia have appeared as important but peripheral figures, seen in the performance of their professional duties only when called upon for their services by the protagonists. The integrity and skill of these practitioners has been shown to vary widely, as do these qualities in the professional members of all societies. Some are faithful to their calling, intent on effective mediation with the spirits for the welfare of their clients and of their communities. Others are motivated mainly or entirely by self-interest.

We have seen examples of each type in Amadi's The

Concubine. The protagonist of Nwapa's Efuru relies on a dibia for the solution of her problems, but she also knows that many dibias are "quacks" (80). The urban dibias of Lagos in Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood are frauds. When Oshia hides some pet mice in the middle of his father's guitar, a dibia divines that the instrument is being played in the night by ghosts that must be exorcised (132). On another occasion, a dibia provides protective medicine for Oshia when the boy claims that he has had a dream that Adaku is trying to harm him. The dibia "did not say that the boy was imagining the whole thing or tell him that he was lying; after all, he had his livelihood to earn" (129). In the village novels, however, the dibia, like everyone else, live mainly by farming, not by their professional services.

To find healers playing a central rather than a peripheral role in West African fiction, we must turn to Ghana, to Ayi Kwei Armah's novel The Healers, named for its major figures. But before leaving the work of Igbo writers, we shall examine two novels in which the protagonists are priests: Chinua Achebe's The Arrow of God, centring on the dedicated priest of the god Ulu and T.O. Echewa's The Land's Lord, focusing on two figures, one a European Roman Catholic priest and the other an African convert who tries to escape his inherited duty to serve as priest of the Land. In both works, it is the preordained vocation of priest that determines the nature of the protagonist's life and death.

"He felt like two separate persons, one running above the other" (Arrow of God 226). This sense of being two persons, one human, one spiritual, is emblematic of the world of Achebe's Arrow of God. The two runners are Obika and the Night Spirit Ogbazulobodo in whose persona Obika is running. The complex ambiguity of the novel arises from the way in which almost all that occurs in it has both natural and supernatural causes. By keeping the reader constantly aware of both, Achebe has created a novel that leaves one with a haunting impression of having experienced not just the reality of a past era but reality on a supra-human level as well.

The events of the novel are a working out of the jealousies of gods or their servants or both. The gods in question are Ulu, Idemili, and the Christian God. Idemili is an autochthonous god,[1] the original deity of the village of Umunneora. At the time when six separate villages including Umunneora banded together as Umuaro, the god Ulu was created and took precedence over but did not supplant the older gods of these villages. The Christian God is a recent arrival who refuses to share power with the other deities or even to admit their existence. The servants of these gods are Ezeulu, priest of Ulu and therefore Chief Priest of Umuaro; Ezidemili, priest of Idemili; John Goodcountry from the Niger Delta, Christian catechist; and Moses Unachukwu, lay reader and pastor's warden of the church but more importantly "the first and the most famous convert in Umuaro" (47). To complicate

matters, Ezeulu sends one of his sons, Oduche, to the Christian mission to be Ezeulu's eyes and ears there, with the result that Oduche becomes a convert.

Open conflict between Ezeulu and Ezidemili has begun five years before the narrative events of the novel, with a farmland dispute between Umuaro and Okperi that led to war and then to intervention by the white administrator Winterbottom, the breaking of the guns of Umuaro by Winterbottom's soldiers, and the awarding of the land to Okperi. In the assemblies debating the pursuit of the land claim and of war, Ezeulu spoke against both, insisting that Ulu would not support "a war of blame" (18); but the titled and wealthy Nwaka, mouthpiece of Ezidemili, spoke in support of both and prevailed. At the ensuing trial presided over by Winterbottom, Ezeulu witnessed against Umuaro, for, as he insists, "how could a man who held the holy staff of Ulu know that a thing was a lie and speak it?" (6-7). But ever since, Ezeulu has been regarded by his enemies as a friend of the white man.

The jealousy between Ezeulu's and Ezidemili's villages and their two priests is not, however, of such recent origin. It has existed since the creation of Ulu. From the time when the leaders of the six villages "hired a strong team of medicine-men to install a common deity for them" (15) in order to protect themselves against the Abam slave-traders, "they were never again beaten by an enemy" (15). But as Nwaka

reminds people, "it was jealousy among the big villages that made them give the priesthood to the weakest" (28). The present Ezeulu knows that "the priest of Idemili and Ogwugwu and Eru and Udo had never been happy with their secondary role since the villages got together and made Ulu and put him over the other deities" (40). For his part, the present Ezidemili claims that "the first Ezeulu was an envious man like the present one; it was he himself who asked his people to bury him with the ancient and awesome ritual accorded to the priest of Idemili" (42), a ritual necessary for the latter because he cannot sit on bare earth since Idemili, Pillar of Water, belongs to the sky. Ulu, however, "has no quarrel with earth" (41), and his priest requires no such ritual.

Ezidemili turns his friend Nwaka into "Ezeulu's mortal enemy" (41) partly by constantly reiterating that "in the days before Ulu the true leaders of each village had been men of high title like Nwaka" (41). During the land controversy, Nwaka had called a secret meeting from which members of Ezeulu's village Umuachala were excluded, and at it had warned that Umuaro must not allow itself to be led by the priest of Ulu, arguing as follows:

> I have been watching this Ezeulu for many years. He is a man of ambition; he wants to be king, priest, diviner, all. His father, they said, was like that too. But Umuaro showed him that Igbo people knew no kings. The time has come to tell

his son also.

> We have no quarrel with Ulu. He is still our protector, even though we no longer fear Abam warriors at night. But I will not see with these eyes of mine his priest making himself lord over us. . . . Since when did Umuachala become head of the six villages? (28)

Although he had just said that there was "no quarrel with Ulu," Nwaka concluded by issuing a challenge to the god:

> Let us not listen to anyone trying to frighten us with the name of Ulu. If a man says yes his _chi_ also says yes. And we have all heard how the people of Aninta dealt with their deity when he failed them. Did they not carry him to the boundary between them and their neighbours and set fire on him? (28)

The threat is a real one. In the present era, non-compliant gods are still being treated thus. A report in _West Africa_ in July 1988 tells of how some farmers in Anambra State in Nigeria reacted to a worrying delay in the arrival of the rainy season: "In the Idle-Oha and Ukewe communities, the villagers smashed their deity, the 'Efure' goddess for not bringing the rains" (_West Africa_ 4 July 1988: 1200). By the end of _Arrow of God_, the power of Ulu in Umuaro appears to have been destroyed.

Two possible explanations of how this comes about are

explicitly presented in a conversation between Ezeulu's best friend Akuebue and his in-law Ofoka. Ofoka warns: "A priest like Ezeulu leads a god to ruin himself. It has happened before" (213). Akuebue rejoins: "Oh [sic] perhaps a god like Ulu leads a priest to ruin himself" (213). To discover whether it is the priest who destroys his god or the god who destroys his priest, we must first examine closely the character and behaviour of Ezeulu.

Like all priests, Ezeulu is considered to be half man, half spirit (133); and we are told that "half of the things he ever did were done by this spirit side" (192). The human and spirit sides do not and cannot function separately; but for the present purpose of evaluating responsibility for the fall of Ulu, it is necessary to attempt to isolate the human personality of Ezeulu.

Undoubtedly he is an autocratic man with a fiery temper. As his first wife used to say of him, "Ezeulu's only fault was that he expected everyone--his wives, his kinsmen, his children, his friends and even his enemies--to think and act like himself. Anyone who dared to say no to him was an enemy" (92). The characteristics that Ezeulu deplores in his second son Obika are a mirror of his own. Ezeulu regrets that Obika is unable ever to look away (198) from an offence or challenge, whereas Ezeulu's eldest son Edogo reflects that his father's trouble is that he can "never see something and take his eyes away from it" (91).

Arrogant in his self-assurance, Ezeulu gives others no credit for their accomplishments. The community values his son Edogo as a carver and his brother Okeke Onenyi as a medicine-man, but Ezeulu speaks contemptuously of both, saying that "the carving done by the one was about as good as the medicine practised by the other" (148) and referring to them as "a derelict mortar and rotten palm-nuts" (148).

Of his own greatness and importance he has no doubt whatever. He shows this in a self-revelatory defence of his controversial action in sending Oduche to the Christian mission:

> Do you not know that in a great man's household there must be people who follow all kinds of strange ways? . . . that is the mark of a great obi. In such a place, whatever music you beat on your drum there is somebody who can dance to it. (46)

When later he ponders whether he should remove Oduche from the mission, he wonders "what would happen if, as many oracles prophesied, the white man had come to take over the land and rule? In such a case it would be wise to have a man of your family in his band" (42). This thought implies a concern for personal power and status, not a concern for either Umuaro or Ulu.

Ezeulu's desire for revenge against his enemies has been festering ever since the time of the land dispute and the

Umuaro-Okperi war: "Every time he prayed for Umuaro bitterness rose into his mouth, a great smouldering anger for the division which had come to the six villages and which his enemies sought to lay on his head" (6). It is Ezidemili, not Nwaka, whom he holds responsible for this division, expressing annoyance that "the cowardly priest of Idemili" (130) should hide behind and incite Nwaka, "an overblown fool" (130), and gloating over the fact that five years have passed since the threat to unseat Ulu (130).

When Oduche, in an excess of Christian zeal, imprisons the royal python, sacred to Idemili, in his school-box, this previously unthinkable abomination increases the bitter enmity between the two priests. Ezidemili sends the following message to Ezeulu: "Ezidemili wants to know how you intend to purify your house of the abomination that your son committed" (54). In return, Ezeulu instructs the messenger: "Go back and tell Ezidemili to eat shit" (54) and further suggests that the messenger is putting his head "into the mouth of a leopard" (54). Although Ezeulu knows that Oduche's offence has been a serious one, he convinces himself that it is "not serious enough for the priest of Idemili to send him an insulting message" (60) and that the general cleansing of the sins of Ummuora at the coming Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves, held just before planting, will suffice to settle the affair.

All of this is a prelude to Umuaro's failure to support Ezeulu when he resists a summons to Okperi from Winterbottom.

Ezeulu's first reaction to that summons is unequivocal: "[T]ell your white man that Ezeulu does not leave his hut. If he wants to see me he must come here" (139). But at the meeting that he calls to inform Umuaro of what has transpired, Nwaka leads an attack on him, sarcastically stressing Ezeulu's previous friendship with the white man: "Did not our elders tell us that as soon as we shake hands with a leper he will want an embrace? It seems to me that Ezeulu has shaken hands with a man of white body" (143). By consensus, it is agreed that "it would be foolhardy to ignore the call of the white man" (144). Full of unspoken rage, Ezeulu claims that he had already decided to go to Okperi before asking their advice, and he refuses all offers to accompany him.

In acting thus, Ezeulu is already plotting revenge against Umuaro, knowing that his absence will prevent his sighting of the new moon and the subsequent eating of one of the twelve sacred yams. This ritual constitutes Umuaro's calendar. What Ezeulu cannot know yet is that a conjunction of circumstances will keep him detained in Okperi through two new moons.

Winterbottom, who has been required against his better judgment to appoint more Paramount Chiefs in his area, has remembered the one witness who spoke truth at the trial, and erroneously imagining that Ezeulu is "a kind of priest-king in Umuaro" (38), he has sent for him to offer him the chieftaincy. But before Ezeulu reaches Okperi, Winterbottom

has become seriously ill, and his subordinate is so incensed at Ezeulu's proud refusal of the "great favour" (174) tendered to him that he keeps Ezeulu imprisoned for eight market weeks for refusing to co-operate with the Administration.

In refusing the chieftaincy with the words: "Tell the white man that Ezeulu will not be anybody's chief, except Ulu" (175), Ezeulu has been true to his god and to his priestly vocation. But during his imprisonment, for the first time in eighteen years he feels free of the burden of his priesthood, for Ulu presides only in Umuaro. Away from Ulu, Ezeulu feels "like a child whose stern parent had gone on a journey" (160). Thus it is as a man whose pride has been injured, not as a priest whose god has been offended, that "his greatest pleasure" comes from "the thought of his revenge" (160).

The date of the New Yam Festival that must precede harvest is announced by the priest of Ulu when the twelve sacred yams have been eaten. But since two new moons have passed without Ezeulu's presence, when the harvest is ready two yams will remain uneaten. By insistence on completing the ritual in the usual way despite these changed circumstances, Ezeulu will have his revenge on Umuaro.

This plan "had suddenly formed in his mind as he had sat listening to Nwaka in the market place" (160). Imprisonment by the white officials has abetted his plan but not created it. Privately he exults: "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" (160). In his enforced idleness, he has time to nurture his grievance:

> 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. . . . Now the fight must take place, for until a man wrestles with those who make a path across his homestead the others will not stop. (160)

This train of thought carries no concern for the people's defection from Ulu; it is their defection from Ezeulu that has enraged the old man. Hence he gloats: "I am going home to challenge all those who have been poking their fingers into my face to come outside their gate and meet me in combat and whoever throws the other will strip him of his anklet" (179).

The torrential rain that soaks Ezeulu on his trek home evokes in him a bitter elation:

> This rain was part of the suffering to which he had been exposed and for which he must exact the fullest redress. The more he suffered now the greater would be the joy of revenge. His mind sought out new grievances to pile upon all the others. (182)

It is for his own suffering, not for any offence against Ulu, that he wants to punish Umuaro. And he aggrandizes himself both as sufferer and vengeance-taker, thinking:

> He must suffer to the limit because the man to fear

> in action is the one who first submits to suffer to the limit. That was the terror of the puff-adder; it would suffer every provocation, it would even let its enemy step on its trunk; it must wait and unlock its seven fangs one after the other. Then it would say to its tormentor: Here I am! (184)

But after Ezeulu has been welcomed home with great warmth, he begins to divide Umuaro into "ordinary people who had nothing but goodwill for him and those others whose ambition sought to destroy the central unity of the six villages" (187) and to consider the possibility of reconciliation.

In all of the foregoing, one can see a pattern of behaviour emerging from a particular kind of human personality. But now the spirit side of Ezeulu must be remembered. While he is very tentatively entertaining thoughts of reconciliation, he hears the voice of Ulu bark in his ear:

> Ta Nwanu! . . . Who told you that this was your own fight . . . to arrange the way it suits you? You want to save your friends who brought you palm wine he-he-he-he-he! . . . Beware you do not come between me and my victim or you may receive blows not meant for you! . . . Go home and sleep and leave me to settle my quarrel with Idemili, whose envy seeks to destroy me that his python may again

> come to power. Now you tell me how it concerns you. I say go home and sleep. As for me and Idemili we shall fight to the finish; and whoever throws the other down will strip him of his anklet! (191-192)

Although to the reader this utterance may seem to come from the depths of Ezeulu's mind, to Ezeulu it comes unquestionably from the land of the spirits and its portent is mandatory: "Who was Ezeulu to tell his deity how to fight the jealous cult of the sacred python? It was a fight of the gods. He was no more than an arrow in the bow of his god" (192). Henceforth all thought of reconciliation vanishes. The punishment of Umuaro is the will of Ulu.

Akuebe, although he knows that the delay of the harvest will be disastrous, never questions his friend's integrity, asserting: "He is a proud man and the most stubborn person you know is only his messenger; but he would not falsify the decision of Ulu" (212). Nevertheless, following Ezeulu's sudden perception that he is "no more than an arrow in the bow of his god" (192), the narrator comments significantly, "This thought intoxicated Ezeulu like palm wine" (192). The word <u>intoxicated</u> suggests that Ezeulu's apparent insight into his role may be a false one, intoxicating to him because it permits him the irresponsibility of carrying out his revenge with no further qualms. His refusal to eat the remaining yams and set a date for the pre-harvest festival means that the

ripened yams cannot be harvested and thus endangers the survival of Umuaro. Can this be the will of Ulu?

Contrary to Ezeulu's assumption, the oracular utterance has been full of ambiguity. It has told him to "go home and sleep" and leave the quarrel to Ulu. When the elders of Umuaro beg him to eat the sacred yams and vow to take upon themselves any subsequent retribution, would not the acceptance of their offer be leaving the outcome to Ulu? On the other hand, to delay the harvest means to destroy Umuaro and Ulu with it.

A great difficulty for the priests of all religions, regardless of their integrity, is to keep clearly separated their own will from the will of their god. Even those who have no intent to misrepresent their god or to misuse their power may fail in maintaining this separation. When Achebe was asked, "You think Ezeulu might have had a tendency to try and assume too much power?" he replied,

> I think he had enough priestly arrogance to attempt it. This shows from time to time, like when he's confusing his thinking with the thinking of the god. These are natural feelings for a man who is a priest. Every priest, I think, can fall into that danger. (Interview, Palaver 9)

At the beginning of the novel, Ezeulu is shown to be aware of this danger in his questioning of whether his power as priest is real or illusory:

> Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam feast; but he did not choose it. He was merely a watchman. His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his. As long as the goat was alive it could be his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered he would know soon enough who the real owner was. (3)

When Ezeulu insists on choosing, not just announcing, the day for the New Yam Festival, he finds out who the real owner of the power is. In an ominous foreshadowing of future events, he has presented exactly this situation to himself: "If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival--no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? No Chief Priest had ever refused. So it could not be done. He would not dare" (3). At this implication by his own inner voice that there is anything he would not dare to do, Ezeulu is "stung to anger" (3). This reaction helps to explain why--when he understands the limit on his priestly power so clearly--he eventually dares so recklessly and disastrously.

Similarly, immediately after he has recognized that the priest's power is no more than a child's over a goat, his self-esteem forces him to reject this important insight: "No!

the Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that" (3). The danger in such thinking is that the priest's attempting to be "more than that" means attempting to usurp the role of his god.

Ezeulu is an intelligent man. He alone understands that the two-month delay of the harvest is not just a one-time calamity, but a catastrophic disruption of the natural cycle that will wrench it out of phase for all time: "It would afflict Umuaro like an *ogulu-aro* disease [a kind of jaundice] which counts a year and returns to its victim" (219). To interfere with the natural cycle is not a prerogative of a man, even a priest, but only of a deity. Thus Ezeulu knows, even though he does not admit it to himself, that he is acting not as Ulu's priest but as a perverse Ulu, for what he is inflicting on Umuaro is not punishment but annihilation, thus fighting "a war of blame" against his own people.

Ezeulu has forgotten that a priest is only a mediator between his people and his god; both are equally important. His friend Akuebue reminds him of this: "[N]o man however great can win judgement against a clan. You may think you did in that land dispute but you are wrong. Umuaro will always say that you betrayed them before the white man" (131). Now Ezeulu is betraying them again, and in doing so he betrays Ulu who is Umuaro's spirit self, its *chi*. As Meek reports, "occasionally the various villages of a Village-group or clan may claim to be one by the possession of a common *chi*" (59).

Just so, the six villages had united themselves by claiming possession of the common deity Ulu. Ezeulu agrees that the ten men of high title who came to plead with him to eat the sacred yams _are_ Umuaro (208); that is, they express the consensual will of Umuaro. Therefore, in opposing this will, he is opposing Ulu. Although he believes that he is enacting the will of the god, he is actually challenging Umuaro's _chi_.

In thus alienating himself from his clan, he suffers an isolation different from the loneliness that always accompanies the priesthood. In his re-enactment of the first Coming of Ulu, during the Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves, Ezeulu assumes the role of his ancestor who, with "the whole people assembled" (71), was chosen to be the first Eze to carry the new deity. He recites:

> I carried my Alusi [spirit] and, with all the people behind me, set out on that journey. A man sang with the flute on my right and another replied on my left. From behind the heavy tread of all the people gave me strength. (71)

In this first journey the priest of Ulu led the people in overcoming the four days of the week; that is, the vicissitudes of time. The leadership was his, but the strength came from them. As Chief Priest, the present Ezeulu too "had often walked alone in front of Umuaro" (218). Like the first Ezeulu, "without looking back he had always been able to hear their flute and song which shook the earth

because it came from a multitude of voices and the stamping of countless feet" (218). Latterly, as in the land dispute, there had been "moments when the voices were divided" (218), but "never until now had he known them to die away altogether" (218).

Whereas the first Ezeulu was chosen to carry the deity and go before the people "challenging every obstacle and confronting every danger on their behalf" (219), the present Ezeulu is now bringing danger on them. Ulu was created to save the clan from destruction, but if he has now become the source of destruction, then he and his priest must go and they must go quickly.

One swift blow destroys the priest. The sudden collapse and death of his son Obika at the end of a masquerade run as Ogbazulobodo, the Night Spirit, is felt by Ezeulu as such an inexplicable and humiliating blow from Ulu that his mind gives way, and he ends his life "in the haughty splendour of a demented high priest" (229).

But what of Ulu? While in Okperi, Ezeulu had had a dream-vision in which the people of Ummuaro "called him the priest of a dead god" (159). On the night of Obika's death but before he learns of it, Ezeulu has another vision-like dream in which a burial-party pass behind his compound and a solitary, sorrowful voice sings of the death of the python, "child of Idemili" (222). The song comes from the rhyme that Ezeulu has heard his children chanting: "Python, run! There

is a Christian here!" (204). But there is also at work the dream mechanism of transference that both reveals to Ezeulu and conceals from him his subconscious knowledge that his own god Ulu is about to be buried.

The death of Obika can be attributed to wholly natural causes. As the best athlete in the village, Obika is always the one sought to run as the Night Spirit, a ritual that requires a great expenditure of energy and is therefore "not something a man can do when his body is not all his" (223), as Obika protests. He is suffering from a fever, but the occasion is the second burial of the father of one of his age-mates, and the family have had to buy very expensive yams from neighbouring communities for the ceremonies because of Ezeulu's intransigence regarding the harvest. Thus Obika fears that if he refuses to participate, "they will say that Ezeulu and his family have revealed a second time their determination to wreck the burial of their village man who did no harm to them" (224). Hence Obika runs as Ogbazulobodo wearing a heavily-studded rope skirt and carrying a heavy iron staff. With a pace like the wind he runs without stopping through every small path, calling out loudly and continuously the "potent words" (225) of proverbs. The exertion fells the man weakened by fever.

But it never occurs to Ezeulu that some natural cause or even some supernatural force other than Ulu may have brought about the death of Obika. When Obika had publicly humiliated

the wicked medicine-man Otakekpeli, Ezeulu had thought his son "rash" and "foolish" (198), unable to look away like his more prudent fellows. Now, however, no thought of Otakekpeli or even of Idemili crosses his mind. Ulu could have deflected any harm from the family of his priest. Nor does Ezeulu understand how his own behaviour has contributed to his son's death. All he sees is that Ulu has struck him down, and he cannot understand why: "What was his offence? Had he not divined the god's will and obeyed it?" (229)

Umuaro and its leaders are equally certain that Ulu has caused Obika's death and his father's ensuing madness, but to them the god's actions are totally explicable:

> Their god had taken sides with them against his headstrong and ambitious priest and thus upheld the wisdom of their ancestors--that no man however great was greater than his people; that no one ever won judgement against his clan. (230)

Yet natural causes for Ezeulu's madness are also offered by the novel. He has an inherited tendency to insanity: his mother had had spells of madness which required her to be restrained during the period of the new moon (222-23). On one occasion, Ezeulu's laugh makes his friend Akuebue "afraid and uneasy like one who encounters a madman laughing on a solitary path" (131). The solitary path that Ezeulu has taken has not been that of a wholly rational man. And Ezeulu has undergone enormous stress, culminating with his bewilderment over being

abandoned by Ulu: "Perhaps it was the constant, futile throbbing" (229) of his thoughts on this betrayal "that finally left a crack in Ezeulu's mind" (229). However, as always in this novel, just as the reader is ready to accept the natural explanation of what has happened, the supernatural one is presented again: "Or perhaps his implacable assailant having stood over him for a little while stepped on him as on an insect and crushed him under the heel in the dust" (229).

But now a third possibility needs to be considered. Perhaps Ulu has stepped on his priest in this way, not out of anger or indifference, but out of mercy, for thus Ezeulu is spared knowledge of the disappearance of Ulu from Umuaro and the seeming triumph of the Christian mission.

This third element in the conflict of gods and their priests, so far barely mentioned, is of ultimate importance. Rivalry between the servants of the Christian God is as intense as that between the servants of the traditional gods. Moses Unachukwu, the first convert and the only carpenter in Umaro, "built almost single-handed the new church" (47). But when the outsider John Goodcountry arrives as catechist, he attempts to ignore Moses, unlike the previous catechist who "consulted him in whatever he did" (47). An open clash between Moses and Goodcountry erupts over the attitude that Christians should adopt to the sacred python. Moses, who comes from the village that carries the priesthood of Idemili, is strongly against the killing of the python, arguing from

both the tradition of Umuaro and from the Bible. When Oduche cites the Biblical account of God's telling Adam to crush the head of the serpent after it had deceived Eve, Goodcountry reprimands Moses for speaking "heathen filth" (49) and sneers that a child has taught Moses Scriptures. In his anger, Moses challenges Oduche: "I shall be waiting for the day when you will have the courage to kill a python in Umuaro" (50). Oduche's attempt to compromise by imprisoning a python arises, then, from this rivalry between Christians, but ironically intensifies the rivalry between the priest of Ulu and the priest of Idemili.

In publicly rebuking and humiliating Moses, Goodcountry appears to have won the ascendancy. However, Moses retaliates by getting a clerk in Okperi to write a petition on behalf of Ezidemili to the Bishop on the Niger, threatening that "unless his followers in Umuaro left the royal python alone they would regret the day they ever set foot on the soil of the clan" (214) and making allusions to "such potent words as law and order and the King's peace" (214). Having just had in another part of his diocese a Christian-python incident that had required the intervention of the Administration, to the great displeasure of the Lieutenant Governor, the Bishop replies by admonishing Goodcountry and assuring Ezidemili that "the catechist would not interfere with the python" (215).

Now it is Moses and Ezidemili who appear to have defeated Goodcountry. But once again there is an ironic reversal.

Having seen the value of Moses' knowing "what the white man knew" (215), many people begin to send their children to school, even some very important men, including Ezidemili's friend and supporter Nwaka. Goodcountry, quite erroneously, attributes the growth of his church and school to his own "effective evangelization" (215), and only by afterthought to the Holy Spirit. When the yam-harvest is delayed, Goodcountry welcomes the crisis "as a blessing and an opportunity sent by God" (213), and lets it be known that if the people make their thank-offering to God, they can harvest their crops "without fear of Ulu" (215). Many accept this delivery from their predicament and thus victory is seemingly won by the Christian God and/or his servant.

But the ironies already noted should alert us to the possibility that the whole sequence of events, if looked at from a different angle, may reveal an entirely different pattern of causation. May not the opportunity seized upon by Goodcountry have been sent or at least opened by Ulu? The narrator, after pointing out that Ulu "in destroying his priest . . . had also brought disaster on himself" (230), muses, "For a diety [sic] who chose a moment such as this to chastise his priest or abandon him before his enemies was inciting people to take liberties" (230). Yes, and a god would know this.

Although this outcome could be interpreted as a victory of the Christian God over the traditional deities, Kalu Ogbaa

points out that the subterfuge adopted by Umuaro of sending sons with one or two yams to offer to the new religion at the Christian harvest festival, and then harvesting in the name of the son, suggests the people's fear of "being chastised like Ezeulu by the god whom they are deserting," and thus the possibility that "the thought of Ezeulu's destruction may yet bring Umuaro back to their traditional religion" (213). As well, it must be remembered that a god chooses his priest. It may be, then, that through Ezeulu's sending Oduche to the Christians, Ulu has achieved his own incomprehensible purposes; incomprehensible to Ezeulu, because they differ from those Ezeulu imagines when he glimpses the possibility that Ulu may be using Oduche. Then he thinks:

> Why had Oduche imprisoned a python in his box? It had been blamed on the white man's religion; but was that the true cause? What if the boy was also an arrow in the hand of Ulu?
>
> And what about the white man's religion and even the white man himself? . . . After all he had once taken sides with Ezeulu and, in a way, had taken sides with him again lately by exiling him, thus giving him a weapon with which to fight his enemies. (192)

All of them, Ezeulu realizes, may be instruments of Ulu:

> If Ulu had spotted the white man as an ally from the very beginning, it would explain many things.

> It would explain Ezeulu's decision to send Oduche to learn the ways of the white man. (192)

Although Ezeulu has formerly given other reasons, the narrator chooses this moment to remind us that half of the things Ezeulu does are done by his spirit side.

Consider, now, how the priest of Ulu is chosen. From the time when Ulu was created, the priesthood has been invested in a single family, but the god's choice of each new priest is revealed by oracle only after the death of the incumbent. Although Ezeulu's father had combined the offices of priest and healer, on his death these powers were divided, the healing powers going to Ezeulu's brother Okeke. The enemies and detractors of each blame the coolness between them on jealousy. According to some, "in their childhood their father led Okeke to think that he was going to succeed to the priesthood and . . . on the old man's death Okeke all but questioned the decision of the oracle" (148). For his part, Okeke claims that Ezeulu thinks that their father deliberately took the knowledge of herbs and <u>anwansi</u> [magic] from him and gave it to Okeke, although Ezeulu knows that to be entrusted with this knowledge is "something inscribed in the lines of a man's palm" (147).

This history of a conflict over the priesthood helps to explain the tensions created by Ezeulu's dealings with his sons. Although there may be early signs that a child is destined to be the next priest, the god's final decision can

never be predicted with certainty. Thus it is with Ezeulu's youngest son Nwafo who, "before he had learnt to speak more than a few words . . . had been strongly drawn to the god's ritual" (4). Nevertheless, it has happened before that Ulu has chosen the least likely son to succeed. Edogo, the eldest, wonders whether Ezeulu, who has never shown much affection for Oduche, has deliberately sent him to the white man's religion "so as to disqualify him for the priesthood of Ulu" (92). Such presumption could backfire, for Ulu might choose Oduche "out of spite" (92). Akuebue, although he rejects Edogo's suspicions of Ezeulu's motive, agrees that if Ulu wants Oduche, "he will take him" (126). However, when he challenges Ezeulu with the question: "What happens if this boy you are sacrificing turns out to be the one chosen by Ulu when you are looked for and not found?" (134), Ezeulu deflects the challenge: "Leave that to the deity. When the time comes . . . Ulu will not seek advice or help" (134). To Akuebue's warning, "If you send your son to join strangers in desecrating the land you will be alone" (134), Ezeulu rejoins, "Who is to say when the land of Umuaro has been desecrated, you or I?" (134). But he should have added, "Or Ulu?"

It may be that the god has chosen as his next servant the Christian son Oduche, as a means of merging himself with the new spiritual power in the land and of besting Idemili. The last sentences of the novel are these: "In his extremity many a man sent his son with a yam or two to offer to the new

religion and to bring back the promised immunity. Thereafter any yam harvested in his fields was harvested in the name of the son" (230). The pun suggests not only a shift of spiritual allegiance from Ulu to the Son of the Christian Trinity, but also a shift of power from the elders to the younger men. At the death of Obika, Ezidemili has wisely shown no jubilance, knowing "too well the danger of such exultation" (228); but he says quietly of Ezeulu: "This should teach him how far he could dare next time" (228).

From this forbearance Nwoga draws the following conclusion:

> Ezidemili must, therefore, be seen as a responsible religious leader, as representing the priests of the other deities that had been made subsidiary to Ulu. The thematic implication is inescapable that the conflict arose naturally from the system that imposed Ulu over the other gods. One can project from this that the same fate awaited any other god, including the Christian god, which came over the inherent gods of the communities. ("Igbo World" 30-31)

One can, however, draw an opposite inference from the fact that the son of Nwaku, Ezidemili's spokesman, is enrolled with the Christians side by side with Oduche. Is this possibly a victory for Ulu?

Among Ezeulu's explanations for his sending Oduche to the

Christians has been the following:

> [O]ur fathers have told us that it may even happen to an unfortunate generation that they are pushed beyond the end of things, and their back is broken and hung over a fire. When this happens they may sacrifice their own blood. . . . That was why our ancestors when they were pushed beyond the end of things by the warriors of Abam sacrificed not a stranger but one of themselves and made the great medicine which they called Ulu. (133-34)

Unbeknownst to the people of Umuaro, it was the coming of the white man that ended the danger from the Abam raiders. In the new dangers of the colonial world, Ulu is no longer an adequate guardian. Just as the older gods had to give way to Ulu, Ulu must give way now. And the sacrifice required is not Oduche but Ezeulu himself. As Achebe has expressed it in an interview: "Ezeulu was caught at a time in history perhaps when it was inevitable that the Chief Priest of Ulu should be sacrificed so that his people could move into the modern world" (Int. with Nwachukwu-Ogbada Mass.Rev. 282). When Ezeulu casts his string of cowries in the shrine of Ulu to seek once again the will of the deity, as he has promised the elders to do, he hears the bell of the Christians, sounding "much nearer than it did in his compound" (210). His consultation with Ulu seems to produce no result, but the sound of the bell in the shrine may be the answer that he has

been seeking.

Destined as he was to be the priest of Ulu at the moment of history depicted in the novel, a man of Ezeulu's temperament could not have escaped the fate that befell him. That fate is the result not only of the concurrence of gods, men, and events in Umuaro and Okperi, but of other personalities and decisions quite remote from the scene of the action and entirely unknown to Ezeulu. Among these are the misguided attempt of the British administration under Lord Lugard to institute in Igboland "an effective system of 'indirect rule' based on native institutions" (55). Moreover, two letters, one from the Lieutenant Governor to his officials reprimanding their delay in appointing Paramount Chiefs, and another reprimanding a Bishop, have also intruded in the affairs of Umuaro. In conjunction with these circumstances, Ezeulu's faithfulness to his priesthood and loyalty to his god lead him to the action that brings destruction on him.

Some excellent critics choose to downplay the metaphysical content of Arrow of God. Nwoga, for example, argues as follows:

> Ulu was essentially a new god, occasioned by external stress. By putting narrative emphasis on Ulu, Achebe was freed from a theological or metaphysical perspective on religion. He could, therefore, pursue a humanistic direction suitable for the social orientation of his novel. (20)

For Nwoga, then, "[T]he appropriate question becomes what personal and sociopolitical factors led to the desertion of Ulu, the tragedy of his chief priest, and the conversion of the Igbo to Christianity" ("The Igbo World" 20).

However much truth lies in this approach, for the reader to reject the metaphysical perspective is to reject Achebe's intention. Narrative comment in the novel clearly reminds us that above all else lie powers and purposes not subject to human comprehension. For example, in a brief contrastive reference to the recovery and continuing career of Winterbottom, the narrator comments: "It looked as though the gods and the powers of event finding Winterbottom handy had used him and left him again in order as they found him" (230).

To ignore or deny the role of the gods is to lose the aura of mystery that Achebe has so skilfully created to make this novel much more than fictionalized history, psychology, or cultural anthropology. In <u>A Dance of Masks</u>, Jonathan Peters draws attention to the "nice balancing of the evidence at the end which allows interpretation of his [Ezeulu's] madness through heredity, psychology or supernaturalism" (127). Achebe's last word on Ezeulu, expressed in his Preface to the Second Edition, confirms that the double perception of natural-supernatural causation emphasized throughout this discussion is true to Achebe's intent:

> For had he been spared Ezeulu might have come to see his fate as perfectly consistent with his high

> historic destiny as victim, consecrating by his agony--thus raising to the stature of a ritual passage--the defection of his people. And he would gladly have forgiven them.

For it is through the sacrifice of his last priest that Ulu, Umuaro's chi, has ensured the survival of the community.

Whether this sacrifice of Ulu's last priest has been made by the god or by the priest is ultimately immaterial. In an interview with Phanuel Egejuru, Achebe insists that "although Ezeulu is very important, he is not the most important thing in the book. His community is more important; the gods that took a hand in the story are more important than human beings" (126).

In T.O. Echewa's The Land's Lord, the novel to be considered next, the gods also take a hand in the story, and their priests are as bewildered by their dealings with men as is Ezeulu. The elderly dibia Ahamba expresses this feeling: "All gods are a little mad. . . . If you have a mind to serve them properly, you should be a little drunk yourself" (1). Later he complains: "It would be nice if the gods would sometimes let us know what they are doing" (145).

Like Arrow of God, then, The Land's Lord is a novel about the relationship between priests and their gods. It too is set in colonial times in an isolated Igbo village whose traditions and beliefs are challenged by the presence of a Christian mission. The title refers to the major god of the

villagers, the Land itself.[2]

As the novel begins, Father Higler, a Catholic priest, has been in the village for a year. An Alsatian by birth, he has spent the previous fifteen years as a contemplative in an English seminary. His servant and catechist Philip is a priest _manqué_, a villager who was consecrated at birth to serve the god of the farm, Ihi Njoku, "the biggest god that this land knows" (19). The third major character is Old Man Ahamba, a _dibia_ who, as the oldest man in the village, presides over the meetings of the Village Council, sessions that involve ritual and sacrifice, since in this traditional Igbo world there is no separation of the sacred and the secular, the religious and the political. Through the discussions of Father Higler and Ahamba, "priests of different gods, different ages and different lights" (127), and through the tragic consequences of Philip's defection from his priesthood, Echewa presents an existential view of the nature of life.

The opening episode establishes the atmosphere of the novel, one of doubt, bewilderment, and fear. In the first paragraph, Father Higler, stopping between the village and the mission, looks "in one direction and then the other, uncertain which way salvation lay" (1). Overtaken in the bush by darkness, he breaks into panic-stricken flight in his effort to find the path out: "The commotion of his hasty passage commingled with his fears and resonated in his imagination to

hundreds of howling drunken demons" (5). When he emerges from the bush, he is brought to his senses by Philip who has been searching for him, but he has lost a shoe, he is badly scratched, and his soutane is shredded.

At the end of the novel, after the death of Philip, Father Higler once more flees through the bush in terror. This time it is Ahamba who searches for him and finds him in a daze on the bank of a river from which night fishermen have rescued him: "He had no shoes. His soutane was shredded, as if the forest through which he had passed had attempted to divest him. His underclothes, too, were torn, and so was his skin marked with dozens of bruises and scratches" (144).

These two flights of Father Higler replicate two that have occurred before the novel opens: Father Higler's flight from the battlefield during a suicide mission and Philip's flight on the first night of his initiation ceremonies to become Njoku, ceremonies that require the initiate to spend three nights alone in the bush. That Father Higler, who does not believe that powerful spirits inhabit the bush, should panic when alone there in the dark helps us to understand the terror of Philip, who does believe it.

Once Father Higler learns of this event in Philip's life, he begins to see in Philip "his twin, his dark reflection" (108). They are both, he thinks, "survivors of similar past hazards, co-expectants of similar futures. . . For in the secret heart of the taciturn servant was trapped an echo of

his own life-cowardice, desertion under fire, abandonment of love" (108).

But there have been profound differences in the experiences of the two men that Father Higler fails to comprehend. He has fled to a priesthood; Philip has fled from one. Higler, deserting after the friend with whom he had exchanged foxholes had been killed, had promised God to become a priest if he got out of the battle zone alive (98). Three weeks later he entered a seminary. Philip, on the night of his desertion, had taken refuge at the mission with Father Higler's predecessor and had stayed there, becoming the priest's servant and later a baptised Catholic. The two men's "abandonment of love" has also been different. In becoming a priest, Anton Higler abandoned a girl who had expected to marry him. Philip, after losing a wife in childbirth, has refused to remarry. Moreover, Father Higler's celibacy is a requirement of his priesthood, whereas Philip's is an offence against his people's traditions, for which his uncle Nwala rebukes him: "All your age mates have married three and four wives and fathered households of children" (21).

Father Higler's intellectual, emotional, and spiritual failure to comprehend Philip's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs is the indirect cause of Philip's eventual disintegration. On the first night of Father Higler's arrival at the mission there was a storm, and Philip had come through the darkness to make sure that the new priest was all right. As Philip left

to return home, Father Higler stood on the veranda holding a lamp aloft: "But he had succeeded only in lighting an island around himself, not the servant's path. Philip had stridden into the darkness, and the darkness had totally absorbed him back. . . ." (54). Thus is prefigured the consequence for Philip of Father Higler's coming to the mission.

It is the events arising from the burial of a Christian convert that initiate the action of the novel and precipitate a dilemma for Philip. Father Higler, mistakenly assuming that all of the bush is "idle forest" (19), has a section of it cleared for a new mission graveyard. Unfortunately, the area he has chosen is not part of the common land on which the mission stands but belongs to the compound of Philip's family. There is an invisible boundary. Consequently, the burial is interrupted by a group led by Philip's uncle Nwala, and a fight ensues between the Christians and the non-Christians. During this struggle, one of Nwala's sons appears with a dane gun. While Philip is trying to wrest it from him, the gun discharges, killing one Christian and wounding Nwala, who dies later of his injuries.

The traditional demands on Philip are now compounded. Two seers declare that Philip's finger made the gun go off. Therefore the Village Council decrees that he is responsible for the bloodshed and must make sacrifices of atonement to the Land. But Father Higler will not permit him to carry out this heathen practice.

Already difficult, Philip's situation becomes intolerable when the death of his uncle leaves him as the senior male member of the family and therefore responsible for serving the family gods and ancestors. Previously, even his failure to share in this duty had wrung rebukes from his uncle.

The demands made on Philip by the conflicting expectations of his people and those of Father Higler are unbearable because although he has "cast his entire lot with the new God" (104), he has not lost his belief in the power of his people's gods. In this he resembles many of the other converts. The more cautious among the church-goers "had added the new God without totally discarding the old ones, and carefully balanced their allegiances according to need" (104). Thus when the Christian Paul was dying, Father Higler said a Mass, but when a seer who was also consulted said that the jujus were angry, "a famous medicine man came from out of town to close the eyes of the jujus" (12). Neither ritual, as it happened, prevented the death. The villagers, even some of the church people, believe that the fever and madness of Father Higler's predecessor Father Scholz was caused by the Land: "They said it was the Land, Mgbarala, that was flogging him in his sleep and making his head not to be correct, that Ala has many different wavs of getting people" (53). Although Philip will not admit to Father Higler that he accepts this explanation, he offers the evasion: "Fada, there are some things that are hard to explain" (53).

Philip's problem is not a purely fictional one, invented by Echewa. Arinze comments on similar situations as follows:

> There have been cases in recent years of weak Christians who succumbed to the strong temptation to take up the priesthood of a spirit when the succession came to them. Pagan neighbours heap argument upon argument to persuade such people to accept the office, and above all warn the reluctant not to be surprised to contract a long chain of misfortunes if they dare say no to the spirit calling them. (Arinze 69)

Both Nwala, in his illness, and Old Man Ahamba warn Father Higler that he must release Philip to his traditional responsibilities. Nwala asks the priest to tell Philip "to watch his steps and to point them back to his own people and father, and the duties that fall on his shoulder" (77), insisting, "you see, a man cannot run away from the Land, even if he flies like a bird. He must come down to it, and it will be there waiting" (77). Ahamba speaks similarly: "He is of this soil, this soil here! . . . There is no escape. Not even in death are we free and disobliged" (61). From Ahamba's viewpoint, Philip "was summoned to duty but defected" (129), and "There are no conditions on duties that bind" (129). After the discovery that Philip has committed acts of abomination and sacrilege, Ahamba reminds Father Higler: "I told you when the gods are after you, they come after you in

devious ways" (131).

But to the European priest the African gods are mirages, lifeless idols and jujus to whom no duties can be owed; and he will permit Philip no compromising with the Christian faith. Imagining that Philip can simply tell his relatives: "Non serviam . . . I will not serve" (90), he tries to persuade Philip that the jujus have no power because he can make one himself. But Philip protests, "[T]heir power is like this cross which I am wearing. It does not come from what it is made of, but what it is" (90).

Thus when Philip does not offer the required sacrifices to the Land because Father Higler will not give his permission, Philip is seen by the villagers and by himself as "a man doomed to some imminent catastrophe, some exemplary punishment" (104). He desperately needs assurance of being under the protection of the God to whom he has defected. But because Father Higler does not believe that there is anything to be protected against, he makes light of Philip's fear. Not receiving the absolute guarantee of security that he craves, Philip cannot sleep and stalks about "like a man afflicted with an irremediably fatal disease, a man expecting a certain ambush from some unknown quarter" (61).

In this mood of despair, Philip does not participate in the funeral rites for his uncle, barring himself into his hut instead and brooding on his situation:

> He could not escape the turmoil which churned in

> his own heart, the contradictory demands and orders of the various allegiances to which he was subject. He was a rope in a tug of war, a rag wrung from two ends, a man without choice, without voice, defenceless and undefended. Duties without rewards. It was not just. It could not be just, to be so caught between irreconcilable allegiances, each fiercely jealous, neither sufficient protection against the other--captious, quarrelsome lordships, careless about rewarding virtue and services but painfully meticulous in remembering and punishing failings. (83)

Philip's bitter sense of the injustice of the gods in giving him neither rewards nor protection is true to the Igbo attitude to the gods as we have observed it in Arrow of God, and as it is described by V.C. Uchendu:

> The Igbo demand from their gods effective service and effective protection. If they fail in this duty, they are always threatened with starvation and desertion. Given effective protection, the Igbo are very faithful to their gods. (95)

The converts to Father Higler's church have adopted Biblical names, but they have not changed their expectations of a god. For example, Genesis has joined the church in the hope of begetting a son (13). When he fathers two girls in succession, he names them "Iheariochi--What Was Requested of

God(?)" (13-14) and "Onyenmachi"--"Who-Knows-What-God-Is-Thinking?" (121). Matthew wants revenge against those who caused the death of John during the graveyard dispute, and he cannot comprehend the priest's admonition to pray for them, protesting, "We pray for them? What difference between us and them? On which side is God and justice? Where is our advantage?" (37). Philip, in giving his allegiance to the Christian God, has likewise expected reciprocal service.

To Father Higler, these attitudes mean only that his adult parishioners have not yet understood God: "God vouchsafed no signs to encourage faith. The faithful and the faithless were indiscriminately condemned to wayward suffering and haphazard death" (16). Nevertheless, the priest is vaguely aware that Philip has gained very little for his defection from his duties to the Ihi Njohu, his failure to offer the sacrifices of atonement to the Land, and his refusal to become the family priest: "all of these and perhaps more--against an uncertain salvation" (97). Yet in faithfulness to his creed, Father Higler cannot give Philip the guarantee of safety that the sufferer so insistently craves.

Unable to comprehend the terrors of Philip, Father Higler makes the fatal error of telling him that the Christian God not only is no sure protection in this life but does not guarantee salvation after this life either, that "even in death we stand in danger of God's ominous judgment" (112). By doing so, he unwittingly intensifies Philip's despair.

Philip feels betrayed. He cannot return to the old gods against whom he has offended by denying them his service, and the new God to whom he has given this service will not serve him.

> Fada had no answers, only distant hopes and promises. His God was like other gods, like the idols and the jujus. So where now? What other God? What other duties and obligations? What other hopes of freedom held before the slave to keep him slaving harder? . . . And one was not even free to shake one's fist in anger! The gods demanded duty and sacrifice--Fada's God as well as the jujus--but owed nothing. It was not just! One should have at least one choice! One voice! One act that speaks loudly! One act! (112)

Suicide could not be that act "for there were particular and general judgements, resurrections and reincarnations. Suicide was further victimized already" (83). Only the most heinous act of abomination against God and against the Land will make his life immediately forfeit and free him from fear.

Hence Father Higler finds the mission chapel desecrated:

> The tabernacle had been ripped off its supports and splintered across the altar table. The <u>ciborium</u> lay on the floor. White circular wafers of Sacred Host lay all around on the floor, where it appeared they had been trampled. The crucifix had been

broken to matchsticks. (125)

And the elders discover that Philip has committed incest with the retarded girl to whom he is foster father, an unthinkable breach of taboo that could endanger the whole village.

Unrepentant, Philip defies the consequent torture and death, explaining proudly: "I was born a slave to duty. I had no choice and no voice. My pains and sufferings, my sweats and tears did not justify me. So I have given myself one choice. . . . I have hit my one blow. I have my revenge against everything" (138). In this mood of defiance and vengeance, he refuses Father Higler's attempts to save either his body or his soul, insisting: "I must die my own death. But if my life has been useless, then my death too. It must be without use" (143). By taking his own life instead of allowing the elders to kill him, he believes that he is depriving them of the peace of mind they are seeking through sacrificing him to propitiate the offended Land.

If Father Higler's presence in the village has been disastrous for Philip, Philip's deliberate assault on the most sacred symbols of Catholicism and the most sacred taboo of his people shatters Father Higler's already wavering faith in himself and his mission.

To Ahamba, Father Higler has insisted, "I chose to become a priest, and then again I was chosen in that I believe I had a vocation, a calling, a voice summoning me to duty" (129). But unlike Philip, he may never have been summoned to the

priesthood, and he experiences many moments of self-questioning: "The yoke he wore was a sweet yoke--was it? He had chosen it voluntarily--had he?" (98); "The promise to become a priest if he should ever get out alive. Would he have made the choice, the covenant, a second time?" (98) He has tried to convince himself that "he had done better when he decided to leave the monastic life for a higher form of service here" (98).

As it does for Philip, life's "seemingly unequal distribution of burdens and favours" (96) makes Father Higler question the nature of God:

> Where was almighty God in all of this? Were abstractions like fate merely subterfuges for the divine alter-ego erected by the timid human spirit in order to keep from assailing God directly with the inconsistencies rampant in his administration of the universe? Faith notwithstanding, one had to admit--on the compulsion of honesty, insist--that on the basis of what we could perceive with the faculties given us--and those were all we had--the ways of God were truly incomprehensible. Illogical, according to our human logic, which, after all, was the only logic we knew. (96)

At times Fate (or God) has seemed to Father Higler to be not just indifferent or incomprehensible but deliberately malicious, as when the fighting over the grave has brought

about an unintentional killing:

> Fate, he thought, stalked her victims with the guile and patience of the seasoned hunter, nudging them toward the abyss until they took the lethal step. Fate then sat back, pinched herself and laughed uproariously--at the child who would not stop until it had caressed the glittering edge of the razor or who would take no dissuasion until it had tested its fingers on the beautiful, glowing piece of hot iron. The cut, the burn, the agonized cry. Who was to blame? To whom did the aliases belong? (24)

With the gun blast that takes two lives, one directly and one indirectly, the fighting ends, "as if an unchallengeable referee had blown a final whistle--stop action!--on them, and they had no choice but to obey" (24).

Also like Philip, Father Higler has yearned for certainty. We hear him praying, "Lord, I believe in you. Help my unbelief. . . . Lord, please believe in me too!" (9-10). Regarding his personal salvation, he wonders:

> Was coming to Africa by itself enough, a sort of plenary indulgence such as was awarded to people who went on the Crusades? Had coming to Africa improved his chances of eternal salvation, wiped away his past life? One became liable at the age of reason. No, one was liable from birth because

of Original Sin. One was just liable. (97)

His feelings of guilt, fear, and the impossibility of escape have mirrored the emotions of Philip. After his desertion under fire, Father Higler "found a new hope in the priesthood, in serving God exclusively" (111). But when Philip asks, "Fada's heart is now in complete peace?" in honesty, he has had to answer, "No, Philip. No . . ." (111).

Now Philip's sacrilegious actions and his explanation for them force the priest to search his own life and purposes more deeply:

> He had now gone from nadir to nadir through the zenith of an illusory hope. Cowardice in battle, fear in the face of imminent death, could they by any alchemic trick be turned into virtue, and could an apostleship arising therefrom ever attain ennoblement? What about faith then? And the thousand hopes that, according to Ahamba, we launched before us? And the Promise? And the call to follow Me? The priestly cloak offered no immunity? Heaven was no nearer here or now than there or then? God was just as mysterious, just as unobligated, man just as helpless and hapless? (139-40).

He questions his mission:

> He had brought a faith here, a saving faith. The natives seemed to ask why, and God, by his seeming

> indifference seemed to ask wherefore--as if on one hand he had not been invited and on the other he had not been sent. For whom then did he work? And to what end? (140)

What Father Higler had not seen, but Echewa has shown us, is that the European priest's behaviour and attitudes in his dealings with his God are not very different, if at all, from those of the Igbo with their gods. Although Father Higler deplores their fear of jujus, he preaches hell-fire (14) to his converts, reassuring himself that although fear is not faith, fear is "fair enough as a start" (15). When members of the Village Council are required to swear an oath, he insists that the converts swear on the Bible instead of on the "sacred community wine" (54) that has been consecrated to heathen idols, impressing on the elders that "the singular and true" God that he serves is "even more wrathful and vindictive than all of theirs" (56).

When Ahamba boasts that he has "learned to bargain" (63) with his gods, Father Higler asks, "How do you dare?" (63), although when he fled from battle, he "had thought himself as striking a perfectly honourable deal with God" (35). At the church, he conducts a Harvest Thanksgiving Festival as an alternative for the church members to the heathen Ihe Ala, the grand feast of Gmbarala "the premier juju of the entire village" (64), both festivals accomplishing the same purpose, to express gratitude for the Land's abundance.

Father Higler is contemptuous of what he calls the "jujus," made as they are of wood and clay. But his greatest dream is to build a huge church in the jungle, a brick at a time (79; 99-100):

> he wanted--needed--a church . . . that would impress itself on the large skies and the endless forests, as well as the pagan villagers, a church capable of standing up to the heaviest onslaught that could be mounted by man or spirit or untamed nature. (100)

This parallel between the European and the African faiths, implicit throughout the narrative, becomes explicit just before Father Higler discovers the desecration of the chapel: "He entered the chapel the way the village old men entered the fetish hut to consult their gods. Meditate. Contemplate the unsolved mysteries of his existence, his mission, his salvation" (124-25).

Like Philip and Father Higler, the old dibia Ahamba had once experienced despair in his relationship with the gods. He tells Father Higler, "Mine drove me to the brink of madness in my youth. In age I have learned to buck their tyranny" (130). Accordingly, Ahamba gives generous sacrifices to those who serve him well, like Edo, the goddess of fruitful womanhood, and neglects or destroys those that do not (130). When the seers tell him that Amadioha is threatening to kill his first son, he in turn threatens his image of Amadioha:

"Protect him instead! . . . for if anything happens to him, I will burn down your hut and bury you!" (130).[3] In this way, Ahamba has freed himself from fear. He tells Father Higler, "Our fears are older than our beliefs. When our fears die down, our beliefs change" (63). Thus, of the three men, only Ahamba has reached an accommodation with the deities. It is through him that the voice of African wisdom speaks.

Throughout, Ahamba has tried to enlighten Father Higler on the realities of the world to which he has come with his conviction that the alien god he brings must supplant the indigenous ones. Ahamba asks rhetorically: "Do not the gods, like men, have their own territories?" (15). "What Salvation can you bring us who were never lost?" (101) For Ahamba, a new god is superfluous: "[T]here is no lack of gods here. We make them ourselves. In other villages, there are other gods, just as it is where you come from. We create our own gods to guide, rule and protect us" (130). Father Higler casts scorn on these village "jujus" as "things you yourselves or your fathers constructed from wood, stone, sticks, raffia weavings, animal skulls and clay you dug from a pot"; but Ahamba rejoins calmly, "How much clay will you yield, White Man, at your death? Is not clay all there is to all of us?" (102).

Father Higler's insistence that his God is "the one and only true God" (55) is not only an insult to the people whose gods are being called false, but from Ahamba's point of view, complete nonsense: "The ground you are walking on, is it

false, White Man? And these trees, are they false? The rains and the rivers, the yams in the farms!" (55). At the village meeting where Philip is judged, Ahamba recites the praises of the Land, a recital that shows why this god assumes such supremacy in Igbo belief:

> The Land is greater than all other gods. Greater even than the sky-god, because when the sky cannot any longer hold its rains, it releases them to the Land to hold. And the Land is everywhere. We come from it, we live on it, we return to it. We reincarnate from it. We are always standing on it or on something that stands on it, whether we are on top of a tree or on top of water. The rivers and the seas have the Land to hold them up. (134)

Ahamba has earlier told Father Higler, "You ve eaten the fruits of the Land, it has sunk its hooks in you. So even you cannot totally escape" (62).

After Father Higler's courageous but futile attempt to rescue Philip from the enraged elders, his headlong flight through the bush carries him into the river. This may have been an attempt at suicide, as Milbury-Steen assumes (167) for the narrator comments that he probably regarded his rescue "as a dubious favour" (144). However, whether the near-drowning is suicidal or accidental, it presages some kind of rebirth for Father Higler.

Much in the last few pages of the novel is ambiguous,

particularly the words of Ahamba, after he re-baptizes Father Higler in the river. Does "everything is now restored, just as it was" (144) mean that the Land is now appeased with the sacrifice of Philip? Or that the village is as it was before the coming of the mission and that Father Higler is now forgiven for his interference? Or does it refer to Father Higler's faith? The qualification "Except for the scars" (144) is equally ambiguous. Are these the scars of the village, or of Father Higler, or both? "You have now arrived" is somewhat clearer. It is not that the priest has at last arrived in Africa, although that too is implied; but that he has arrived at the point of truth, and therefore the point of despair. When men discover the "secret which makes us human and keeps the gods divine to us" (145), as Ahamba expresses it, they have discerned a dangerous truth, the discovery of which few men can survive. This moment, Ahamba continues, "is not the end, though, only a halfway point . . . though some [like Philip] mistake it for the final destination and never go beyond it." Father Higler himself, Ahamba insists, "must go beyond it" (144) The trick is "to take as much truth as we can bear and go on living" (145).

It is significant that Ahamba has not blamed Philip for having run from his initiation as Njoku. Others have done the same, and it would not have been held against him, Ahamba implies: "Many men have not the heart to face what happens in these bushes you see all around in the middle of the night.

Even in the middle of the day. But to run and not come back!" (103). In re-baptizing Father Higler in the water of Africa, Ahamba seems to be telling him to come back.

Earlier, Ahamba has warned Father Higler of the danger of his absolutism: "You seem to claim to have answers for others as well as for yourself" (129). Ahamba knows better: "I can vouch only for the experience that has been mine" (129). When now, in the extremity of his loss of certainty, Father Higler asks Ahamba, "What are my choices?" (145), he receives the only answer the wise <u>dibia</u> can give: "My friend, you make them yourself" (145). Choices are the equivalents of the gods that the villagers create to serve their needs.

Even the novel's title, <u>The Land's Lord</u>, is ambiguous. Milbury-Steen assumes that the word <u>lord</u> refers to Philip who "in overcoming the gods . . . becomes for a few exalted moments the Land's Lord" (165). However, not being ruled is not equivalent to ruling, and Philip in defying the gods destroys an innocent girl and himself. It is Ahamba, not Philip, who speaks the truths of the novel; and Ahamba asserts that Philip has been driven mad by despair (145), whereas man must "go past despair to a new understanding" (130).

According to my interpretation of the novel, its title should be read as <u>The Land Is Lord</u>, since the Land is man's universe, the reality with which he must live, not in fear but in mutual accommodation. And man must learn to do so through his choices, for the human and the divine are inextricably

intermeshed. The ending of the novel supports this reading. In our last glimpse of Father Higler, he is contemplating the horizon:

> the gilded edge of the sky touched the dark green top of the forest. Joining hands, sky and land were swaying to and fro like dancers, humming: "We are gods together! We are gods together . . ." (145)

Father Higler is surely included in the dance and the song.

Dancing and singing in harmony is also the note on which Ayi Kwei Armah's The Healers ends, as is fitting since the novel's primary theme is the need to restore inner and outer harmony.

The Healers is set among the Akan, the dominant ethnic group of Ghana, at the time of the second Asante War of 1873-74 (Derek Wright 244). Yet priest-healers, both traditional practitioners and those connected with indigenous Christian churches, have a continuing importance in Ghana, as attested to in 1981 by Kofi Appiah-Kubi: "The priest-healers, both men and women, are recognized, respected, and accepted as shrewd, intelligent, honest people in the Akan community" (xiv). Moreover, in today's Ghana there still exist communities of healers, such as the two groups in Armah's novel, one gathered around the healer Damfo in the Eastern Forest and one at Praso on the sacred river Pra, headed by a woman, Nyaneba. Armah's

healers, however, are healers only, not priests, for reasons that will become apparent.

The subject of the novel is societal health and illness, past, present, and future, and its themes are presented through concepts of disease and healing that have their roots in traditional Akan thought and practice. These concepts are revealed through the conversations of the fictional healer Damfo with Densu, a young man who is attracted to the vocation of healing, and through Damfo's treatment of two patients: the fictional Araba Jesiwa, daughter of the Fantse queen-mother, and the historical Asante general Asamoa Nkwanta.[4] Moreover, characterization and plot validate the concepts.

According to The Healers, illness in an individual or in a community is caused by disunity or disharmony within. In the individual, conflict between body and soul causes disease. Similarly, as Damfo explains, "When one person in a community--body and soul--clashes with another individual in the same community, that too is disease" (82), and "When different groups within what should be a natural community clash against each other, that also is disease" (83). "[T]he language of the universe," (82) to those such as healers who have learned to hear it, reveals that "there are two forces, unity and division. The first creates. The second destroys; it's a disease, disintegration" (82). "Tribes and nations," therefore, "are just signs that the whole is diseased" (82).

In his treatment of Araba Jesiwa, Damfo tells her, "If

you bring together all your scattered energies . . . then you can see your own strength" (72). Similarly, the black people need to bring together their scattered energies. Damfo makes this similarity explicit when he says,

> Healing an individual person--what is that but restoring a lost unity to that individual's body and spirit?
>
> A people can be diseased the same way. Those who need naturally to be together but are not, are they not a people sicker than the individual body disintegrated from its soul? Sometimes a whole people needs healing work. (82)

The "highest work" for healers, then, is "the bringing together again of the black people" (83) who have been fragmented by the events of centuries.

Notice how closely the following Akan beliefs, as described by Kofi Appiah-Kubi in Man Cures, God Heals tally with Damfo's teaching: "Akan medicine considers disease as a state of disharmony in the body--and in the person or even in the society--as a whole" (2). Health, on the contrary, "implies well-being of mind, body, and spirit: living in harmony with one's neighbours, the environment and oneself, and in all levels of reality--physical, social, spiritual, natural, and supernatural" (8). Consequently, "Any one-sided approach to healing, whether spiritual or physical, is considered by the Akans as incomplete and inadequate. The

human being is not seen as divided into body-soul, spiritual-physical segments, but rather as a complete individual" (2). Health, then, is "part of the magico-religious fabric of existence" (2).

With the omission of the words supernatural and magico-religious all of these statements could have been made by Damfo. Armah's elimination of the supernatural elements of traditional Akan beliefs is necessitated by his conviction that man unaided can and must heal himself and his society. Thus, in The Healers suprahuman involvement in illness and healing is both explicitly and implicitly denied. For example, in one of Damfo's Socratic dialogues with Densu, Densu states that he considers anything to be sacred "that lifts life higher" (93), but that he has no belief in gods and that worship comes out of fear, whereas the sacred should be loved and respected, not feared. Hence Armah's healers, unlike the Igbo dibias, have no recourse to diviners in diagnosing illness or to sacrifices for curative purposes.

Nevertheless, Armah adheres to Akan tradition in the healers' stress on the spiritual components of the natural universe and of human beings. Their healing power derives from their acute spiritual awareness, as Damfo explains:

> The Healer sees not just a mass of leaves. He can recognize the different spirit in each kind of leaf. . . . [I]t is as if the spirits of all the leaves of the forest were talking to the healer,

> telling him what it is they each contain, what it is each can do, and what they cannot do. The leaves, animals, even stones, say much, and they show much, to any prepared to see and hear. (79)

Hence it is that "he who would be a healer must set great value on seeing truly, hearing truly, understanding truly, and acting truly. . . . The healer would rather see and hear and understand than have power over men" (81).

A healer's training, three years to begin with, is never-ending:

> After his training the healer walks through the same world every person walks through. But he sees signs others don't see. He hears sounds others don't hear. The same tree that just stands there dumbly to everyone, to the healer its leaves have things to say. The healer learns the meaning of the river's sound, of the sounds of the forest animals. And when he needs the curing spirit from a plant, if his eyes are well prepared, he may see from a great distance some small sign of the leaf that is ready to be taken. (80)

Both Densu and his friend Anan seek such understanding. What makes Anan happiest is "seeing" (20), or, as he says, "getting to know something I didn't know before" (18). After Anan's death, Damfo tells Densu that Anan's soul "looked in the same direction as yours" (133).

Thus a healer is destined to his vocation by his innate nature, given to him by his creator. According to Akan belief, man is given life by the creator Nyame who at the same time gives him his okra (or kra). The concept of the okra is somewhat similar to that of the Igbo chi. In Appiah-Hubi's words, "The Okra, or soul, is believed to be the guiding spirit through a person's earthly life journey" (10). Or as Helaine K. Minkus explains, the okra is "conceived as both one constituent of the living person and as an extrinsic guardian peculiar to him" (116). In The Healers there is no direct reference to the okra, but the concept is implicit in Damfo's reply to Densu's question "What gives the healer his nature?" (81), to which Damfo answers, "The same that gives him life" (81).

Furthermore, the Akan believe that "when God gives the Okra, He also gives Nkrabea ("destiny") (Appiah-Kubi 10). Accordingly, although Densu has been first drawn to Damfo through his attraction to Damfo's daughter Ajoa, Densu believes that this apparent accident has been the working of destiny:

> [S]ometimes he could see the accident was only on the surface. Deeper than the surface he could see connections; he could sense natural links between his love for Ajoa and his long search for understanding and knowledge, the search that had brought him, all alive with conscious purpose, to

Damfo. (66)

Densu's search for understanding has manifested itself in his early questioning of the ritual games of his Fantse community of Esuano. From his fourteenth year, he sought to discover the purpose of the highly competitive games, only to learn that they are deformations of what were originally "ceremonies of unity" (6):

> A few remembered the old ceremonies as rituals in which all the people of Esuano had done things together. These rituals had celebrated the struggles of a people working together to reach difficult destinations. But then that . . . had changed. The games were now trials of individual strength and skill. (6)

Densu is repelled by this "perversion" (7) of tradition which has resulted in "a single winner riding over a multitude of losers" (7). Rituals "that could satisfy the yearning inside him would have to be ceremonies, rituals, and games of co-operation, not of competition" (39), ceremonies in which there would be "no competitors, only participants" (39). Thus Densu, like all healers, values unity and wholeness. In his twentieth year, as one of "the generation of youths crossing into manhood" (4) whose turn it is to compete, Densu--who could have won effortlessly--purposely allows Prince Appia to do so.

In a third way, as well, Densu has the nature of a

healer. Damfo has made him aware that there are two kinds of power in the world, the power of manipulation and the power of inspiration, and two kinds of people who seek these kinds of power. The power of inspiration "respects the spirit in every being, in every thing, and lets every being be true to the spirit within" (270). In contrast, "Manipulation steals a person's body from his spirit, cuts the body off from its own spirit's direction" (81). Healers are inspirers. The power in healing work is "the power to help life create itself" (103). Very few are drawn to become inspirers or healers, and of these even fewer complete the arduous years of training and choose to continue in the ascetic life that offers no worldly rewards or acknowledgement. Densu is destined to be one of these few. By the time of his participation in the games, he feels

> a natural, increasing urge to fly far from manipulators, seeking only to be with inspirers. Yet all the life around him belonged to the manipulators. . . . Force, fraud, deceit: these were the chosen methods of most of them. That this was the way of the world Densu had come to see with increasing sharpness. At the same time as he saw this, what he felt in himself was a great desire, a need, to put huge distances between himself and all such people and their ways. (27)

He does not feel at home in Esuano: "Every moment spent near

the men of power in the royal courtyard was to him time spent in alien territory" (49). Hence Densu joins the healers in the Eastern Forest.

The abstract concepts of disease and healing so far discussed are illustrated in Damfo's successful treatment of Araba Jesiwa, who first consults him in despair over her barrenness, after having failed to get help "from a veritable procession of doctors promising cures" (70). She has, in the past, allowed herself to be influenced by the values of the manipulators of her society, who have persuaded her that she, as a princess, ought to marry into royalty. In thus abandoning the man she loves, Entsua, a gifted carver but a commoner, she has, as Damfo explains to her, acted against her own nature:

> Things go wrong when we do violence to ourselves. Yes, we have more than one self. The difficulty is to know which self to make the permanent one, and which we should leave ephemeral. You set one of the passing selves above your permanent self: that's doing violence to your self. (69)

Through searching dialogue, Damfo awakens her to the knowledge that she can "change the direction of her life" (76), and that healing will come only with "rediscovery of the authentic self" (68).

A Western reader may wrongly imagine that in this depiction of Damfo's method of healing Armah is drawing on

Jungian concepts and practices. But the Akan have long conceived of the individual as consisting of multiple selves, as shown by the following brief (and somewhat over-simplified) description of traditional Akan beliefs about the person:

> Akans view the individual as a composite of Mogya ("blood"), or physical being, which he receives from his mother; Sunsum ("spirit"), or personality, which he receives from his father; and Okra ("soul"), which he receives from God, his Creator. Without Okra, the life-giving force, the individual is merely blood and spirit. It is in fact the soul that gives meaning to life. . . .
>
> The child gains lineage ties through the mother's blood. Since the spirit from the father molds the child and is the source of personality, a person is believed to have the same temperament as his father. From spirit come his distinctive personal gifts and virtues. (Appiah-Kubi 10)

In the words of Kofi Asare Opoku, "The remarkable aspect of the Akan conception of man is that spiritual factors predominate over the material factors" (21). One of these spiritual factors, the okra, discussed earlier, is of particular relevance to Armah's insistence on healing through "the regaining of contact with a truer self" (68), as suggested by these words of W.E. Abraham:

> The okra is also that whose departure from the

> living man means death, and marks the completion of his destiny. It returns to God to justify its earthly existence. . . . The okra is capable of appearing time after time on earth in different bodies, and it is the crucial factor in personal identity. This is what encourages the Akans to talk of a person's real self [emphasis mine]. (The Mind of Africa 59)

Araba Jesiwa is able to give birth only when she rediscovers her real self by separating from her royal husband and marrying Entsua, whom she loves. In this new marriage there is "a quiet understanding between two people whose spirits needed unity" (76), and within a year Prince Appia is born. Since communal health is lost and restored in the same way as individual health, the inference to be drawn is that for the black peoples, not just for Araba Jesiwa, false selves have offered "the illusion of greater convenience" (68), and revitalization can come only through rediscovery of the real black self.

As well as Araba Jesiwa, Damfo successfully treats Asamoa Nkwanta, "commander of all the armies of Asante" (98), whose despair stems from an event five years earlier: the killing of his favourite nephew by one of the Asante princes during the ritual raid on Kumase that took place after the death of an Asante king in order to provide slaves to "serve . . . the dead king in the underworld" (97). Customarily, it was only

"powerless" people (98) who were victimized in this way. In the matriarchal Asante system, the uncle-nephew bond is a very strong one, and Nkwanta's initial anger at the malicious murder of his nephew has "turned into sorrow of such depth that he vowed not to touch arms again in defence of Asante" (98), a vow that has become "something like a curse upon the Asante army" (98).

Summoned to try to heal Nkwanta, Damfo diagnoses his condition as a "disease of his soul" (99) whose cure requires a complete transformation:

> He was treated like a slave. That shattered him. If the pieces of his life are to come together again, he must understand what shattered him and conquer it. He'll have to understand slavery. Not on the surface, but deeply. It isn't often men like Asomoa Nkwanta have to rethink their whole lives. It takes a catastrophe to push them to it. (99)

Once Nkwanta agrees that the killing of his nephew "like a slave" (175) is the root of his illness, Damfo leads him on to consider the possibility of a world without slaves. Such a world would have to be also a world without kings, a world at first unimaginable to Nkwanta, who protests, "Our people have always had kings and slaves" (175). However, his understanding of "our people" and their past is too limited, Damfo points out: "The Asante are part of the Akan. The Akan

in turn came from something larger" (176). Damfo's insistence that "the Akan and the black people were one in the past" (176) and therefore "may come together again in the future" (176) is disturbing to Nkwanta who has spent his life "fighting to make Asante strong" (177), fighting against other black people. Now he asks, "If the past was a time of unity, then must I see my entire life as wrong?" (177).

In Nkwanta's recurring nightmares, he is powerless to save his nephew. Concentration on his loss drains energy from him, as Damfo explains: "The past steals energy from your soul because it forces you to think of a loss you're impotent to prevent. The future may bring you energy--if it can show you ways to work against that kind of loss" (178). Here Damfo is exercising the healer's method of recognizing the body's "own healing energies, which fight the poisons of disease" (100) and then working to multiply these energies.

Rand Bishop regards the recounting of dreams in The Healers as "excessive" (536). This criticism fails to take into account that Armah is depicting realistically the work of Akan healers. Among the Akan, Appiah-Kubi tells us, "Dreams and visions play a vital role [in guiding behaviour] especially among the priest-healers. In fact, some of them depend largely on the interpretation of dreams and visions which are believed to contain messages from the spirits" (32). Rattray, in Religion and Art, explains that "To the Ashanti mind dreams are caused either by the visitation of denizens of

the spirit world, or by the spirits, i.e. volatile souls of persons still alive, or the journeyings of one's soul during the hours of sleep" (quoted in Charles Nana, "Ayi Kwei Armah's Utopian World" 30). Armah's healers depart from this tradition only in that Damfo interprets a dream as a message from the inner spirit, the soul, the true self of the dreamer. Here, as elsewhere, Armah is faithful to tradition but eliminates its suprahuman accoutrements in order to stress that we must take charge of our own destinies.

Hence, when Nkwanta has a recurring dream in which he is being asked, "Why have you abandoned the army? Is the army the court?" (179), Damfo tells him that a dream is an indication of what is most important in the dreamer's life: "When people build their lives close to their soul's desires, their dreams can be extremely direct, like yours. Their nightmares too" (180). Nkwanta agrees that the Army has been his life, that he has been totally happy as a warrior, but now his will is paralysed by doubt:

> When I think that the result of all my work, the best that is in me, is simply to give power to people who know only how to waste power and waste life, my arm grows weak and I feel all the forces of life and will deserting me. (180)

He respects "men who think well and can act strongly for a good purpose" (180) and does not find such men among the royalty of his time, admitting sadly, "The royals these days

serve only themselves" (180) and the army has become "[a] plaything the royals indulge themselves with" (180). "Division in the soul" (181) of Nkwanta is weakening him, because he can see no way to work for the army and the people "without being at the same time a plaything in the hands of royalty" (181).

Thus far we have seen that the leit-motifs of The Healers are verbalized by Damfo and illustrated through the treatment of Nkwanta and Araba Jesiwa. As well, Armah's characters are embodiments of his themes. Just as Damfo is a fully-fleshed portrait of an inspirer, Densu's guardian, Ababio, is a contrasting portrait of a manipulator. Each is revealed through both words and actions.

The difference between inspirers and manipulators is basically a difference in their attitude to and treatment of other people, as shown in Densu's thoughts concerning Ababio, the man to whose care he had been entrusted from the time of his mother's death at his birth:

> Not a single instance could he remember of Ababio approaching anyone as a human being to be trusted, inspired, shown the truth of a situation, and left to make up his own heart and mind about it [the approach of the inspirers]. In every case Ababio preferred to turn those he dealt with into blind victims--victims knowing only enough about the situation they had been forced into, to move just

> the way Ababio had planned they should move. In this way Ababio ensured that those he dealt with moved only in ways profitable to himself. A human being was to him nothing better than an obstacle to be tricked, lied to, manipulated and shaped by force or guile into becoming a usable ally in spite of himself. And if that failed, then a human being became simply an object to be destroyed. (49-50)

Ababio, originally of slave descent, brags of knowing "everything there is to know about roads to power" (300) and claims that the quickest of these roads is "blind loyalty to those who already have the greatest power" (300). He advises Densu, "Those who take care to place themselves on the right side of big changes . . . become big men" (29) and urges the young man to join those black people like himself who have chosen "to work for the whites" and thus put themselves "on the road to power" (30). Because Prince Appia has accepted Damfo's teaching that "a king should work . . . to bring all the black people together" (31), Ababio decides that it is "necessary to put someone else in Appia's place" (31) and would like that person to be Densu. He assures Densu that if he wins the games, the kingship is his.

Angered at Densu's deliberate losing of the games to Prince Appia, and fearing Densu's unwelcome knowledge of his secret intentions, Ababio resorts to arranging the murder of Appia and his mother Araba Jesiwa by the giant Buntui,

ensuring at the same time that Densu will be accused of the crime. With the help of the priest Esuman, a lapsed healer who has placed his knowledge and skills at the service of the manipulators, Ababio almost succeeds in having Densu killed during a trial by poison. This attempt is foiled by the sacrificial rescue of Densu by his friend Anan. Much later, when Ababio, having made himself king, has Densu tried at a court trial presided over by a white man, with Esuman and Ababio as chief witnesses, once again he is balked, this time by the testimony of Araba Jesiwa who has been rescued and healed by Damfo. Hence the arch-manipulator and erstwhile king finds himself sent to Cape Coast as a prisoner of the whites whose power he has sought to use and share.

The machinations of Ababio in his dealings with Densu are replicated by those of the Asante kings in their dealings with each other and with Asamoa Nkwanta. The Commander, healed by Damfo, returns to the army with one clear desire, "to fight an invading white army, not with guns but with the natural environment . . . by bringing them deep into the forest and letting the forest wrap itself around them, sucking the life out of them" (182). Earlier, he has expressed to Damfo the fear that the kings will not permit this strategy because "all kings fear a war that comes home" (182), since "when a war comes home . . . it changes the whole people into an army" (182) and "the general becomes the leader of the whole nation" (183).

But despite the acuity of this assessment, Nkwanta does not foresee the betrayal of their own people by the kings. Ultimately, Nkwanta's attempt to destroy the invading white army by cutting it off in the depths of the forest is thwarted by the perfidy of the kings who, just as he has foreseen, fear his growing authority. While he is present at the royal council they approve his plan, but afterwards they agree among themselves to sabotage it. Knowing full well that only Nkwanta's scheme can prevent the whites from reaching Kumase, they choose to allow the kingdom to be invaded in order to keep him "from becoming king of the inviolate nation" (291). Thus, in their fear of losing power, the kings effect the victory of the whites over the black peoples.

Moreover, the kings order the destruction of the healers' village at Praso where Nkwanta was treated, charging that the healers have bewitched him and tried to use him to overthrow the kings. Their fear is that the healers "want . . . to make themselves into a new kind of aristocracy to replace the old" (294). The attackers, led by the jealous priest Okomfo Tawia, burn the village, killing all the healers still resident there. Long before this, though, Damfo, his daughter, and Araba Jesiwa have returned to the Eastern Forest.

In the attitudes and actions of the kings and Ababio, Armah has demonstrated the destructiveness of the world's manipulators in contrast with the constructive endeavours of the inspirer-healers. On this ground and others, much of the

adverse criticism of characterization in The Healers is misapplied. For example, Derek Wright objects to what he calls "a doctrinaire thinness of characterization" (257), claiming that "the characters of the novel are reduced to having a few fixed attitudes, mechanical thought-patterns and laboured catch-phrases, all strongly coloured by the prevailing ideological positions and seldom carrying an authentic ring of spontaneous utterance" (257).

This and other of Wright's criticisms ignore the fact that the narrative voice of The Healers is that of a griot, a traditional story-teller (203), a fact to which the reader's attention is drawn very early in the narrative, and that, as Neil Lazarus emphasizes, must affect the manner in which the novel is read. Therefore, for Lazarus, one of the few critics who have given The Healers its due, the novel is a "magnificent work" with a "cohesiveness" in which "[s]tyle and substance, symbol and significance are fused perfectly" (488), whereas Wright claims that the historical and thematic elements do not merge successfully with the personal story of Densu. Rand Bishop, too, who finds the recountings of dreams "excessive," claims that this indicates the loss of "the tight formal control that has marked Armah's earlier novels" (536). The discussion to follow will show that Lazarus' appraisal of the novel is much more perceptive than that of its detractors.

For example, since the story is told by an Akan griot, it

is entirely appropriate that the characters are presented as types, as they would be in traditional Akan orature for reasons explained by W.E. Abraham in the following passage:

> One finds that characterization, the limning of the individual in the round, was notably absent in the traditional Akan literature. This has an explanation in the very conception of society and of the individual. Since society was thought of as comprising individuals with antecedent duties and responsibilities, the three-dimensional individual, completely subsistent, and a distinct atom, was non-existent. Literature did not therefore portray him. The social contract was not merely false of Akan society; with reference to it, it was nonsensical, for, even before a man was born, his spiritual factors belonged to specific ethnic groups. Character types were therefore more interesting to Akan literature than characters in the round. (The Mind of Africa 96-97)

Hence, the portrayal of the main characters of The Healers as either inspirers or manipulators is not a stylistic flaw but a stylistic requirement of the narrative form of this novel, as well as an embodiment of one of Armah's themes.

A second frequent criticism of Armah's characters, as Simon Gikandi notes, is that they are too elitist, that they stand above the very people they are supposed to serve" (37).

For example, Derek Wright states that in The Healers, "[m]ore blatantly than in the early novels, the salvation of society and the race is placed at the disposal of exceptional, privileged individuals" (263) and that such an "elitism . . . oversimplifies and falsifies in the preference it gives to personalities over processes" (257). Gikandi perceptively challenges such criticism, pointing out its irony "in view of the motive force behind Armah's novels: the novelist believes that individuals are only relevant within the group" (37); he shows that in The Healers "Densu does not find his true self until he is co-opted into a community that shares the ideals of wholeness which he finds lacking in Esuano" (37).

Moreover, the charge of elitism ignores the explicit denial within the novel that change can be effected by the lone superior individual. When the healers of Praso express to Damfo the possibility that Asamoa Nkwanta may be able to turn the army against the disease of division, of which royalty is a part, Damfo rejects this hope, reminding his colleagues:

> 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. And it can't depend on people who do not understand the healing vocation, no matter how good

such people may be as individuals.

> The work of healing is work for inspirers working long and steadily in a group that grows over the generations, until there are inspirers, healers wherever our people are scattered, able to bring us together again. (270)

Furthermore, such criticism as Wright's fails to allow for the fact that the view of the individual and the community as a dichotomy is a Western, not an African, concept, as Kwame Gyekye explains in the following passage:

> In African social thought human beings are regarded not as individuals but as groups of created beings inevitably and naturally interrelated and interdependent. This does not necessarily lead to the submerging of the initiative or personality of the individual, for after all the well-being and success of the group depend on the unique qualities of its individual members--but individuals whose consciousness of their responsibility to the group is ever present because they identify themselves with the group. . . . In African philosophy, as in African life, these concepts [communalism and individualism] are not considered antithetical, as they are in European (both capitalist and communist) philosophies. (210)

Similarly, Appiah-Kubi explains the symbiosis of the

individual and the community:

> Though the Akans support communal life, they encourage individual achievement. However, the notion that something is "for me" is meaningless unless it is linked with the total idea that it is "for us." This is the cardinal principle of Akan communal life. (8)

Some Marxist-oriented critics seem to imagine that society can function without leadership, but the Akan would not agree. Very tellingly, an Akan proverb translates as follows: "It is only one man who kills the elephant for the entire community, or nation" (Appiah-Kubi 8). This proverb expresses the recognition that unusual individual skill and achievement are essential to the welfare of all.

The Akan ideal of kingship is likewise one of a symbiotic relationship between the monarch and the community, rather than one of hierarchy. It is the departure from this ideal that Armah attacks in _The Healers_ in his portrayal of both the Fantse and Asante kings. They are travesties of the Akan ideal as it is described by Appiah-Kubi:

> The throne is the symbol of the local community's or the nation's unity. It enshrines the religious and cultural identity of the people and links the living with their dead ancestors. The ancestors are said to be the custodians of moral and ethical behaviour and to be the actual owners of the land

> of the stool. The chief, or king, is the manifest embodiment of the ancestors and holds the land in trust for the kin group. . . .
>
> Because the throne of the chief or king enshrines the ancestral power, it is religious and sacred, and its occupant is expected to be pure in heart and to hold high ethical and moral standards. It is believed that the ancestors bring peace and harmony to the society through the monarch's upright and spiritual role. (5-7)

Clearly, kingship among the Akan was intended to ensure social unity, whereas the kings of The Healers, in Nkwanta's words, "serve only themselves" (180), and in so doing are forces of disharmony.

Thirdly, Derek Wright finds fault with what he sees as the sentimentality of the ending of The Healers. In this evaluation, I believe that he is mistaking his personal rejection of Armah's point-of-view for a flaw in the work. As has been seen, the healers' ultimate aim of restoring unity to the black peoples of the world is emphasized throughout the novel. Their disunity is demonstrated to be a disease through Armah's treatment of the events that lead to the fall of the Asante capital Kumasi. The army of Asante has weakened itself through fighting other black people. Moreover, as Damfo sees, "the royals of Asante do not wish the unity of black people all over this land. All they know is Asanteman. Of Ebibirman

they are totally ignorant. Wilfully so" (267-68). Their ignorance is wilful because "to the royals the healing of the black people would be a disaster, since kings and chiefs suck their power from the divisions between our people" (269).

Although The Healers does not offer hope of any immediate change in the current fragmentation of Ebibirman, neither does it permit despair. As Damfo asserts, "The disease has run unchecked through centuries. Yet sometimes we dream of ending it in our little lifetimes" (84). Not surprisingly, even the healers become confused "not about the aim" (84) of their work but about the medicines that they may use "and about what may look like medicine but may end up being poison," (84)--such as "the speedy results of manipulation" (270). (A similar controversy over methods of societal healing occurs in Wole Soyinka's Season of Anomy, to be discussed in the next chapter). Healing, Damfo insists, will not come quickly or easily: "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" (84).

The ending of the novel reinforces Damfo's argument. As General Wolseley, the apparent victor in the war, sails from Cape Coast for Britain, the groups of blacks "gathered by the whites to come and fight for them" (308) dance together, not to the "graceless beats of white music" but to "a new, skilful, strangely happy interweaving of rhythms" (308). The

previously fragmented black peoples "[a]ll heard the music of these West Indians who had turned the white men's instruments of the music of death to playing such joyous music. All knew ways to dance to it" (309). The ancient healer-woman Ama Nkroma laughs at the irony of this moment of unity: "Here we healers have been wondering about ways to bring our people together again. . . . Does it not amuse you, that in their wish to drive us apart the whites are actually bringing us work for the future? Look!" (309).

Wright (256), finds in this conclusion only a "rather weak symbolic gesture" (256), arguing as follows: "The grimness of the historical situation and the persistence of black puppet-rulers in the work of the whites give the wishful speculations of Ama Nkroma at the closing dance a nebulous and fanciful air" (256), and adding even less cogently: "Armah's determined optimism strives to make a pan-African virtue out of the necessity of universal white conquest" (257). This contemptuous dismissal of the ending ignores the fact that the words of Ama Nkroma are an explicit verbalization of what the novel as a whole has been saying: Look at the work needed for the future. Moreover, it is nonsense to speak of the depiction of a single historical event such as the British conquest of the Asante empire as suggesting "the necessity of universal white conquest," even if Armah's treatment of the event did not clearly contradict such an interpretation. Above all, Wright ignores the strength of the ending in its

recapitulation of the themes of the novel. The reunification of the black groups has been accomplished not only through no intent of their own but contrary to the intent of the whites. We are thus reminded that in human affairs neither victory nor defeat is eternal, a reminder more realistic than optimistic. And in transmuting the music of the white man's instruments to their own rhythms and dancing together, the assembled black peoples are rediscovering their true selves, the first step to the renewal of health.

Hence, by constructing his novel The Healers on the foundation of traditional Akan beliefs about disease and healing, Armah has presented a diagnosis of the fragmentation and disharmony not only of the nineteenth-century Akan world of the novel but of independent Ghana as pictured in The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born and Fragments, his two earlier novels discussed in Chapter 3.

He has also recapitulated the future-oriented theme of his historical epic Two Thousand Seasons: the black peoples of the world must rediscover and revivify their authentic self by returning to The Way: the Way of creation (2), of reciprocity (10,16-17), and of connectedness (134). Near the end of this earlier work, Armah introduces the metaphor of the later one in the following passage:

> A people are already trapped in spirit when they agree to the use of things to hurl themselves separately against each other. The root of the

> disease is not in things themselves but in the use of things; the disease is not in the abundance of things but in relationships growing between users. The people using all things to create participation, using things to create community, that people have no need of any healer's art, for that people is already whole.
>
> Since how many seasons gone have we needed healers to reveal to us the secret of all healers' work? The body that is whole moves always together. No part of it goes against any other part. (TTS 202)

In Armah's conception, healers are not destined to mediate on our behalf with the gods but to revive the true spirit of humanity within us. Surely the healing power of Armah's prescription for effecting this regeneration could be extended beyond Ebibirman to all the peoples of the human community, all of whom are called to be healers.

Whereas Armah has presented the visionary possibility of a more human world than the one that we now inhabit by using the practices and beliefs of Akan traditional healers, Wole Soyinka has done so by comparing human activities with those of the Yoruba gods. He thus introduces his critical work Myth, Literature and the African World with the following words:

> I shall begin by commemorating the gods for their

> self-sacrifice on the altar of literature, and in so doing press them into further service on behalf of human society, and its quest for the explication of being. (1)

In his two novels The Interpreters and Season of Anomy, although their emphasis seems to be on the greatly flawed reality of the present, symbolic reminders of the gods provide a measuring-rod for assessing that reality and offer the challenge needed for effecting change.

Notes

1. From conversation with the elders in Achebe's home village, Robert C. Wren learned that "since time immemorial all the clans of the region drained by a tributary of the Niger which has as its source the spring called *ide* have revered Idemili (literally *pillar* of water). The spring feeds the python as well as all the people of the region" ("Mister Johnson" 215).

2. Whereas Achebe and Amadi use Igbo names for the powerful earth deity, *Ani* and *Ali* respectively, Echewa has chosen to avoid Igbo words as much as possible. The capitalized word *Land* is sufficiently forceful to designate the god; but unfortunately it is not clear whether *Ihi Njoku* described both as "the god of the farm" and "the biggest god that this land knows" (19) is intended to be equated with the Land.

A second problem with Echewa's avoidance of Igbo words arises with his use of the derogatory words *jujus* and *idols* to refer to the images kept in the shrines of African gods. Although these terms are appropriately used by Father Higler, they are singularly inappropriate in the mouth of the *dibia* Ahamba, who, although he discards those gods which no longer serve him, does not reject his gods *in toto*.

3. Arinze provides an example of an Igboman who, like Ahamba, tired of a god's demands on him:

> About twenty-five years ago a very unusual incident took place at Umuabi in Udi division. A certain god was in the habit of asking an elderly man through the priest (dibia?) for fowls, goats, and so on, for sacrifice. When the man became tired of offering sacrifice to this god, he thought about what to do. He remembered that he was one of those who in his youth brought the god from a nearby town. So he took a decision. He was a hunter, and a crackshot at that. He loaded his gun with very powerful bullets. He went straight to the god. When he reached there he started to justify his act in the characteristic pagan manner. He said: "This god, since you came, you have ever made demands on me, never giving me. I helped to carry you to this town. So if you be older than I, kill. If not, I kill you." He shot the god into pieces. People boycotted him and said he would die inside of one month. He lived more than fifteen years after. The god has become "powerless" ever since. (96)

4. The Asante and the Fantse are two of the numerous sub-groups that make up the Akan people.

CHAPTER V

The Yoruba Pantheon and Wole Soyinka

> "I shall begin by commemorating the gods for their self-sacrifice on the altar of literature, and in so doing press them into further service on behalf of human society, and its quest for the explication of being." (Soyinka, Myth 1)

Wole Soyinka was one of a group of thirteen lecturers and professors who in 1977 signed a manifesto entitled "An Appeal for the Re-establishment of African Religions on the University of Ife Campus," a statement that Wilfried F. Feuser believes to have been the handiwork of Professors Pierre Verger and Soyinka. Be that as it may, the following excerpts from it reveal Soyinka's attitude to Yoruba traditional religion:

> Today there exists in the Nigerian intellectual community a tacit assumption that a University scholar is automatically a Christian, or perhaps a Moslem, but on no account an adherent of traditional African religion.
>
> The equation Intellectual=Christian, or Moslem, which has thus been imposed upon us seems to go pari passu with another false equation, namely traditional religion=backwardness. . . .
>
> Our religions have always played a fundamental role in our culture and in our daily lives. . . .

> <u>They have an important role to play in the cultural renewal we all desire</u>.
>
> <u>We therefore have to revaluate them</u>. (Feuser 568)

The group, calling itself Orile-Orisa, set forth seven tenets that relate the Yoruba pantheon to ideals for contemporary life.[1]

In his <u>Myth, Literature and the African World</u>, Soyinka chides those Africans who seek in foreign religions and ideologies ways of thinking and living that are available to them in their own traditions:

> Like his religious counterpart, the new ideologue has never stopped to consider whether or not the universal verities of his new doctrine are already contained in, or can be elicited from the world-view and social structures of his own people. (xii)

It is not surprising, then, that Soyinka has grounded his creative writing in the Yoruba world-view.

At the same time, he insists on both the need and the right of the African writer to be eclectic. In his ongoing debate with the Chinweizu-Jemie-Madubuike troika[2] over their accusations that writers like Okigbo and himself are Europhile intellectuals, Soyinka insists:

> There's no way at all that I will ever preach the cutting of <u>any</u> source of knowledge: Oriental,

> European, African, Polynesian, or whatever. There's no way anyone can ever legislate that, once knowledge comes to one, that knowledge should be forever excised as if it never existed. ("Introduction" Six Plays with Jeyifo, xv.)

It is from the perspective of his own tradition, however, that Soyinka assesses, incorporates, and re-creates such knowledge:

> I cannot claim a transparency of communication even from the sculpture, music and poetry of my own people the Yoruba, but the aesthetic matrix is the fount of my own creative inspiration; it influences my critical response to the creation of other cultures and validates selective eclecticism as the right of every productive being, scientist or artist. ("Neo-Tarzanism" 44)

Soyinka's approach, he says, is exploration . . . into points of departure as well as meeting points between African and European literary and artistic traditions, quite unabashedly exploiting these various complementarities, or singularities, or contradictions, in my own work" ("Introduction," Six Plays, xv). Thus, seeing Dionysus and the Yoruba god Ogun as twins, Soyinka has incorporated some of Ogun's liturgy in his adaptation of Euripides' The Bacchae ("Introduction" Bacchae vi).

The Yoruba gods, unlike those of Christianity and Islam, are a mixture of strengths and weaknesses and thus are very

human. They are as multitudinous and complex in their interrelationships and significances as are those of Graeco-Roman mythology, with whom Soyinka often compares them. As well, as we have already seen, Yoruba tradition posits other non-human but animate powers in the universe. Karin Barber gives the following succinct summary of Yoruba metaphysics:

> Yoruba cosmology presents a picture of Man, a solitary individual, picking his way (aided by his Ori or Destiny, chosen by himself before coming to earth) between a variety of forces, some benign, some hostile, many ambivalent, seeking to placate them and ally himself with them in an attempt to thwart his rivals and enemies in human society. Among the hostile powers are the _eniyan_ or witches, and the Ajogun which are personified evils such as Death, Loss, Sickness, etc. Among the benign ones are the ancestors who revisit their descendants in the guise of _egungun_ (masquerades) and the _orisa_. Over them all is Olodumare, the High God who is not approached directly by humans, and his two intermediaries, Esu the ambivalent trickster and Orunmila the god of wisdom who reveals Olodumare's will to humans through divination. (729)

The divination referred to is centred at Ife, where the diviners called _babalawo_ (fathers of mystery[3]) may be consulted. With regard to its importance, Wande Abimbola,

another signatory of the Ife manifesto, asserts:

> Ifa divination literature . . . is indeed the Yoruba traditional body of knowledge embodying the deep wisdom of our forefathers. It is a complete system by itself in which all that the Yoruba consider valuable to them throughout the whole range of their experience from the very ancient times can always be found. (Ifa vi)

E.M. McLelland in The Cult of Ifa points out that two of the most frequently illustrated principles in t divination verses known as the Odu of Ifa are those of justice (78-79) and the use and abuse of power, the Odu giving "many illustrations of the view that strength must be accompanied by responsibility" (79). These are also Soyinka's most frequently articulated principles, passionately expressed in his words: "The man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny" (The Man Died 13).

Unlike their Graeco-Roman counterparts, some of the Yoruba gods are still functioning in the daily lives of many people, both in Africa and in the black diaspora. They exist contemporaneously with the God of Christianity and the Allah of Islam. Soyinka describes this co-existence in Nigeria as follows:

> Yoruba society is full of individuals who worship the Anglican god on Sundays, sacrifice to Sango [god of thunder] every feastday, consult Ifa before

> any new project and dance with the Cherubims and Seraphims [an indigenous Christian sect] every evening. . . . [T]hey find it natural; no spiritual conflict is created within them and no guilt is experienced. Being unwesternized in religious attitudes, that is, not slavishly tied to the western concept of a single form of worship for the attainment of spiritual exaltation or divine protection, they live without any internal contradictions. ("Neo-Tarzanism" 42)

This eclecticism of worship is possible also because of the accommodative nature of the _orisa_. As Soyinka explains in _Myth_, "Experiences which, until the event, lie outside the tribe's cognition are absorbed through the god's agency, are converted into yet another piece of the social armoury in its struggle for existence, and enter the lore of the tribe" (54). Consequently, "Sango is today's god of electricity, not of white-man magic-light. Ogun is today's god of precision technology, oil rigs and space rockets, not a benighted rustic cowering at the 'iron bird'" ("Neo-Tarzanism" 44). Always god of iron, Ogun is today, among other things, god of drivers. Accordingly, when Nigeria was preparing to change over from left- to right-hand drive in 1972, the event was advertised by the National Broadcasting Corporation through a recording by a popular singer, with variations of the refrain:

> We shall be taking the right-hand side of the road

in Nigeria.

Let's be careful, let's be careful.

Let's pay tribute to Ogun

Before we go out. (Barnes 49)

In her anthropological study _Ogun: An Old God for a New Age_, Sandra Barnes has reached a similar conclusion to that of Soyinka regarding the present-day relevance of Ogun: "No other belief system is as prepared to respond to the sweeping changes brought about by the twentieth-century technological revolution" (Barnes 44-45).

As has been mentioned already in the discussion of _Aké_, it is in Ogun that Soyinka has found his objective correlative for humanity and the human condition. It is customary among the Yoruba for an individual to become a devotee of only one of the _orisa_ and to be "more or less indifferent to the rest of the pantheon" (Barber 734). Moreover, although the _orisa_ may at times possess the devotee, "the devotee, also, in a different sense, 'possesses' the _orisa_" (734), for, as Barber explains, the devotee's "own style and personality affect the way the manifestation is regarded. . . . Each colours the other's personality" (734), so that "each can be saluted with the _oriki_ [praise chant] of the other" (734). Although inheritance and/or divination may play a role in determining an individual's dedication to a particular _orisa_, it seems as if "the spiritual agency finally singled out is one whose personality corresponds to his own inner potential" (Robin

Horton 62). Morton-Williams notes that the characteristics of worshippers are "either remarkably like those of the gods or else clearly complementary to them" ("Outline of the Cosmology" 246). Barber quotes Ulli Beier as suggesting that the individual even becomes "psychically fused with his orisa" (743). This may happen with artists, as we have noted in Chapter II in the Oshogbo artists' inspiration from the river goddess Oshun. Biodun Jeyifo gives the following account of the identification of the Yoruba dramatist Duro Ladipo with the god Sango:

> The day Duro Ladipo died in Ibadan in 1978, a tumult of rainstorm, lightning and thunder totally out of season descended on Ibadan. This had the good people of that city in great awe. For Duro Ladipo had become identical in the public imagination with Sango, the fiery Yoruba god of thunder and mystical medium of lightning and electrical energy. Ever since his first performance during the 1960's of Sango in the greatest production of his repertoire, Oba Koso, Duro Ladipo had made the deity the inspiration and model of both his stage career and his total artistic personality. The unseasonal rainstorm on the day of his death seemed to thousands of Duro Ladipo's devoted admirers as a passage rite preternaturally appropriate to the transition of

> the contemporary incarnation of Sango. It seemed that in an instant of epiphanic revelation, the essence of Ladipo's lifework as an artist and cultural figure was disclosed in as memorable a manner as possible. ("What is the Will of Ogun?" 142)

Soyinka has become similarly identified with the god Ogun, his self-chosen creative muse and an explicit or implicit presence in most of his creative and critical works.

Ogun, like each of the orisa, has many manifestations and many meanings. Barber explains that "each orisa is divided into countless versions, each with its own subsidiary name, oriki,[4] personality and taboos" (732). Therefore, "each manifestation is thought of as being a distinct personality" (733). Ogun is spoken of as having seven forms. According to one mythical explanation for this, "a quarrel between Oya and Ogun (her first husband) led to a fight in which Oya used her magical staff to break Ogun into seven pieces, while Ogun used his to break Oya into nine" (Barber 734). In Barnes' study of Ogun cults, she finds four major traditions: blacksmith, hunter, earth, and warrior (21-27). For many orisa, however, the number of manifestations is indefinite, and "a new one may be established or discovered by an especially powerful devotee who wants to set himself apart from his fellow cult-members" (Barber 734). All of this helps to explain why Soyinka's Ogun is, in many ways, the writer's unique creation and why it is

important, in interpreting each of his creative works, to recognize which of the manifestations of Ogun he has appropriated and for what particular purpose. From this point on, then, this discussion will focus on Soyinka's interpretations of Ogun as expressed in his many interviews, speeches, and essays, beginning with his Myth, Literature and the African World.

After explaining that the multitudinous orisa arose from the fragmentation of Orisa-nla, the original godhead, the solitary "primogenitor of god and man" (Myth 27), Soyinka gives the following account of Ogun's significance as it is portrayed in both mythic narrative and in the life and ritual of Yoruba tradition. The passage is of necessity quoted at length because it contains almost all the information and ideas concerning Ogun that are required to understand the place of this god in Soyinka's thinking.

> The shard of original Oneness which contained the creative flint appears to have passed into the being of Ogun, who manifests a temperament for artistic creativity matched by technical proficiency. His world is the world of craft, song and poetry. . . .
>
> With creativity, however, went its complementary aspect, and Ogun came to symbolize the creative-destructive principle. . . .
>
> Yet none of them [the orisa], not even Ogun,

was complete in himself. There had to be a journey across the void to drink at the fount of mortality. . . . But the void had become impenetrable. A long isolation from the world of men had created an impassable barrier which they tried, but failed, to demolish. Ogun finally took over. Armed with the first technical instrument which he had forged from the ore of mountain-wombs, he cleared the primordial jungle, plunged through the abyss and called on the others to follow. For this feat the gods offered him a crown, inviting him to be king over them. Ogun refused. Human society was to commit the same error, and to prove sufficiently persistent to sway him from his wisely considered refusal. On arrival on earth, the various deities went their way, observing and inspecting. Ogun in his wanderings came to the town of Ire where he was received, later returning its hospitality when he came to its aid against an enemy. In gratitude he was offered the crown of Ire. He declined and retired into the mountains where he lived in solitude, hunting and farming. Again and again he was importuned by the elders of Ire until he finally consented.

When he first descended among them, the people took to their heels. Ogun presented a face of

himself which he hoped would put an end to their persistence. He came down in his leather war-kit, smeared in blood from head to foot. When they had fled he returned to his mountain-lair, satisfied that the lesson had been implanted. Alas, back they came again. They implored him. If he would only come in less terrifying attire, they would welcome him as king and leader. Ogun finally consented. He came down decked in palm fronds and was crowned king. In war after war he led his men to victory. Then, finally, came the day when, during a lull in the battle, our old friend Esu the trickster god left a gourd of palm wine for the thirsty deity. Ogun found it exceptionally delicious and drained the gourd to the dregs. In that battle the enemy was routed even faster than usual, the carnage was greater than ever before. But by now, to the drunken god, friend and foe had become confused; he turned on his men and slaughtered them. This was the possibility that had haunted him from the beginning and made him shrink from the role of king over men. (Myth 28-29)

The foregoing account makes it possible to understand Soyinka's use of Ogun as an archetype of human nature and the human condition, for included in the narrative are the two

main events of Ogun's career that define him as the creative-destructive essence: his hewing a passage through the transitional abyss and his killing of his own people. In Soyinka's account of the latter event, he inserts the word "wisely" when describing Ogun's initial rejection of kingship. Here one notes the emphasis on the dangers of "the power lust in group or individual" ("Critic and Society" 59) that pervades Soyinka's writing. Even a farcical comedy like The Trials of Brother Jero deals with this theme obliquely, and it is the major concern of works like Kongi's Harvest, A Play of Giants, Madmen and Specialists, and Season of Anomy.

Although Soyinka favours an egalitarian form of society that respects and nourishes human dignity, he has no faith in the ability of any ideology to create and preserve such a society. Thus he reminds his Marxist academic critics, who object to his literary use of myth as unscientific, that "the so-called scientific systems of society have yet to find a scientific counter to the abnormal and unpredictable development of the personality cult around a strong leader with unsuspected power drive" ("Critic and Society" 51). Soyinka sees

> the ramifications of the power drive throughout history--at all stages of socio-economic development, within and affecting various human activities in public and private, in magic and technology, in the arts, education and the civil

> service, across and within the class units of every form of society" ("Critic and Society" 51).

He therefore concludes that power is "a contributory motive force of history" ("Critic and Society" 51). Many examples could be cited, in all continents of the world, of "kings" (emperors, dictators, chiefs, presidents) who, like Ogun, could not tell their own people from the enemy and destroyed both indiscriminately.

But humanity can choose to use its technology, of which Ogun is tutelary deity, for either creative or destructive purposes. Hence in Soyinka's Nobel Prize banquet speech, he expresses a hope for the future of mankind by equating Ogun's act of clearing a way through the cosmic abyss with the life of Alfred Nobel:

> [M]y creative muse is Ogun, the god of creativity and destruction, of the lyric and metallurgy. The deity anticipated your scientist Alfred Nobel at the very beginning of time by clearing a path through primordial chaos, dynamiting his way through the core of each to open a route for his fellow deities, who sought to be reunited with us mortals. . . . [I]t was Alfred Nobel's hope that the humanistic conversion, even of the most terrible knowledge, can improve the quality of life for mankind. That also is the lesson of Ogun, that essence of the warring duality of human nature.

> And we join in the endeavour that the lyric face of that demiurge will triumph in our time, snaring for all time that elusive bird--peace--on our planet Earth. ("Banquet Speech" 447-48)

In Ogun, then, Soyinka discerns a multi-faceted and paradoxical being: "master craftsman and artist, farmer and warrior, essence of destruction and creativity, a recluse and a gregarious imbiber, a reluctant leader of men and deities" (Myth 27). As would be expected, Soyinka emphasizes diverse aspects of Ogun in his creative works. For the poem "Idanre" that retraces Ogun's experiences, he glosses the deity as "God of Iron and metallurgy, Explorer, Artisan, Hunter, God of war, Guardian of the Road, the Creative Essence," and adds, "His season is harvest and the rains" (Idanre 86). For Ogun Abibiman, in which Ogun and the great Zulu chief Shaka are invoked to free the black people of South Africa, the gloss on Ogun includes the appellation "Restorer of Rights" (23). Central to the play The Road is the festival of Ogun as god of iron and metallurgy and therefore guardian of the road and patron deity of drivers.

In talking to a Flamingo interviewer about his play A Dance of the Forests, in which Ogun figures as one of the characters, Soyinka explained: "when I use myth it is necessary for me to bend it to my own requirements. I don't believe in carbon-copies in any art form. You have to select what you want from traditional sources and distort it if

necessary" (Gibbs Critical 4). To his Marxist critics, he has declared: "Wole Soyinka wishes to announce his intention of continuing to re-create his own myths, unscrupulously in images--consciously selective--of vapour and matter for his contemporary needs" ("Critic and Society" 45).

Just so, in his two novels The Interpreters and Season of Anomy Soyinka has bent or re-created myth in order to criticize and challenge contemporary Nigeria. We shall now consider how he has done so by patterning the human characters and events of these post-independence novels on the personalities and experiences of Ogun and other Yoruba deities.

The Interpreters

> "To dare transition is the ultimate test of the human spirit, and Ogun is the first protagonist of the abyss." (Myth 158)

Soyinka describes his first novel, The Interpreters (1965) as "an attempt to capture a particular moment in the lives of a generation which was trying to find its feet after independence" ("Introduction", Jeyifo, Six Plays xiv). The protagonists[5] are five young Nigerians, all of whom have studied abroad and who have returned to elite positions in their newly-independent country. In the disordered upheaval of Nigerian society, their generation is passing through the perilous "transitional gulf" from colonization to independence, from a rural to an urban culture, from tradition

to modernity. In such an era leaders are needed with the strength of will to link the past with the present, the material with the spiritual, the human with the divine. As assessed by the criterion of Ogun, only two of the five young men, Sekoni and Bandele, show the way of continuity sustained by the will in the service of society. Bandele and Kola are university lecturers; Sekoni and Egbo are officials in government ministries; Sagoe is a newspaper feature writer. None of them preens himself on his attainments. Rather, they scorn the pretensions and status-seeking of others in similar positions. Yet although their society is riddled with corruption and in dire need of leadership, Sagoe, Egbo, and Kola lead futile lives. Only Sekoni and Bandele offer any positive contribution to the world around them.

For Western culture, Edwin W. Mosely asserts, Christ is "the chief objective correlative . . . the _something_ through which the Western writer frequently gets at _everything_" (34-5). For Soyinka, Ogun fulfils the same function. This is particularly true in _The Interpreters_, in which Ogun is a key figure in the Pantheon of Yoruba gods that Kola is painting and for which his friends act as models. By implication, Ogun is a touchstone by which the lives of the protagonists may be evaluated, for each represents one or more facets of this god of multiple meaning. By seeing how the responses of the protagonists to the difficulties of their lives resemble and differ from the conduct of Ogun, the reader can more fully

comprehend the challenge which Soyinka's novel is presenting to his compatriots.[6]

In Myth, Soyinka explains that, in Hellenic terms, Ogun can be "best understood . . . as a totality of the Dionysian, Apollonian and Promethean virtues" (141): Dionysian in his ecstatic energy, in his association with wine, and through his disintegration and "spiritual re-assemblage" within the abyss of transition (142); Apollonian as the "first artist" and "the essence of creativity" (141); and Promethean as the "instinct of rebellion" (146) and the bringer of the secrets of the universe to man in the beginnings of technology (29). Among the protagonists of The Interpreters, Soyinka gives us the Dionysian Sagoe, the irrepressible and often drunk reveller; the Apollonian Kola, who understands "the nature of Art" (227); and the Promethean Sekoni, who dares the retributive wrath of officialdom in his effort to bring power and light to a village.

The key incident in the Ogun myth, as we have noted, is Ogun's traversing of "the transitional gulf" (Myth 143). When "long isolation from the world of men had created an impassable barrier which they [the gods] tried, but failed, to demolish" (28), Ogun was "the only deity who 'sought the way', and harnessed the resources of science to hack a passage through primordial chaos for the gods' reunion with man" (27). Having "plunged through the abyss," Ogun "called on the others to follow" (29).

As intellectuals and artists, the young protagonists of <u>The Interpreters</u> should harness the resources of their knowledge to seek the way through "the transitional gulf" for the floundering members of their chaotic society to follow. Sagoe, Egbo, and Kola are not able to do so because they are divided selves, out of touch with the deepest resources of their beings. The following passage from <u>Myth</u> is quoted at length because of its pertinence to the situation of these three young men:

> the weightiest burden of severance is that of each from self, not of godhead from mankind, and the most perilous aspect of the god's journey is that in which the deity must truly undergo the experience of transition. It is a look into the very heart of the phenomena. To fashion a bridge across it was not only Ogun's task, but his very nature, and he had first to experience, to surrender his individuation once again (the first time, as a part of the original Orisa-nla Oneness) to the fragmenting process; to be resorbed within universal Oneness, the Unconscious, the deep black whirlpool of mythopoeic forces, to immerse himself thoroughly within it, understand its nature and yet by the combative value of the will to rescue and to re-assemble himself and emerge wiser, powerful from the draught of cosmic secrets, organising the

> mythic and the technical forces of earth and cosmos to forge a bridge for his companions to follow. (153-54)

In each of Sagoe, Kola, and Egbo, we see, in the words of the just-quoted passage, the "severance . . . from self," along with an unwillingness "to surrender his individuation," a lack of "the combative value of the will," and therefore an inability "to forge a bridge for his companions to follow."

The three lead fragmented lives. In their contempt for others' behaviour, they express different values from those around them. They scorn people like Professor Oguazor, Dr. Lumoye, and Ayo Faseyi for whom status is so all-important that they invest much of their time and energy in trying to advance it and impress it on others. Unlike this latter group, the young friends are not concerned with upward mobility. And yet, in their bi-monthly night-club rendezvous, with unnecessary brawls initiated by Egbo (219), Kola's bawdy satirical sketches (22-25), and Sagoe's progressive drunkenness (19), these "superior" young men are not so different from the frequenters of the university social affairs as they like to believe. Society will not be revitalized by the self-indulgent lives of this trio.

Sagoe relies on his girlfriend Dehinwa for support in the illnesses brought on by his excesses and pesters her for sexual gratification, but he is reluctant to offer her the commitment of marriage. In the fanciful exuberance of

drunkenness, he plays practical jokes on people whom he sees as his intellectual inferiors. He leads an Honourable Member into making a fool of himself in Parliament through a ludicrous suggestion for trading night-soil from the south for donkeys from the north, and then ridicules his dupe in his column for having done so (238-39). He spends much time in expounding his "Philosophy of Voidancy" in what he calls his "Book of Enlightenment" and reading it at great length to captive listeners. This opus is a hilarious commentary on society's coalescence of grandiose utterances and moral filth, but Sagoe's ingenious wit leaves that society uncleansed and Sagoe continues to while away time at a newspaper in which any story revealing the truth about society will remain unpublished.

Kola also evades commitment both in his personal life and in his art. When he finds himself attracted to Monica, he fears "the leavening presence of some tenderness to weaken the laws of his own creation" (50). After beginning to express his complex feelings about the albino child Usaye, he breaks off abruptly, apologizing, "Sometimes I suffer from fluffy emotions" (49). For fifteen months he immerses himself in the creation of the enormous Pantheon, knowing that it lacks "even the beginnings" of that power of true art present in Sekoni's 'Wrestler' (100-01). Kola admits to himself that he has experienced "the knowledge of power within his hands, of the will to transform," but that "he dared not, truly, be

fulfilled. At his elbow was the invisible brake which drew him back from final transportation in the act" (218). Therefore Kola's Pantheon cannot empower its viewers with the strength of the gods it depicts nor reunite society with its traditional values.

Sagoe, Kola, and Egbo try to escape from personal memories and obligations of the past. Sagoe, on his return from America, does not at first let his family know that he is back, planning "a brief courtesy visit and then finish. Every man to his own business" (90). Both Kola and Egbo express the wish to be free of the past. Near the end of the novel, Kola thinks, "if only . . . we felt nothing of the enslaving cords, to drop from impersonal holes in the void and owe neither dead nor living nothing of ourselves" (244-45). Egbo cries, "Is it so impossible to seal off the past and let it alone? Let it stay in its harmless anachronistic unit so we can dip into it at will and leave it without commitment, without impositions!" (121). But in Yoruba belief, "life, present life, contains within it manifestations of the ancestral, the living and the unborn" (<u>Myth</u> 144). Therefore an alienation of oneself from the past is self-destructive, a form of that "refusal to be" that Egbo sees in Noah but fails to recognize in himself (231).[7]

It is Egbo whom Kola has chosen to represent Ogun in the Pantheon, but ironically Egbo is the one in greatest need of developing Ogun's "combative value of the will" (<u>Myth</u> 153).

Egbo's unwillingness to engage in self-sacrifice is apparent from the very beginning of the novel. The Osa Descendants Union plead with him to assume his grandfather's chieftaincy in their hope of gaining an "enlightened ruler" (12). In this request, they are asking him to relive the feat of Ogun, to traverse the dangerous abyss between the old traditional ways of his grandfather and the new modern society of Ibadan and Lagos. But Egbo, unlike Ogun, shirks the task. On the canoe-journey to his grandfather's creek-town domain, he tells his friends, "Over there is a blind old man and a people, waiting on some mythical omniscience of my generation" (12). That he does not have such "mythical omniscience" is his rationalization for failing their expectations, but a truer explanation lies in his subsequent selfish protest: "But what on earth can such an existence hold out for me?" (12). He could better ask this question about his work in the Foreign Office. Very little of its nature is revealed directly, but by implication his desk job is much like the one Sekoni refuses to tolerate--letters to sign, leave applications to process, bicycle advances, job applications to sort. Egbo, however, is not "one of the keen ones" like Sekoni (27), and he continues to stagnate.

Later, Egbo admits another reason for his recoiling from his inherited responsibility: "My rejection of power was thoughtless. . . . If you seek to transform, you must not be afraid of power" (182). It is Egbo's lack of the Ogun will,

rather than callous indifference, as Bandele sees it (228), which keeps Egbo from trying "to forge a bridge" between his grandfather's people and the modern world, between the past and the present. He concedes, "Oh I've dreamt of me and . . . the future prospects for the country's traditions. By example to convert the world" (14). Here he is joking about polygamy, but the implications are much wider, and dreams which are not energized by will are futile.

At the moment in the creek-journey when Egbo must enter his grandfather's town or return to the city, Egbo tries to evade the responsibility for his retreat by instructing the paddlers to go "[w]ith the tide" (14). To drift with the tide is Egbo's way of life. Whereas Ogun, in the passage quoted earlier, immersed himself in the "black whirlpool of mythopoeic forces" in order to "understand its nature," and then "to rescue and to re-assemble himself," Egbo defies one such whirlpool and shrinks from another.

In the first instance, Egbo is sleeping on the rocks under the railway bridge over the river Ogun,[8] after his sexual awakening by the courtesan Simi has upset "some balance in his life" (125). In the night he wakes to see the rushing waters "turned black, black as the deep-sunk cauldrons of women dyers and the indigo streams from _adire_ hung up to dry, dripping like blood in the _oriki_ of Ogun, _to to to to to_" (126).[9] At first, "alone among the rocks, and the closing forests, naked in the . . . dark" (126), he is filled with a

metaphysical fear, as if "in the dark dwellings of an avenging God" (127), but then he grows "bold with fear, and angry, truly angry. . . . And his anger mounted, seeing only the blackmail of fear." Believing that his weakening has come from a sense of sin, he defies the numinous presence: "If this be sin--so--let come the wages, Death!" (127). Having survived these "terrors of the night," he feels free of sin: "it seemed to him that he was born again" (127). But as Mark Kinkead-Weekes points out, Egbo's feeling of rebirth comes from his daring of the gods rather than from communion with them (227). Making this spot "his preserve, a place of pilgrimage" (127), Egbo has many times "relived his passage of darkness" (133). But he has not let himself be "resorbed within universal Oneness," and never has he emerged "wiser, powerful," able "to forge a bridge for his companions to follow." Rather than re-assembling himself through his mystical experiences, Egbo anaesthetizes himself as he does in sexual oblivion with Simi.

Egbo's awareness of his lack of purpose is shown in his words to the girl student whom he takes to his shrine and seduces there:

> . . . I seem to go only from one event to the other. As if life was nothing but experience. When I come here I discover, it is enough. I come here . . . to be vindicated again, and again and again. Some day I may find that once has been

sufficient. (133)

His endlessly-recurring need for vindication suggests an uneasy sense that his way of life is an indefensible one.

At the end of the novel, when Egbo must choose between Simi and the pregnant girl--and analogously between continuing his drifting life and fulfilling his obligations to the past, present, and future--he experiences a second black whirlpool. In the hypnotic darkness of the concert-hall where Joe Golder is singing, Egbo feels himself being sucked into the whirling blackness of dye pits with their angry bubbles calling to him: "Egbo-lo, e-pulu-pulu, E-gbo-lo . . ." (246). This near-hallucination recalls his reaction to the pleadings of the Osa Descendants Union: "a slow anger built in him, panic and retraction from the elaborate pit [emphasis added]" (12). Terror-stricken, Egbo hovers on the brink of the transitional gulf between irresponsible immaturity and responsible manhood "for the abyss is the transition between the various stages of existence" (Myth 154). Egbo has imagined that he wants to be freed from the "creek-surface" of life where you are "controlled by ferments beyond you" (13), but now he is close to panic when faced with assuming the direction and control of his own life.

In Myth, Soyinka describes such a moment as Egbo is experiencing as a re-enactment of Ogun's ordeal:

> On the arena of the living, when man is stripped of excrescences, when disasters and conflicts . . .

> have crushed and robbed him of self-consciousness and pretensions, he stands in present reality at the spiritual edge of this gulf [the metaphysical abyss], he has nothing left in physical existence which successfully impresses upon his spiritual or psychic perception. It is at such moments that transitional memory takes over and intimations rack him of that intense parallel of his progress through the gulf of transition, of the dissolution of his self and his struggle and triumph over subsumation through the agency of will. (Myth 149)

Whether Egbo will summon the will to triumph is the question left unanswered at the end of The Interpreters (although the discussion of Simi in Chapter II of this study suggests that the novel implies an answer). Like the other protagonists, Egbo has within him the godlike power to transform. But in Kola's words, the act of transforming is "the process of living" and requires of each the will to overcome "the intense fear of fulfilment" (218). Without the Ogun will, Egbo, Kola, and Sagoe can only drift through life uncommitted both to some worthwhile purpose and to other people.

Such drifting not only prevents constructiveness, it occasions destructiveness. Although Noah's fear of the homosexual Joe Golder is the immediate cause of the young boy's death, the self-centred irresponsibility of Sagoe, Kola, and Egbo is the underlying cause. Sagoe's desire for an

exploitative news story takes the group to Lazarus' church where they meet Noah. Kola, struck with the purity of Noah's appearance, seeks him out and takes him to Ibadan to sit for the Pantheon, but afterwards ignores him, leaving him to wander where he will. Egbo, in "a sudden moment of curiosity" (231), takes Noah to Kola's studio wanting to be present at the first meeting between Lazarus and Noah after Noah's flight from the trial by fire through which Lazarus has sought a needed miracle. But in an eruption of egotistic anger at his Ogun image, Egbo flings out of the studio, not caring what has become of Noah. Thus Noah is abandoned to Joe Golder and to death.

Of the many myths surrounding Ogun, Kola has chosen for his Pantheon "one single myth, Ogun at his drunkennest, losing his sense of recognition and slaughtering his own men in battle; and he has frozen him at the height of carnage" (233). As explained earlier, Ogun had at first refused to become a king, just as Egbo has done. But Ogun later assumed kingship with the tragic result shown on Kola's canvas. When Egbo sees this representation of himself, he is affronted not only personally but on behalf of Ogun: "Look at that thing he has made of me . . . a damned bloodthirsty maniac from some maximum security zoo. Is that supposed to be me? Or even Ogun, which I presume it represents?" (233). Egbo, in rejecting this repugnant vision of himself, quarrels with Kola's selectiveness:

> Even the moment of Ogun's belated awareness would have been . . . at least that does contain poetic possibilities. . . . And then there is Ogun of the forge, Ogun as the primal artisan . . . but he leaves all that to record me as this bestial gore-blinded thug! (233)

What we realize is that although the more positive attributes of Ogun are potentially present in Egbo, Kola has painted actuality: Egbo as destroyer, one who, during a night of drinking, erupts into "sudden violence" (219). And Egbo has not yet reached the stage of "belated awareness" of how he is living, nor has he yet benefited his society in any way.

What is lacking in the three protagonists so far discussed is the essential quality of Ogun, which Soyinka describes in _Myth_ as follows:

> Ogun is the embodiment of challenge, the Promethean instinct in man, constantly at the service of society for its full self-realization. Hence his role of explorer through primordial chaos, which he conquered, then bridged, with the aid of the artifacts of his science. . . . Only Ogun experienced the process of being literally torn asunder in cosmic winds, of rescuing himself from the precarious edge of total dissolution by harnessing the untouched part of himself, the will. This is the unique essentiality of Ogun in Yoruba

> metaphysics: as embodiment of the social, communal will invested in a protagonist of its choice. (30)

Because Sagoe, Kola, and Egbo are unable or unwilling to harness the will, they are in danger of "total dissolution" as useful participants in society and cannot explore and bridge the chaos of that society to lead others safely through it.

It is the engineer Sekoni who takes on the Ogun "role of explorer." Sekoni "with the aid of the artifacts of his science" creates an experimental village power station, and when it is condemned by corrupt officials, he exerts his will against them in his effort to get the station opened for "the service of society." As a result, he suffers confinement in a mental hospital, but he rescues himself "from the precarious edge of total dissolution by harnessing the untouched part of himself, the will" and redirecting his creative energy into sculpting his masterpiece 'The Wrestler,' "all elasticity and strain" (99). The sculpture physically resembles Bandele in face and form, but it also images the life and soul of its sculptor.

The explanation of Sekoni's superiority to Kola as an artist resides in the symbolism of Ogun "both as essence of anguish and as combative will within the cosmic embrace of the transitional gulf" (<u>Myth</u> 150):

> Ogun is the embodiment of Will, and the Will is the paradoxical truth of destructiveness and creativeness in acting man. Only one who has

> himself undergone the experience of disintegration, whose spirit has been tested and whose psychic resources laid under stress by the forces most inimical to individual assertion, only he can understand and be the force of fusion between the two contradictions. The resulting sensibility is also the sensibility of the artist, and he is a profound artist only to the degree to which he comprehends and expresses this principle of destruction and re-creation. (150)

Sekoni, in defying the forces of authority, has subjected his spirit to be tested by daring and suffering, but Kola "dared not, truly, be fulfilled" (218). Therefore it is Sekoni, not Kola, who develops "the sensibility of the artist."

In Sekoni is reflected also what Egbo might become with the exertion of the Ogun will. Ogun permitted himself "to be resorbed within universal Oneness" and reunited the gods with men. Sekoni, a visionary and a mystic, sees the unity of life under the illusory plurality of its manifestations (122) and symbolizes this unity in his image of the dome of continuity (9). Emmanuel Obiechina explains this dome as "the dome of life, where we find religious ideas about gods and ancestral beliefs underlying the lives of men and women of modern culture and sensibility, whose present occupations and concerns anticipate a revolutionary future" (Culture 152). For Egbo, who seeks to separate himself from the past, a

belief in continuity is "an optimist's delusion" (233). When he expresses a desire to forget the dead, it is Sekoni who reminds him, "b-b-bridges d-d-don't jjjust g-g-go from hhhere to ththere; a bridge also faces backwards" (9).

Sekoni can never fully transmit his vision of continuity in words, as perhaps his characteristic stammer is intended to signify. But his "wonder-filled, miracle-seeking hands" weighing "heavily with hope and with history" absorb power during his pilgrimage to Old Jerusalem, where "wholly awed" he stands "pitiless on his heritage before disturbing intimations, suddenly meaningful affinities" (99). Egbo makes his pilgrimage to his god-haunted shrine on the Ogun river "wonder-filled" like Sekoni. But because the miracle that Egbo desires is the self-seeking one of personal vindication, he draws no life-giving power from his experience. Egbo's mysticism is inward-turning and enervating. When a woman in Lazarus' church is "taken by the spirit" (175) and becomes physically frenzied, Egbo leaves before the others: "he had seen too much like her and could never like it. . . . At such times Egbo longed for the other possession, the triumph of serene joys and sublimated passions" (176). What Egbo desires in spiritual experience is to be solaced, not regenerated as Sekoni and Ogun are.

If Sekoni, who takes life's necessary risks, rather than Egbo, who refuses them, had represented Ogun in Kola's Pantheon, the creative and uniting aspects of Ogun rather than

the destructive and disruptive ones would have emerged. It is noteworthy that the final scene of the novel focuses attention simultaneously on the indecision of Kola and Egbo and the achievement of Sekoni's 'Wrestler.'

Throughout the novel, as has been seen, Kola, Sagoe, and Egbo are withdrawing from life: Kola into his painting, Sagoe into drunkenness and his Philosophy of Voidancy, and Egbo into his isolated river sanctum. In their grief at the death of Sekoni in a road accident, they self-centredly seek these retreats as usual. Only Bandele reaches out to the one more agonized than they, Sekoni's father. Bandele, like Sekoni, fulfils the Ogun role of acting in "the service of society." In doing so, he also embodies the mercy and justice of Ogun's multiple personality.

Traditional poetry records Ogun as "'protector of orphans', 'roof over the homeless', 'terrible guardian of the sacred oath,'" (Myth 141). Such is Bandele who is sought out by those in need because he is always ready to help. Thus the girl student sends messages to Egbo through Bandele and he tries to protect her and her unborn child. Joe Golder comes to him for help after inadvertently causing Noah's death and is given succour. With sympathetic regard for the feelings of others, Bandele respects human dignity. He tries to protect people such as Faseyi from their own follies, rather than to lead them into making greater fools of themselves, as Kola and Sagoe do. He sees the worth in others, telling the sceptical

Kola that Faseyi "is supposed to be the best X-ray analyst available in the continent" (45). Unfailingly courteous to Lazarus, he chides his friends for their mockery of this preacher who has rescued others from lives of crime:

> [T]his 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. . . . (179)

Thinking of the possible damage which might be caused by a sensational newspaper account of Lazarus' belief that he has been resurrected, Bandele warns Sagoe against carelessly promoting another's myth (178), and he issues the quiet but stern condemnation: "None of you minds much what suffering you cause" (179).

The justice for which Ogun stands and which Bandele personifies is "transcendental, humane but rigidly restorative" (Myth 141). Bandele can forgive his friends' weaknesses. What he cannot forgive is their inability or unwillingness to admit and repent their transgressions. Men, like the gods, must acknowledge and repent their failings to regenerate their community and restore harmony. As Robert W. July tells us, the Yoruba gods

> are held accountable for their transgressions, and obliged to make amends through ritual. Thus, as with their human counterparts, their fallibility

> produces discord, and requires remedial action that will contribute to the constant regeneration of the universe and the restitution of harmony. (490)

On the day after Noah's death, Bandele finds unbearable the seemingly light-hearted banter of the others, for whom Noah has become "a subject to be pushed from thought, to be wholly effaced from conscious recognition" (238). Nor can he accept the inhumanity of Egbo whose revulsion at Joe's homosexuality has caused him to refuse to assist Bandele with the hysterical man: he tells Egbo: "I can't forget that I came to you this morning for help and you failed me" (241). To Kola, Bandele looks as if he is "killing himself inside" (243), but Bandele asserts, "I expect Joe Golder has put years on me. But I will not snap" (244). He suffers the Ogun anguish but, like Sekoni, transcends his suffering.

In the final pages of the novel, Bandele becomes Ogun as the "terrible guardian of the sacred oath."[10] He sits "apart from the others" (244), he holds himself "unyielding, like the staff of Ogboni" (244), he stands "forbidding" (247).

> He was looking at them with pity, only his pity was more terrible than his hardness, inexorable. Bandele, old and immutable as the royal mothers of Benin throne, old and cruel as the _ogboni_ in conclave pronouncing the Word. (250-51)

The Word he pronounces is intended for his friends as well as for the hypocrites who have been pompously delivering moral

judgments on the pregnant student: "I hope you all live to bury your daughters" (251). It is a warning of the retribution for their inhumanity--an impotent and sterile future.

As we noted in Aké, the ogboni society exercised great power in Yorubaland. Peter Morton-Williams explains that the ogboni "worship and control the sanctions of the Earth as a spirit. Earth, they hold, existed before the gods. . . . Earth and the ancestors, not the gods (orisa), are the sources of the moral law" ("The Yoruba Ogboni Cult" 364). The aim of the ogboni is "to preserve the customs and the kind of behaviours on the part of men that are beneficial to the earth. To this end, they detect, and rigorously punish, any offenses deemed to be against the earth spirit" (McClelland, The Cult of Ifé 35). Bandele, then, has invoked incontrovertible moral law. Moreover, he has done so in the form of a curse, and curses are believed by the Yoruba to be "a special manner of speaking the truth" (Buckley 141). The ogboni, in particular, are thought to own a form of curse called olugbohun that "must not be brought inside the house because, when it is there, anything they say in the house will actually occur" (Buckley 143). Hence the association of Bandele's curse with the ogboni image gives to his judgment the intensity of a prophetic warning and reinforces the impression that he, like Ogun, represents restorative justice.

In these many parallels of the protagonists with Ogun,

much of the meaning of The Interpreters resides.

Other critics have related the protagonists to the Yoruba cosmology in a somewhat different way from the one just expounded. Emmanuel Obiechina (112-14), Richard Priebe (82), and Gerald Moore (76-77), for example, all perceive the character of Bandele as being structured on the principle of Obatala (often syncretised with Orisa-nla, the primal godhead); and Obiechina finds this principle also in Sekoni. But it has just been shown that the suffering of these two men is the active suffering of Ogun, not the passive suffering of Obatala. The Obatala principle plays its contrasting role in Season of Anomy, as will be seen, but not in The Interpreters. In Myth, Soyinka stresses that Obatala/Orisa-nla is god of creation "but not of creativity!" (152), and it is creativity, Ogun's trait, that men and gods possess in common. It should be noted, too, that Orisa-nla (or Obatala) is referred to in The Interpreters only in the compressed description of Kola's almost-completed canvas (224), and then this god is identified not by name or nature but only by his fragmentation through the rebellious action of his slave. Furthermore, there is no reference to any character's sitting for the portrait of this god as Egbo does for Ogun.

Both Priebe and Moore perfunctorily associate Sagoe with Eshu (Priebe 116; Moore 79) and Sekoni with Sango (Priebe 116; Moore 78). These resemblances, I would argue, are superficial ones, not keys to the meaning of the novel. Moore pertinently

recognizes that Sekoni and Sagoe are both pathfinders or pioneers in their own way (73; 79), but he does not develop the implications of this resemblance to Ogun. Clearly it is the Ogun principle that is most relevant to an understanding of all five protagonists of The Interpreters.

Other than Egbo as Ogun, the text identifies only four characters as models for specific figures in Kola's Pantheon: Usaye as the handmaiden of Obaluwaye, the praise-name "King Lord of the World" for Sopona, god of smallpox (Bascom 92); Simi as a water-goddess; Joe Golder as Erinle; and Lazarus as Esumare. The albino child Usaye is of narrative importance, for it is Kola's and Monica's mutual interest in her that first draws them together. But the other three function both narratively and symbolically in the lives of the protagonists, and their identification with the Yoruba pantheon is of crucial significance, as has already been shown in the case of Simi in Chapter II. All that remains, then, is to examine the aesthetic and thematic purposes of the correlations of Lazarus and Golder with the orisa.

When Kola was beginning the Pantheon, "Golder fell in place as Erinle only less obviously than Egbo as Ogun" (102). Joe Golder, a university colleague of Bandele and Kola, is a "three-quarter white" (101) American who longs intensely to be black. It is in keeping with this desire to be African that he teaches African history (184). Egbo abhors Golder's homosexuality, not seeing that Golder is a mirror image of

himself. Both suffer from a disorientation of identity, both having rejected their inheritance and destroyed a progenitor; Egbo, Sagoe thinks, "could have matched Joe Golder for violence" (193); both reject human claims on them, insisting on freedom from all obligation; both are enslaved by sensuality. In their self-centredness, both are dangerous to others.[11]

It is appropriate that Golder, Egbo's dark self or double, should represent Erinle, a hunter-god of the untamed forest, whose cult is closely connected with Ogun since the hunter manifestation of Ogun dominates the forest (Williams Icon and Image 88). Erinle is also "the bi-sexed one that split himself into the river" (Interpreters 225). A traditional Yoruba poem to Erinle ends with the lines "from the depth of the river/he calls us to war!" (Ulli Beier, Yoruba Poetry 35). Thus Golder/Erinle is linked with the creekman Egbo and the war-god Ogun. The latter association also explains why Kola is aesthetically pleased that the peeling of Golder's face (from the effect of too much African sun) has given him a "different fierceness" (102).

Kinkead-Weekes observes that

> Lazarus and Golder are opposite ways of focusing the question of how man can be transformed into something more god-like. Lazarus sees man as destroyed and remade from without. . . . Golder is a man apparently caught in hopeless opposition, but

> to measure him against Erinle is to reinforce the sense of what he could be, transformed in the crucible of clashing forces from within [as to measure Egbo against Ogun does]. For Erinle is bisexual and contradictory. He is both fierce predator and beneficent river, a god both of violence and healing. . . . For Soyinka, it is intrinsic to the Yoruba sense of deity that there is a vital connection between opposites. . . . To *be* both fully is to explode contraries into power and progression; to tap the divine forces in the universe, and to become more godlike. (232)

In Joe Golder and Egbo, as in Erinle and Ogun, destructiveness co-exists with creativity, but in these human manifestations of the gods, the opposites have not yet fused.

The Pantheon is completed with the figure of Esumare, the rainbow, for whom Kola (after first having mistakenly selected Noah) is inspired to paint Lazarus, a Christian sect leader who claims to have died and come back to life as an albino. As evidence of his miraculous resurrection he has only an ancient news clipping that may or may not refer to him and that makes no mention of any colour transformation. According to his version of his experience, he has no memory of his life before his aborted burial but he was informed by the district nurse and the villagers of the region where the events occurred that he had been black when he "died" (161).

In many respects, Lazarus is a realistic character. Indigenous religious movements melding elements of Christianity and/or Islam and traditional religions have proliferated in Nigeria in the twentieth century.[12] Neils Kastfelt gives the following account of Kulibwui, a founder of one of these who emerged in the 1920's:

> During a serious attack of epilepsy he was believed to have died, but when he was about to be buried he rose to life again. He declared that he had come to the kingdom of the dead but that Gold [sic] had ordered him to return to life and charged him with founding a new religion. (Varieties 119)

He adds the comment that

> Kulibwui's experiences have great similarity with the dreams, cisions, prophecies, trances and miracles through which other African prophets have been called to preach a new religious message; besides, he resembles other African prophets by having died and been raised to life again. (119)

At a religious revival in Ibadan in 1930, reportedly twenty-two people were raised from the dead (Peel 92-93).

Lazarus, then, is as probable a resident of Lagos as are Sagoe and Egbo. But he also reinforces the mythopoeic symbolism of the novel through the theme of resurrection, or as Kinkead-Weekes has phrased it, the question of "how man can be transformed into something more godlike" (232). Satire

abounds in The Interpreters, but Lazarus is not one of its targets. He is not a charlatan, like the self-aggrandizing prophets satirized by Soyinka in the Jero plays and in Requiem for a Futurologist. Whatever the truth of Lazarus' personal experience, he has used it to give new life to others, as the authorial voice of Bandele points out. It is the difficulty of accepting what has to be accepted, Sekoni's death, that draws the bereft friends to Lazarus' church to hear his story, a need articulated by Bandele: "I would not have been curious to hear Lazarus if Sekoni had not recently died. Deep inside me, I suppose that was why I came" (181).

Lazarus sees his "true disciples" as "the thieves, the rejected of society" (229), claiming that "[t]he more evil a man has known . . . the more strength I have got from him" (229) and that the murderer is "your most willing martyr" (229). His chosen apostles are former criminals, including a forger, a bank robber, and a wife-murderer (229-30). In attempting to replace the deceased apostle with the young thief Noah, he was looking for "a youth with an inner fire" (229).

But Lazarus is as guilty as the others of Noah's death, for although he has rescued Noah from a punitive Lagos mob, he has tried to use the boy for his own purposes. He explains to Kola, "I persisted only because it was the time of floods and this is the time for our Revivalist Services. We needed Noah" (229). Lazarus knows why he failed with Noah: "What you

wrestle with, what you fight and defeat, that is true conversion" (229). The words recall Lazarus's vivid depiction of Christ's wrestling with and overmastering Death, as well as the image of Sekoni's 'Wrestler.' In trying to force Noah into martyrdom, Lazarus has forgotten that the martyr, or the leader through the abyss of transition, must be "willing"--like Christ or Ogun. Lazarus' attempt to force Noah through a transformation has had the reverse effect of depriving him of all will. Similarly, Sagoe, Kola and Egbo must <u>will</u> their own transformations. Only then can they lead (but not force) their society through the needed metamorphosis.

When a worshipper at Lazarus' church becomes possessed, she sees Lazarus "walking with a faceless companion" who she says is Death (182). This vision is interpreted by Lazarus as one "into the past" (182), not as a prophecy, and because it comes shortly after his sermon with its graphic description of his experience of death, the reader is led to rationalize the incident. But no detail in Soyinka's poetic text is irrelevant. Although no further reference is made to this vision, retroactively one understands that there has been a prophetic warning, dismissed by Lazarus, that he is leading Noah to his death.

It is implied that Lazarus has attempted the miracle of turning Noah into a second Christ. Noah's washing of the worshippers' feet, his bearing a heavy cross while repeatedly circling the church, and the intended "crucifixion" of passing

through fire--all seem to be designed towards this purpose. Lazarus' words concerning his aspiration for Noah, "At the very least, I thought, a successor," (229), show that he was aiming for something greater than another apostle. Bandele warns Sagoe against "carelessly" promoting Lazarus' myth, explaining, "I saw his face when Kola mentioned painting Noah as Christ" (178).

In African Religions & Philosophy, Mbiti points out that a "strong millennial expectation often leads to the creation of many small independent churches centred around individuals who symbolize, and more or less fulfil, this messianic expectation" (28). Claims of being the returned Christ are not infrequent, as suggested by Bandele's telling Sagoe that his newspaper had

> tried to pull down a Christ not so long ago. . . . He was the boldest of them yet. He said he had come to enjoy himself at this Second Coming, not to suffer. The papers waged a most vicious attack on him. . . . He's prospering more than ever. Big transport business and a bakery, and a big harem which has survived two suits of seduction. (180)

When Lazarus' attempted miracle has failed, his concern is more for himself and his church than for the welfare of Noah. Although he expresses an awareness of a responsibility towards him, "I must try and see that Noah does not return to the gutter" (230), his motive is self-serving: "He is free to

go where he pleases--outside Lagos. . . . I do not want him in Lagos. It is not right that any of my church should meet him picking pockets or loitering in the markets" (230). It is in apprehension for himself, not for Noah, that he insists on Kola's going with him to search for the boy: "I have the feeling of danger to myself when I think of the path that lies before him from now" (230). In the thus emptied studio, Noah fatefully encounters Joe Golder. Hence, in the terms of our earlier discussion of priests and healers (Ch. 4), the Christian priest and healer Lazarus has been both true and false to his calling. Like Ezeulu in Arrow of God, he has mistaken his own will for the will of his god.

A further aspect of Lazarus, however, integrates him into the Yoruba mythopoeia of the novel. Although Kola has at first been repelled by the abnormal (and to Kola, ugly) appearance of the albino (158), he is finally enabled to see that Lazarus is the proper model for the rainbow Esumare, "the bridge, or the ladder between heaven and earth. . . . The link" (225). Aesthetically, the phosphorescent pallor of Lazarus is appropriate for Esumare, whom Kola describes as the "vomit streak of the heavenly serpent" (228). In Yoruba belief "the rainbow is produced by a very large boa: the reptile discharges from its inside the sulphurous matter which sets all its surroundings aglow and causes a reflection, which is the rainbow, . . . in the sky" (Idowu, Olodumare 35). According to one Yoruba myth, the supreme deity Olodumare was

"the offspring of the large primordial boa," and when the god went to dwell in heaven, he and his parent "entered into a covenant that they would always remember, and from time to time communicate with each other. The rainbow . . . is the sign of that age-long covenant and communion between Oludu and the boa, a sign that the covenant remains for ever" (Idowu, Olodumare 35). Accordingly, the rainbow represents a covenant between heaven and earth in both Judeo-Christian and Yoruba symbolism.

In Christian cosmology, Lazarus' belief in his resurrection represents a link between death and life, mortality and immortality, humanity and the divine. In Yoruba cosmology, and especially for Soyinka, his being an albino carries a similar significance. Albinos are under the special protection of Obatala, "god of soul purity" to whom belongs "the function of moulding human beings, into whose forms life is breathed by the supreme deity himself, Olodumare" (Myth 15). In some versions of the myth, Obatala or Orisa-nla moulded such forms as cripples, albinos, half-wits, and the blind "to mark them as his worshippers so that his worship will not be forgotten" (Bascom 81); or "to indicate his anger at the breach of a tabu or to display his freedom to act as he chooses" (Sawyer 53). But in the version that interests Soyinka, they were moulded after the god imbibed too much palm wine, with the result that his "craftsman's fingers slipped badly" (Myth 15), and therefore such people are respected

"because it's understood that they are evidence of the moment of weakness of a god" (Soyinka in Morell 118).

Like abiku, albinos have a further mystique for Soyinka, as he explains in the following reply to the question "What is the function of the albino in your works?": "for me especially in my own private mythology and also for lots of Yoruba people, they [and the other imperfect beings] represent [the] area of transition since they have to breach or cross this gulf over and over again, more than other people" (118-19). Previously to this, he defines what he means by the "area of transition":

> Yoruba metaphysics holds the view of their being three major areas of existence. What you might call the traditional Yoruba sensibility is constantly in touch with and aware of these three. It's the world of the unborn, the world of the dead, and the world of the living. There is a mutual correspondence between these three areas. But I believe there is also a fourth which is not often articulated but which I recognize as implicit. It is not made obviously concrete by the rituals, by the philosophy that is articulated by the Ifa priests. This is the fourth area--the area of transition. It is the chthonic realm, the area of the really dark forces, the really dark spirits, and it also is the area of stress of the human

> will. So many physical symbols keep cropping up as an expression of this area of transition. Now one of them for me is the albino. He is a kind of twilight creature, the albino, and I entered into a feeling with the albino personality very early, from childhood, maybe as a result of knowing and having a rapport with them. There's this feeling of them not being quite of this world; they can't see very much in daylight, they see better in the darkness; they're very fragile; you feel that if you hold them they'll dissolve in your hands. [Compare Kola's impression of Usaye, 49.] And I think it is this which creeps into The Interpreters. . . . It's a kind of spillover of this feeling for the numinous area of transition. (Morell 117-18)

Kola paints Lazarus/Esumare as "an arched figure rising not from a dry grave, but from a primordial chaos of gaseous whorls and flood-waters . . . wreathed in nothing but light, a pure rainbow translucence" (232). Thus, as Egbo says, he "has made the beginning itself a resurrection" (233). With the rainbow bridge creating one continuous whole from the "disjointed fragments" (228) of the presences on the canvas, Kola's completed Pantheon has become a testament to Sekoni's creed, that the plurality of life's manifestations, like the plurality of the godhead, is illusory, and that all is one in

the single dome of existence (122).

Thus The Interpreters, although it presents realistic and satiric descriptions of urban and university life in Nigeria in the early 1960's, is also a mythopoeic novel. Neil McEwan, characterizing it as "African menippea" (67), gives the following description of the menippean world as analysed by Bakhtin:

> complex and unstable, comic, satirical, fantastic, poetical and committed to pursuit of the truth. . . . Fantasy and symbolism are combined with low-life naturalism. Odd vantage points offer changes of scale. . . . Madness, dreams and daydreams, abnormal states of mind and all kinds of erratic inclinations are explored. Scandalous and eccentric behaviour disrupts 'the seemly course of human affairs' and provides a new view of 'the integrity of the world.' Society is very unpredictable; roles can quickly change. Current affairs are treated with a satirical, journalistic interest. Genres are mixed. Stories, speeches, dramatic sketches, poetry and parody are absorbed into the menippean. (McEwan 66)

Egbo's mystic reveries at the Ogun river, Sagoe's fevered dreams of Sir Derinola, the "scandalous and eccentric behaviour" of those in authority as well as of Sagoe and Kola, the symbolism of the Pantheon--all contribute to a new view of

the "integrity of the world" in The Interpreters. The parody of isms in Sagoe's Voidante philosophy and the satiric sketch of the Oguazors' party find their place with Lazarus' exuberant sermon and the lyric imagery that permeates every element of the novel in its pursuit of truth.

The story of Sagoe is narrated satirically; that of Egbo, mythopoeically. These satires are interwoven with the realistic romance of Kola and the tragedy of Sekoni. Bandele is a chorus-figure, the communal voice, the memory of the past, the observer and critic of the present, the prophet of the future. All of these characters and narratives are intricately meshed so that no one strand predominates, each reinforcing and highlighting the others.

But pervading everything is the world-view of Yoruba cosmology, indicating the vantage-point from which the whole must be seen and evaluated. Just as "the dominant social criticism" of John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath "is in no way vitiated by the mythic [Christian] framework into which it is cast" (Ziolkowski 272), the dominant social criticism of Soyinka's Interpreters and of his second novel Season of Anomy, to which we now turn, is substantiated by the mythic prefigurations that both define the characters and transcend the temporal and spatial boundaries of the Nigerian locale.

Season of Anomy

> "[O]ur generation appears to be born into one long crisis" (Ofeyi 6).

Season of Anomy (1973) belongs to that genre that Soyinka has called the literature of social vision, whose most important purpose is "the decongealment of the imaginative function by past or present reality, even in the process of reflecting upon them" (Myth 65). Soyinka maintains that "the reflection of experience is only one of the functions of literature; there is also its extension. And when that experience is social we move into areas of ideological projections, the social vision" (Myth 64). The literature of social vision possesses a "creative concern which conceptualises or extends actuality beyond the purely narrative, making it reveal realities beyond the immediately attainable" (Myth 66).

In the title Season of Anomy and the novel's opening phrase "[a] quaint anomaly," Soyinka establishes the alternatives for Africa (and for mankind): the anomy produced by militaristic capitalism in its "alliance of the purse and the gun" (Season 138) or the anomalous because yet-to-be-tried "progressive communalism" of African socialism (Balogun 525), in which people would live in harmony with nature and with each other. The mythical resonances of the novel, as will be shown, contribute both to this reflection of reality and to its visionary extension.

T.S. Eliot in his 1923 review of James Joyce's Ulysses wrote as follows:

> In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous

> parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. . . . It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. ('Ulysses' 270)

By using the Orpheus-Eurydice myth as a sub-structure in Season and blending it with the Ogun myth, Soyinka draws a parallel with the futility and anarchy of Nigerian life in the late 1960's to attack the "progress" myth of twentieth-century capitalism.

Although Phyllis Pollard sees that Orpheus and Ogun are "both aspects of the same archetype," she insists that Soyinka's model for his protagonist Ofeyi "is not Ogun . . . but Orpheus" and that Season is "a novel about the writer's dilemma rather than a work of ideological commitment, the ultimate powerlessness of Orpheus' song perhaps casting doubt on the powers of the writer to change anything" (84). Stephan Larsen, on the contrary, sees an Ogun figure in Ofeyi, but nowhere in his discussion of the novel does he relate its events to the recent history of Nigeria (Writer 171-80). Joyce Johnston is much more perceptive in recognizing that Soyinka "brings both Ofeyi and Orpheus into an equation with Ogun" (298-99) and that "[c]orrespondences between Ofeyi, Ogun ard Orpheus suggest . . . universal applications for themes

which are given a specific historical focus and cultural relevance within the novel by the constant reminders of events in Nigeria" (299). This viewpoint is also that of the present writer.

To consider Season of Anomy in a historical vacuum is neither defensible nor productive. Soyinka has stated: "Inevitably, I think, every work belongs to a given moment. But then it transcends this because the ideas, the values, which they project are ultimately universal and external values" (Interview with Agetua, When the Man Died 41). Only through an examination of the grounding of Season in "the given moment" of the Nigerian civil war with its prelude and aftermath can one fully comprehend that transcendence.

At this point, a brief chronological outline of the narrative events of Season is required in preparation for an examination of how its events and characters have arisen from "the given moment" and how Soyinka's integration of Yoruba and classical myth contributes to the novel's structure, characterization, and themes.

The setting is an unnamed African country controlled by a military-industrial cartel headed by the "Terrible Quads" (46): a Commandant and three traditional rulers, Zaki Amuri and Chiefs Biya and Batoki. Also powerful is a Cartel-manipulated political party, the Jekú.[13] The protagonist Ofeyi is a publicist for one of the Cocoa Corporations, "regional fronts for a thousand conspiracies of the Cartel"

(50-51). Iriyise, the woman he loves, is the Cocoa Princess, the symbol of all the Corporation's advertising. Through its promotion of its ersatz products cocoa-bix and cocoa-wix, "cocoa-flavoured sawdust" (58), the Corporation has ensured their substitution for nutritious cocoa in the national diet.

When Ofeyi's publicity team is sent to an isolated self-governing community called Aiyéró, he and Iriyise are deeply attracted to Aiyéró's communal philosophy and way of life. From then on, Ofeyi uses his position within the Corporation to subvert the Cartel's aims; for example, he writes subtly satiric songs for the advertising campaigns, songs popularized by the Cocoa Beans orchestra led by his friend Zaccheus. At the same time, Ofeyi activates the dissemination of Aiyéró's ideas through young men from the community who are working throughout the country. By the time that Ofeyi's involvement is realized by those in power, the Cartel has instigated the killing of Aiyéró people in the northern Cross-river area, violence that develops into indiscriminate and wholesale massacres.

Having just set out to tour the Cross-river region at the time of the eruption, Iriyise is kidnapped by the minions of Zaki Amuri, the northern Quad, and is held in a comatose state in an inner cell in Temoko prison, a cell that can be reached only through prison-yards inhabited by lepers and lunatics. Ofeyi's quest to rescue Iriyise that takes him through the hell of Cross-river and of the prison, occupies the second

half of the novel. Departing from the Orpheus-Eurydice paradigm, the novel ends with Iriyise's unconscious form being carried to join the survivors of the massacres on the trek back to Aiyéró.

Although these events and characters are patterned on mythical prefigurations, they arise equally from the conditions in Nigeria preceding and during the civil war of 1967-70. It is necessary to examine this foundation in reality in order to understand the aesthetic and philosophical purposes of the mythical substratum.

In January 1966 a military coup overthrew the First Republic of Nigeria, and a Supreme Military Council was established, with four military governors being appointed, one each for the regions of the North, the West, the Midwest, and the East. Continued political unrest throughout the county precipitated what came to be known as the Minor Massacres in the north at the end of May. A second coup occurred in July, with General Yakubu Gowon then assuming leadership. And the Major Massacres ensued the first week-end of October, beginning in the north but erupting also in the other regions. All of this led eventually to the secession of the East, under the name of the Republic of Biafra, and the consequent civil war.

The personalities and events of Season of Anomy, although not an exact representation of specific personalities and events of that period, arise directly from them and from

Soyinka's response to them. This response is detailed in The Man Died, his account of his war-time twenty-seven-month imprisonment-without-trial. Rightly or wrongly, he believed that the Federal Military Government under Gowon was, at the very least by default, partially responsible for the second wave of massacres. (See The Man Died throughout, especially Chapter XV). Soyinka had witnessed some of the initial carnage in May, having been sent north to renew contact with intellectual colleagues and assess the increasingly-worrisome political situation (Man 164-69). Unable to support either the Gowon administration or the secession of Biafra, for reasons to be explained shortly, Soyinka undertook numerous activities designed first to prevent and then to bring a halt to the war, culminating in a visit to Enugu, the capital of Biafra, three weeks after the fighting had begun. In The Man Died, he summarizes the factors that led to his arrest as follows:

> my denunciation of the war in the Nigerian papers, my visit to the East, my attempt to recruit the country's intellectuals within and outside the country for a pressure group which would work for a total ban on the supply of arms to all parts of Nigeria; creating a third force which would utilize the ensuing military stalemate to repudiate and end both the secession of Biafra, and the genocide-consolidated dictatorship of the Army which made

> both secession and war inevitable. (Man 18)

Explicit references are made in The Man Died to the "profit motif of genocide" (176). Corrupt profiteering among other causes had led to the initial coup that ousted the civilian government, but "assets probes" promised by the new military regime were either halted or never begun. Soyinka asserts that when trade unionists, intellectuals, and newspaper columnists kept insisting on action,

> the civilian and politician profiteers admitted the danger to themselves. There had to be a distraction, and it had to take place on such a level as to completely obscure all other goals of society. The Northern Mafia got together with the Lagos counterparts and contributed the necessary investment for self-preservation. Cold-bloodedly the pogrom was planned, every stage plotted, and the money for operations distributed to the various centres of mayhem. The Ibos, twice victims, were again the most obvious, the most logical victims of this new profit-motivated massacre. (Man 177)

All of this is summed up in Soyinka's blunt assertion: "Genocide was the chosen cure for assets probes" (Man 176). Accordingly, in Season of Anomy, Ofeyi thinks of the victims of the massacre as "scapegoats to lay a false trail of blood away from the altar of the unholy god, Mammon" (105).

The term anomy in the novel's title is an ironic

euphemism, as evident in the following passage from The Man Died:

> ATROCITIES did take place on a scale so vast and so thorough, and so well-organized that it was variously referred to as the Major Massacres (as distinct from the May rehearsals), genocide, and sometimes only as disturbances and--this gem is by Ukpabi Asika--a state of anomy! (119)

The deliberate planning of genocide is depicted in the novel through an incident that shows the collusion of Zaki Amuri with the white-owned Mining Trust through whose activities the land has been "well and truly finished" (123). Amuri deceives an illiterate man into believing, wrongly, that he has been tricked by a southerner into signing away the land of his fathers "to robbers from across the river" (127). This man is then sent to report this treachery to the men of his village, and to have them get ready by taking note of the strangers' homes, work-places, and eating- and drinking-spots, and then to wait "until the Zaki gives you the word" (127). In this way, we are shown how ignorant people are manipulated into perpetrating a massacre designed and organized to destroy any opposition or threat to the oppressive Cartel's power and well-being. At the same time, the contributory role of neo-colonialism to the holocaust is indicated.

It is the activities of men from Aiyéró in "the strongholds of the Cartel"--the Mining Trust, the cement

works, the cotton mills--that have been perceived as a threat (126). The fictional Aiyéró, like the fictional Cartel, has its genesis in a real-life counterpart, an economically-successful, self-governing, Christian commune called Aiyetoro, established in 1947 in the area of Ilaje in the Western State of Nigeria. From this prototype, Soyinka has appropriated the creek-and-lagoon terrain accessible only by boat, and the economic and social prosperity of an egalitarian, sharing society.[14] The Aiyéró of the novel is an offshoot of a seventy-five-year-old fictional Christian commune Aiyétómo, whose foundation Soyinka transposes to the time of the slave-trade. Aiyéró is the "quaint anomaly" in a "profit-hungry society" (2). The idea of Aiyéró--that of a "communal, labouring, sharing entity" (19)--that Ofeyi tries to disseminate in order to undermine "the Cartel's superstructure of robbery, indignities and murder" (27) reflects the communal nature of the actual Aiyetoro, but more importantly shows Soyinka's own ideal for society: "communal organization and true human equality," in which there is no "diminution of any other beings" (Interview with Jeyifo Transition 62). Aiyéró is a symbol, not a blueprint, of the kind of society Soyinka envisions for man. In a 197[illegible] interview, he asserted:

> I believe implicitly in the values of an egalitarian society. . . . An egalitarian society means egalitarianism in justice, in economic welfare in the right of each individual to achieve

> maximum fulfilment. . . . I believe in retaining the means of production and the material benefits of production by the masses of the people. (Interview with Agetua, When the Man Died 41)

Although Aiyéró has accepted technology wholeheartedly, it has rejected all alien belief systems. Its communalism is traditional, not Christian or Marxist. The opening description of it signals that it is not to be equated with a Marxist society: "A definitive guffaw from the radical centres of debate headed by Ilosa, dismissed Aiyéró as the prime example of unscientific communalism, primitive and embarrassingly sentimental" (2). Its founder's decision to abandon Christianity "to return to the religion of our fathers" came from his recognition that the bearers of the faith of the white god "kill, burn, maim, loot and enslave our people" (10). Aiyéró has substituted no single god for the "self-contradictory deity" (10) from which its founder fled, but among other gods it grants Ogun "pride of place" (13). Other details also associate Aiyéró with Ogun. Ogun is the tutelary deity of blacksmiths, and "men come from all over the country to seek the best" from Aiyéró's smithy. The community also has a hunting class, "in case slave-raiders come again," and Ogun is god of hunters. As well, he is associated with the season of harvest, and the first founder of Aiyéró and its subsequent leaders are entitled "custodian of the Grain." Pa Ahime, Chief Minister to the Custodian, stresses that grain

means "not merely food but, germination" (6), and thus creative renewal of life.

As Karin Barber explains, "[t]he Yoruba pantheon contains many figures oddly linked and merging with each other: orisa that are said to be 'the same', and yet not the same, orisa that are partly refractions of each other and partly distinct" ("How Man Makes God" 736). Denis Williams in Icon and Image points out that Ogun, as god of iron, is intimately associated with the cults of Osanjin, the god of medicine, Oginyan, the god of the new yam, and (as we have seen) Erinle, god of the forest (88), as well as with the cult of Oko, the god of agriculture (92). The connection between medicine and the forest is that the herbs and specifics necessary for healing are gathered there, and Ogun's "power over iron dominates the life of the forest (Ogun in his second function)" (Williams 89). It is not strange, then, that the Ogun priest or smith is also sometimes a 'medical' healer (Williams 90). Soyinka's comment in Myth on the oral poetic form Ijala also indicates the close connection of Ogun with the domains of growth and healing:

> The Practitioners of Ijala, the supreme lyrical form of Yoruba poetic art, are followers of Ogun the hunter. Ijala celebrates not only the deity but animal and plant life, seeks to capture the essence and relationships of growing things and the insights of man into the secrets of the universe.

(28)

Williams speaks too of "the generative importance of iron in agricultural communities" (90). Because of all these associations, Ogun is an appropriate god to have "pride of place" in Aiyéró and in the novel with its theme of healing and its metaphorical structuring on the natural growth cycle, two features to be discussed later in this chapter.

The people of Aiyéró follow a way and a philosophy, rather than a religious ideology. The rituals of this farming and fishing community "acknowledge . . . debts to earth and to the sea" (11). Man's ultimate dependence on nature is expressed by the elder Pa Ahime in his reiterated "food is sacred" (194; 215). He elaborates: "[T]he earth is our grounds, the rivers our watering places; if we are contemptuous of them we will look to them in real need some day and find we are rejected" (194). Ofeyi remembers these words when the corpses from the "organized carnage" (193) pollute wells, pools, and rivers.

In Myth, Soyinka describes how the recognition of the symbiosis of the human and natural worlds affects the ordering of communal life:

> Where society lives in a close inter-relation with Nature, regulates its existence by natural phenomena within the observable processes of continuity--ebb and tide, waxing and waning of the moon, rain and drought, planting and harvest--the

> highest moral order is seen as that which guarantees a parallel continuity of the species. We must try to understand this as operating within a framework which can conveniently be termed the metaphysics of the irreducible knowledge of birth and death as the human cycle; the wind as a moving, felling, cleansing, destroying, winnowing force; the duality of the knife as blood-letter and creative implement; earth and sun as life-sustaining verities, and so on. These serve as matrices within which mores, personal relationships, even communal economics are formulated and reviewed. (Myth 52-53)

Aiyéró functions in the cosmic matrix just delineated.

During the funeral ceremonies for the Custodian of the Grain, the sacrifice of fourteen ivory bulls "one for each of the thirteen prior departed founding elders of the town" (14) is a regenerative ritual. The bull in classical mythology is associated with Dionysus, god of vegetation, whom Soyinka views as a twin of Ogun (Myth 158). According to Soyinka, in all religions of vegetation deities, godhead is represented "as inseparable from Nature. . . . Their cults and observances are dedicated to regenerating earth and stimulating growth" ("Introduction," Bacchae ix). Soyinka links such religions with communal values and communal powers, as opposed to the values and power of an elite:

> Land, the primary economy and primary stimulant of communal labour, its mystery of seasonal fluctuation, death and bounty is the natural base of vegetation religions. Material (harvest) benefits which derived from land were identified with spiritual rewards. Where the ritual responsibility for land renewal lay with a small elite, the economic powers of such a minority were limitless. A religion which transferred its ritualism to communal participation and identified self-renewal with the truth of land renewal and food production fed . . . on a long repressed reality. As a social force, its powers were incalculable. ("Introduction" Bacchae ix-x)

The ritual sacrifice of the bulls in Aiyéró incorporates these elements of communal participation and renewal. After preliminary dancing by the various guilds, the bulls are prepared for the sacrifice by a group of young men. Then Pa Ahime, acting as priest, waits to "let the ponderous mass for the dead emit vibrations of abundance, potency and renewal . . . building a force for life within the circle of the pen" (16). Ahime's knife, "blood-letter and creative implement" (Myth 53), opens the red sluices "for the land's replenishment" (Season 17); and all present, including the Custodian just deceased, share in "the essence of the sacrifice" (17), "the sympathetic potency, the healing and

reproductive promise of the earth-bull union" (18). Hence the newly-dead is exhorted to give fertility and health to the earth and to the people of Aiyéró. All of this contrasts with the Cartel's opening of life-annihilating red sluices in the later massacres.

The communal bull-earth ritual contrasts also with the later communal ritual of cursing directed against the Cartel and witnessed by Ofeyi during a tour to observe the conditions of the country. Gborolu is the "planned city" of the Jekú, the political party: "An old, crumbling village, primitive, clannish and locked in decadent rituals of vengeance had been transformed into a clinical exhibition city of factories, colleges and civic contentment" (130). Millions missing from ledgers could always be blamed on this "prototype of the future city. Prototypes are invariably costly" (130). However, Ofeyi is shown "a little-known sector," "the real Gborolu that no man of Jekú dare penetrate" (131). In this "ancient heart" of the city, Ofeyi hears "wraiths of incantation . . . a plaint of anguish and anger, and yet demand and prayer also" (131), that become distinguishable as "a chant of curses and excommunication" (132).

As has been pointed out in the discussion of The Interpreters, in Yorubaland cursing is "a special manner of speaking the truth" (Buckley 141). Moreover, "when the truth which is spoken concerns the future, the act of speaking is understood to have a positive impact upon the events of the

world" (Buckley 141). Awolalu reports that "by means of evil incantations men have been ordered to be paralysed or to run mad; and they have been so" (72). Hence Ofeyi understands that this "collective intensity" of cursing is an attempt to "alter the course of history" (Season 132).

The incense of the ritual is "a blend of Gborolu's herbs and unguents floating on oil exhalations from the burning lamps of hate" (132). Gborolu is noted for its illegal liquor whose potency is famed to come from the quality of the water from its wells, and for "alleged miracles of pharmacy" from "strange fungoid growths" nursed by old women in the "dark damp of fermentation sheds" (131). These details suggest that Gborolu may possess "medicines which allow the individuals who use them to influence events simply by stating what is going to happen" (Buckley 141). Accordingly, the impression of mystical power in the incantatory ritual of cursing is enhanced. Yoruba incantation poetry is called ofọ or oro (Word). It has the "magical and mystical intention to subject the entire universe to man's wishes. In it, therefore, the powers in objects, plants, animals and supernatural beings are summoned and urged to carry out these wishes" (Olatunji 146). The wishes of the people of Gborolu are for the deaths of the Quads and the leaders of Jekú; for example, they chant: "the death of a viper brings joy to the farmer's household--may you bring joy to the heart of Gborolu" (Season 132). As Olatunji explains, "[t]he fact that the expressed assertions are held

to be incontrovertible . . . is the reason, the people believe, why the ofo must operate effectively" (154). Moreover, "the Yoruba believe in the magical effect of repetition" and therefore "invocations, assertions and prayerful appeals are repeated, often thrice, in the incantations" (Olatunji 163). The names of those the speaker wants to be affected are usually inserted in the malefic ofo. Hence, Ofeyi hears "the names, punctuating the curses, over and over again. . . . the Cartel quads, the Jekû leaders" (Season 132).

It is significant that Soyinka locates this episode in a city whose dwellers are among the presumed beneficiaries of the Cartel regime: "For these were the inhabitants of the new dwellings of concrete and glass, among them were the upholders of the new bourgeois conceit" (132), and yet "their need was undeniably pervasive" (133).[15] The need that Soyinka perceives and defends always is that of human dignity. Therefore these materially-privileged city-dwellers are depicted as being sufferers under the Cartel. They have "turned backwards and inwards to this old eternal community of feeling" and seek "to transcend limitations of tramped self and transform it" (133) by cursing "the four-headed beast that trampled their dignity with iron hooves" (132).

Incantation cannot succeed, of course, against the tangible guns of the Cartel, which enforce on Gborolu a peace that is like the coma of Iriyise, "a wax composure, a dead

composition of serenity" (133). In contrast, the life-renewing ritual in Aiyéró has inspired Ofeyi to initiate his scheme for "the birth of the new man" (19).

Although Aiyéró has its genesis in the actual Aiyetoro, the attempted dissemination of its communal idea has its real-life parallel in the abortive Third Force that Soyinka, among others, hoped could rescue Nigeria from its state of civil war. This movement "tried to find a more ideological basis for reconstructing the entire society and obliterating the tribalistic lines which formed the original context of that war" (Soyinka in Morell 112). The proponents of the Third Force agreed that building a socialist state was the only alternative for Nigeria. In Soyinka's words at the time: "We need a Third Force which thinks in terms of a common denominator for the people" (<u>The Man Died</u> 178). This movement therefore repudiated not only the military government in Lagos which was "founded on a . . . genocidal event" (Soyinka in Morell 112), but also the Biafran secession, with the result that several of the leaders, including Victor Banjo, were executed by the Biafran side. Ofeyi's argument for using the men of Aiyéró as a movement to counteract the Cartel reflects the motivation of the Third Force in opposing the Federal Government: "The storm was sown by the Cartel. . . . Unless we can turn the resulting whirlwind against them, we are lost" (<u>Season</u> 24). Similarly, the Third Force's opposition to the Biafran secession is replicated in the novel in the words of

Chalil Raman, an Asian doctor who has worked for years in Cross-river. After the massacres, he tells Ofeyi: "I know only the problems of the Cross-river people. They need the rest of the country, maybe down there you feel you don't need them. But they need you" (229). Ofeyi agrees: "And that is sufficient reason for us not to give up what we tried to do" (230).

What Ofeyi has tried to create through the men of Aiyéró, and especially at the Shage dam project, is "working communities" with "working-class kinships as opposed to the tribal" (170). Initially, after the funeral of the Custodian of the Grain, he has persuaded the Cocoa Corporation to allow him to begin a new plantation in the rich earth of Aiyéró in order to film a documentary on the cocoa plant "from seed to ripening" (20). The purpose behind this is to produce a subversive film using the Cartel's technical facilities, in order

> not merely to effect restitution to many but to create a new generation for the future. . . . Ofeyi envisioned the parallel progress of the new idea, the birth of the new man from the same germ as the cocoa seed, the Aiyéró ideal disseminated with the same powerful propaganda machine of the Cartel throughout the land. (19)

This use of the Cartel's technology for a revolutionary purpose is an Ogun-like action. However, the Cartel becomes

suspicious of Ofeyi's work and sends him abroad on an extended study leave. On his return, Ofeyi resumes his effort to transform society, this time working through the men of Aiyéró who are scattered in every factory and industry in "nearly all of the major towns" (27). He dreams of "a new concept of labouring hands across artificial frontiers, the concrete, affective presence of Aiyéró throughout the land" (27). In thus attempting to diffuse the values of Aiyéró throughout the country, Ofeyi is attempting to repeat Ogun's mission of reuniting the gods with men.

It is only after the massacres and the abduction of Iriyise that Ofeyi becomes an Orpheus figure as well as an Ogun one. The Orpheus-Eurydice model provides a distancing device that has enabled Soyinka to recreate fictionally the all-too-real horrors through which he and his country had so recently passed.[16] Soyinka himself speaks of his "deliberate distancing of a familiar physical terrain" through "utilization of a myth from as remote a culture as Asia" and of the "obvious literary signification" of the "creation of a different language--an alien myth--interworking with the personages of the action on local grounds" ("Critic and society" 46).

In co-opting the Orpheus-Eurydice narrative as a structuring device for the second half of Season of Anomy, Soyinka has also exploited a complementarity of African and Euro-Asian myth. Just as some Western writers have conflated

Orpheus with Christ (Strauss 12), Soyinka conflates Orpheus with Ogun through Dionysus. As has already been noted, Soyinka perceives Dionysus and Ogun as twin archetypes, whom he uses "interchangeably . . . as symbol of the destructive-creative unity of Nature" ("Between Self and System" 69). Orpheus, Walter A. Strauss tells us, "as a native of Thrace . . . was from the very beginning associated with the cult of Dionysus. . . . In his many wanderings he introduced the cult of Dionysus wherever he went" (5). Similarly, Ofeyi sets out to spread the way of Aiyéró whose most-revered god is Ogun.

Strauss summarizes three major moments in the Orpheus myth (6), all of which have counterparts in the Ogun myth and all of which Soyinka replicates in the life of Ofeyi. Orpheus as "singer-prophet capable of establishing harmony in the cosmos" (Strauss 6) is paralleled by Ogun whose world is "the world of craft, song and poetry" (Myth 28), and who re-established harmony by reuniting the gods with man. Ofeyi, through his music, attempts to subvert the Cartel and establish the way of Aiyéró, and through his rescue of Iriyise begins a restoration of harmony. Ofeyi's poetic power, Ogun-like, is both creative and destructive. When it serves the Cartel, it is destructive of the people. When it is re-directed, it becomes destructive of the Cartel and creative for the people.

Secondly, Orpheus' descent into Hades to recover Eurydice is paralleled by Ogun's terrible passage through the cosmic

abyss and by Ofeyi's nightmare journey through the violence-ravaged Cross-river territory and into the deepest recesses of Temoko prison to restore Iriyise to Aiyéró. The third important "moment" in the Orpheus myth, dismemberment, is paralleled by the experience of Ogun in "the process of being literally torn asunder in cosmic winds" (Myth 30). It is reflected in Ofeyi's witnessing of the physical dismemberment of the human victims of violence and in his resulting psychological dismemberment from which, like Ogun, he must rescue himself "from the precarious edge of total dissolution by harmonising the untouched part of himself, the will" (Myth 30).

Like Ofeyi, Iriyise is prefigured by both classical and African archetypes. In the narrative structure, her role is that of Eurydice. The beloved of Ofeyi/Orpheus, she is abducted through the agency of the salesman-spy Aristo/Aristaeus and carried off to the Hades of Temoko, presided over by its club-footed governor Karaun/Charon and guarded by the giant mute Suberu/Cerberus. But the African meaning of the name Iriyise, "dew on the feet" (Izevbaye 248), identifies her as earth-goddess, and in this role she becomes a thematic symbol.

The earth-goddess identification begins during the initial visit to Aiyéró, where Iriyise takes to the community "as a new organism long in search of its true element" (3). On the second visit she spends much time with the old women,

"getting to know the heart-beat of this earth of ours" (7), as Ahime tells Ofeyi. When the new cocoa plantation is begun, she works with the women "weaving fronds for the protection of the young nursery" (20) and splices wounded saplings "with the ease of a natural healer" (20). When, as Cocoa Princess, she dances the "dance of the young shoot" at Shage, where "the men of Aiyero sowed their seeds in the soil of the new communal entity" (88), Iriyise feels a "prolonged sensation of climbing out of her skin into a rainstorm, sprouting leaves and fresh buds from neck and fingers, shaking her hair free of dead leaves and earth and absorbing light and air through every pore" (41). After Ofeyi has seen the devastation of death at Shage, the memory that "Iriyise danced here" (175) is both a mockery of his hopes and his only resource against despair.

Like the water-goddess figures discussed in Chapter II, Iriyise as earth-goddess is beautiful, strangely "other," and magnetically attractive. As Cocoa Princess, the epithet by which she is popularly known is "Celestial." Ofeyi's thoughts show his awareness of the quality of "otherness" in her. When she has just been inducted by the women of Aiyero, he feels excluded by the "transparent numinous excitement" flushing her face, and thinks: "how little I know of her, how very little after all" (7). On other occasions, he realizes that "Iriyise could be raised in a foundling home and there would only be differences of detail in her, not of essential nature" (67), and that there are times when "however briefly, with that

transience that was a seal of truth on its own nature, Iriyise would reveal within her person a harrowing vision of the unattainable" (82).

In the latter instance, Ofeyi's prefatory thought is that "[v]ision is eternally of man's own creating" (82). When Iriyise is imprisoned, Isolo Demakin, the Dentist, is as determined as Ofeyi to rescue her as a necessary symbol of the revolutionary vision: "pimps, whores, thieves, and a thousand other felons are the familiar vanguard of the army of change. When the moment arrives a woman like Iriyise becomes for them a Chantal, a Deborah, torch and standard-bearer, super-mistress of universal insurgence" (219). From this perspective, she is the appropriate mate for the revolutionary Ofeyi-Ogun. Her coma, then, as Ofeyi perceives, resembles the condition of the country's people from which they must be aroused: "abdication of the will, resignation, withdrawal or enforced withdrawal . . . the half-death state of inertia, neither-nor, sensing but unaffecting, the ultimate condition of the living death" (306). The stirring of life in the forests as Iriyise re-emerges from Temoko-Hades signifies her individual recovery, the re-birth of earth's fertility, and a promised revitalizing of the revolutionary vision of Aiyéró. And in rescuing the earth-goddess whose spirit is "indissoluble . . . from the soil of Aiyéró" (25), Ofeyi has truly become Custodian of the Grain, the responsibility foreseen for him by his predecessor.

These prefigurations of Ofeyi and Iriyise as harvest-god and earth-goddess are integrated with the novel's structural device of the earth's self-perpetuating cycle of natural growth to embody the novel's theme of regeneration. The five sections of the novel are entitled "Seminal," "Buds," "Tentacles," "Harvest," and "Spores." Each title has a double significance, referring simultaneously to the two opposing forces, Aiyéró and the Cartel, the healthy growth of the Aiyéró idea preparing for a harvest of communal well-being, and the parasitical growth of the Cartel producing a harvest of death. Implicit in this structure, too, is the creative-destructive principle, the Ogun essence.

The third element that asserts and reinforces the theme of regeneration is the controversy over methods of healing that is threaded through the narrative, appearing mainly in arguments between Ofeyi and two characters not yet discussed: Isola Demakin, known as the Dentist, and the Asian girl Taiila, both of whom Ofeyi first meets in an airport during his enforced European sojourn and whom he re-encounters after returning home. The patient to be healed is the diseased society. The Dentist advocates action through selective assassination; Taiila counsels the contemplative embracing of the infinite to perfect the individual who may then radiate a healing beauty (99). In these conflicting attitudes, the Dentist and Tailla are an embodiment of the complementary Yoruba principles of Ogun and Obatala, whose ritual dramas

Soyinka characterizes respectively as "the drama of acting man" and "the drama of suffering spirit" (Myth 152).

Obatala, syncretized by Yoruba myth with Orisa-nla, is, in Soyinka's words, "god of purity," and "the serene womb of chthonic reflections (or memory), a passive strength awaiting and celebrating each act of vicarious restoration of his primordial being" (Myth 143). The state to which Taiila aspires is like "the acceptance and wisdom of Obatala in which faith is rested, not on the self, but on a universal selfhood to which individual contributions are fundamentally meaningless. It is the faith of 'knowing', the enigmatic wisdom of spiritual serenity" (Myth 154). She tells Ofeyi:

> I know that everything is linked. . . . And I am striving to obtain a glimpse of the entire network. I know I will arrive at a state of detached consciousness where I shall stand aside and comprehend it all in one instant. Even if it lasts only one moment, it will be enough for me. (Season 100)

Accordingly, she sees the ultimate beauty in the life of a nun: "To spend a whole life in self-preparation for that moment of perception of the infinite. To perceive, understand and be at peace" (100). And she yearns "to draw the world within her inward peace" (97).[17]

Moreover, Taiila's actions reflect a further aspect of the Obatala essence. The "province of Obatala," Soyinka says,

is the "sympathetic need to be redeemed by evidence of love and human contact, by extension of the self into recognisable entities and other units of potential consciousness" (Myth 153). In a church where a group of refugees are being hidden, Taiila cradles the head of a dying woman. When she rises from "that hard death-bed," Ofeyi sees in her eyes "oceans of sadness, reflecting a suffering that he had not thought possible in one so young" (271). Like Obatala, she is "the embodiment of the suffering spirit of man, uncomplaining, agonized, full of the redemptive qualities of endurance and martyrdom" (Myth 152). Obatala's beauty is "enigmatic, expressive only of the resolution of plastic healing through the wisdom of acceptance. Obatala's patient suffering is the well-known aesthetics of the saint" (Myth 143). Taiila, "the Asian enigma" (Season 22), claims that what heals is the beauty that healers "radiate from their own persons" (99), and therefore a nun is "a form of healer" (99).

Ofeyi, as an Ogun figure, understands that there may be different ways of healing. In the following lines of a praise-chant for Ogun quoted by Soyinka in Myth, opposite methods of healing are attributed to Ogun:

> To rescue slaves he unleashed the judgement of war
> Because of the blind, plunged into the forest
> Of curative herbs. . . .
> . . . .
> Salutations O lone being, who bathes in rivers of

blood. (<u>Myth</u> 26-27)

Soyinka comments on these lines: "Yes, the blood is never completely absent, but at least we know that this is not simply due to bloodthirstiness" (<u>Myth</u> 27). In response to Taiila, Ofeyi reminds her that

> healing takes many forms. There is the way fire heals. And the way wind heals by tearing down and blowing dirt into the void. Even if one is blinded by too sudden and too much light, it reveals inner truth. I also seek beauty, but that kind which has been tested and stressed. Only such beauty lasts. (<u>Season</u> 99)

Radiating beauty passively is a function of Obatala; testing and stressing are Ogun functions. Taiila and the Dentist are not, as Ofeyi jokingly suggests, "good angel on one side, bad angel on the other" (25), but the complementary Obatala-Ogun essences of himself. The ritual of Obatala is "a drama in which the values of conflict or the revolutionary spirit are excluded, attesting in their place the adequacy and certainty of a harmonious resolution which belongs in time and human faith. It is antithetical to the tragic challenge of Ogun in man" (<u>Myth</u> 152).

Ahime may also be seen as an Obatala figure, in the sense that at first he is content for Aiyéró to live to itself, "untouched . . . by the plight of the rest of mankind" (6), on the grounds that "Evangelism is a form of aggression" (6).

Ahime, Ofeyi thinks, is like the canoe paddle "creating motion within himself and within his environment without a hint of stress, without disrupting the pristine balances" (92). Like Taiila, Ahime sees value in passive suffering: "If it is given for the men of Aiyero to be the sacrifice . . . it was a good cause" (105). Ofeyi rejects this concept of sacrifice: "Not sacrifice . . . only more scapegoats to lay a false trail of blood away from the altar of the unholy god, Mammon" (105). But Ahime, too, in the event, becomes active. He travels into the depths of Cross-river to lead the survivors home to the sanctuary and renewal offered by Aiyéró.

A single sentence identifies the Dentist as an Ogun-figure: "Youthful as he looked, a lonely concentration of the will to action within his own person rendered him grave and aged" (108). Like Ofeyi, he has come to Aiyéró from the outside (216) and has been profoundly influenced by it to work for change in the world, but he seeks to effect healing by way of violence--"extraction before infection" (92), "clean, drastic surgery" (109); in other words, "selective assassinations" (117). In practice, the Dentist's attempt at instant elimination of all four of the Quads is betrayed (217); and relatives of oppressive agents of the Cartel, such as a seven-year-old boy and a nursing sister, become victims of an "operation" (110) of vengeful violence.

Nevertheless, the contrasting methods of healing, like the Obatala and Ogun essences, are shown to be complementary

rather than opposed. Ahime reminds Ofeyi that "[t]he founding history of Aiyéro had its roots in violence" (23). And although Ofeyi prefers the way of education, he concedes that "the sowing of any idea these days can no longer take place without accepting the need to protect the young seedling, even by violent means" (23). Even so, for a long time Ofeyi struggles against becoming an accessory to the Dentist's efforts, not wanting to advise on which Quad should be eliminated first. Interestingly, one version of the Orpheus myth reports that Orpheus "preached the evil of sacrificial murder to the men of Thrace" (Graves I:112).

Ofeyi believes that Aiyéró possesses some healing essence that inoculates its children "against the poison of places like Ilosa, against temptations such as the Cartel can offer" (24). Not content with accepting this healing for himself alone, he seeks to procure it for his compatriots: "the healing essence which soothes one individual or some stray dog that happens to wander into Aiyéró [like Ofeyi himself] is not enough for the bruises of others I know of. They require a very different form of healing" (24). After the peaceful effort at healing has unleashed all the destructive forces of the Cartel against the men of Aiyéró, Ofeyi wonders how healers are created, whether they are "[w]itch-cauldroned from the womb or stressed to a tensile purity by experience, by a slow painful self-crucifying search through life" (195). As a child, he was told by a madman with healing power that he

too could be a healer (150). He is certain of the world's need of healers: "If they are not found at will then events must bring them forth, the terrible individual needs" (195). But he is puzzled as to what kind of healers can cure "the tumoured belly of humanity with its periodic seepage of pus and bile into the living streams of earth" (195). Hence he questions: "Ahime? Healer in magic insulation against such pervasive evil?" (195).

The novel seems to suggest that the destructive way of the Dentist and the creative way of Ofeyi are both necessary for the regeneration of Society. It requires both the Dentist's incitement of a prison riot and Ofeyi's power of language to effect the rescue of Iriyise. Both energies will be required to realize the vision of Aiyéró. Elsewhere, Soyinka has indicated his belief that violence is sometimes necessary. In The Man Died, he asserts: "A war, with its attendant human suffering, must, when that evil is unavoidable, be made to fragment more than buildings: it must shatter the foundations of thought and re-create" (183). F. Odun Balogun reports that in a 1987 Ogun State television interview, Soyinka "states his belief in the right of people to use violence, if occasion demands it, to overthrow a reactionary government" (511).

In itself, the Dentist's method is not healing but it may be a necessary preparation for healing. He admits that he has no creative vision for society, as Ofeyi has, telling him:

"Beyond the elimination of men I know to be destructively evil, I envisage nothing. What happens after is up to people like you" (112). Therefore the Dentist represents solely the destructive half of the Ogun essence. Only Ofeyi's creative methods linked with his destructive ones can achieve a cure. The Dentist therefore insists that in the future they must "complement each other" (219). Ofeyi shows that he has accepted that necessity when he and Taiila's brother Chalil are engaged in rescuing a second-generation citizen of Cross-river whose family has already been annihilated by Cross-river indigenes. Ofeyi tells Chalil, "Shoot to heal," meaning that he should shoot to kill the attacker because it is the victim who is Chalil's patient (251).

At the end of the novel, Ofeyi joins forces with the Dentist on the trek back to Aiyéró. When Taiila had argued earlier that Ofeyi was trapped on his "violent circumference," he replied that for some "[m]ire and mud . . . are the paths to beauty and peace" (97-98). Ofeyi had momentarily been tempted to marry Taiila "and forget the outer chaos" (238), to choose "the infectious calm" rather than continue with "the turbulent quest which would go beyond the finding of Iriyise" (340). But despite his act of will in choosing the quest, he recognizes the truth of Taiila's assertion: "I on my radials, you on your laterals Ofeyi, we are bound to cross again and again because we are seeking the same goal of quietude, which is the centre of the web" (239). As Ofeyi turns to follow the

Dentist and the seemingly-lifeless form of Iriyise, he sends a message to Taiila: "[T]ell her we'll meet again at the next intersection" (320). The ultimate goal is the same, but the paths must be different. Hence, Soyinka's narrative invokes the metaphysical import of Yoruba ritual drama:

> Obatala's 'Passion' play, is only the plastic resolution of Ogun's tragic engagement. The Yoruba metaphysics of accommodation and resolution could only come after the passage of the gods through the transitional gulf, after the demonic test of the self-will of Ogun the explorer-god in the creative cauldron of cosmic powers. (Myth 145)

Although on the narrative level the Aiyéró idea has suffered defeat, as it did in Nigerian reality, the permanence of that defeat is denied by the novel in several ways. For Ahime, the trek back to Aiyéró is "a cleansing act" to "purify our present polluted humanity and cure our survivors of the dangers of self-pity" (218). For the Dentist it "marks the route, for a more determined return" (218). The journey of purification and strengthening becomes, then, another regeneration ritual.

Secondly, the Temoko trusty Suberu voluntarily leaves the prison and joins the Aiyéró trek. In Ofeyi's words, Suberu has been one whose mind has been trapped by "the deadly exploitation" in "one lifelong indenture to emptiness" (316) and who thus behaves like "the privileged slave who will place

manacles" on the "held-out wrists" of his companions. Without people like Suberu, the exploiters like Amuri "could not trample down humanity with such insolence" (316). The breaking of Suberu's psychological bonds through the beauty of Iriyise and the words of Ofeyi suggests the possibility of people's awakening from their condition of unquestioning subservience to the Cartel.

In the freeing of Suberu through the efficacy of Oeyi's words, Soyinka blends the Orpheus myth with the Yoruba concept of the healing power of incantation, as explained by Dan Izevbaye:

> there is a close link between the poetic names of herbs and their healing properties. This has often been used to support the theory that the poetic phrases in incantations are not merely puns but were originally verbal definitions of the curative properties in the herbs used. If tranquilizers used in the treatment of madmen are associated with images and puns in poetry, it is not difficult to see how the practice of healing makes possible the myth about the power of poetry to humanize the man of violence. ("Soyinka's Black Orpheus" 245)

The verbal images with whose incantations Ofeyi charms Suberu from his mental imprisonment are those of traditional wisdom: "The milk rots in the coconut if left too long. The child rots in the womb if it exceeds nine months, or else it emerges

a monster--isn't that what your own people say?" (Season 315-16). Like the assertions in curses, these are unassailable truths, spoken to reveal to Suberu the truth of his own condition.

The final sentence of the novel is one of revitalization: "In the forests, life began to stir" (320). Soyinka refuses to despair of or for humanity, claiming that he has "faith in the redemptive potential of any society" ("Between Self and System" 61). While Ofeyi looks at a child's floor-and-wall drawings in the refugees' church sanctuary, he remembers another church full of worshipping people that he has seen sealed and torched (197-201), and he thinks of the "ash-shrouded catacombs of the future" (274) that may be unearthed by archaeologists as was Massada "a brave self-immolation that slept for a thousand years" (271). In this way Soyinka reminds the reader of the perpetual re-enactment of man's inhumanity to man. Similarly, when Ofeyi seeks recovery and wisdom at Ahime's "well of restoration" in Aiyéró, after learning of the massacres and Iriyise's abduction, he becomes aware both of the cyclical recurrences of history and of the necessity of intervening somehow to re-direct the process: "The pool stank of history. Slaves, gold, oil. The old wars. . . . .. this violent, untimely cycle of waste renewed a demand for transformation" (90). Although the "refutation of change brought moments of despair" (91), he refuses to accept the "statement of immutability" (91) suggested by the camouflaging

of any entrance to or egress from the pool: "The regenerative powers were only jealously contained within the pool, hidden but attainable, awaiting only the rightful challenger. It awaited only the precise trigger to arouse it to its function within convulsive, rock-blasting, honing tides" (91).

Although Soyinka recognizes the cyclic repetitions of history, he refuses to countenance their immutability. He explains his attitude as follows:

> the moment of a mouthful of the ashes of defeat has been repeated millions of times in every corner of the world. It often ends, in real life, at the point of disintegration. My social temperament does not permit me to accept this curtailment of the process, hence my adoption of Ogun, and the reason why I point out the continuing cycle of this human experience. ("Who's afraid?" 119)

The passage of time, for Soyinka, does not ensure progress:

> For this consoling potential of the future is also double-edged, being both a potential for good or evil, for retrogression or progress, for reactionary consolidation or radical recreativeness. History proves continuously that there is no certainty which will emerge as the ultimate direction, even from identical sets of circumstances. (The Man Died 174-75)

For this reason, humanity needs Ogun heroes to reverse the

disintegrative process at the moment of complete despair:

> This is the moment of tragedy. But the human spirit constantly overrides the negative side of it, not always, but those who inspire us ultimately are those who succeed in overcoming the moment of despair, those who arise from the total fragmentation of the psyche, the annihilation of even their ego, and yet succeed in piecing them together, piece the rubble together to emerge and enrich us by that example. ("Introduction" Six Plays, with Jeyifo xvii-xviii)

In the contemporary context, Ogun is "the god of revolution" Myth 54n), through which humanity may change course: "Action is exercise of will. Revolutionary action is the ultimate expression of will, an assertion of the human intellect as instrument of choice, change, self-destination" (Interview with Jeyifous, Transition 42 (1973): 63).[18]

Ogun's road, then, as Soyinka calls it in his poem "Idanre," is "a 'Mobius' orbit" (Idanre 85), for in the ring called the Mobius strip[19] Soyinka finds a mathematical symbol of Ogun as agent of revolutionary change, a "symbol of optimism as it gives the illusion of a 'kink' in the circle and a possible centrifugal escape from the eternal cycle of karmas that has become the evil history of man" (Idanre 87-88). Therefore the "very simple figure of aesthetic and scientific truths and contradictions . . . is the symbol of

Ogun in particular, and an evolution from the tail-devouring snake which he sometimes hangs around his neck and symbolizes the doom of repetition" (Idanre 88). In this connection, Soyinka also gives a positive significance to the myth of the slave Atooda (also called Atunda) who "created the multiple godhead" (Idanre 87) by rolling a rock down on the single primal deity Orisa-nla: "even if the primal cycle were of good and innocence, the Atooda of the world deserve praise for introducing the evolutionary 'kink'" (Idanre 88).

All of Soyinka's pronouncements and actions testify to this credo of hope: "It is because I believe that the forces of history may be confronted that I believe in social and political action" (Interview with Jeyifous, Transition 42 (1973): 63). Therefore, he has presented the fictional community of Aiyéró as one that "works, it is upright and balanced" (8) because human beings, if they so will it, can create such a world. It was in an act of "total and profound hubristic assertiveness" that Ogun "not only dared to look into transitional essence but triumphantly bridged it with knowledge, with art, with vision and the mystic creativity of science" (Myth 157). Through his literary transvaluations of Ogun, Soyinka keeps telling us that we can do the same.

A problem with Season of Anomy for some readers is that the characters, carrying such a weight of historical and mythical significance, never come alive as credible individuals. The villains, such as Chief Biga and Karaun, are

grotesques; Iriyise and Taiila, as women, are male fantasies, so that when Ofeyi first sees Taiila in the airport, he imagines that she is Iriyise. Ofeyi himself is both a staging-ground for conflicting viewpoints and a perspective through which incidents widely separated in time and place can be focused and presented. At no time in the novel does he have the clear individuality and living presence of any one of the protagonists in The Interpreters. Only a character like Zaccheus, who has to assume no meaning except his own existence as band-leader and friend of Ofeyi, comes alive as a human being. After his escape from Cross-river, Zaccheus' loyal affection for Ofeyi drags him back into that Hades, protesting all the way but stubbornly refusing to allow his friend to brave the danger alone. What little humour exists in this grim novel comes mainly through Zaccheus.

But ultimately, Season of Anomy is a philosophical work, a novel not of characters but of ideas, particularly the idea of Ogun. In the 1974 interview already referred to, Soyinka explains very clearly his "fascination" with Ogun whom he speaks of in this instance as "the symbol figure of my society." The following words, spoken shortly after the publication of the novel, sum up the meaning of Ogun in Season of Anomy:

> He represents this duality of man; the creative, destructive aspect. And I think this is the reality of society, the reality of man, and that

one would be foolish not to recognise this. I cannot sentimentalize revolution. I recognise the fact that it very often represents loss. But at the same time I affirm that it is necessary to accept the confrontations which society creates, to anticipate them and try to plan a programme in advance before them.. The realism which pervades some of my work and which has been branded pessimistic is nothing but a very square, sharp look. . . . I think one should not promise what is not there. Only one thing can be guaranteed and this is the principle of accepting the challenges of life, of society in the same way as nature does. . . . we must all accept the negative potential of action and then transcend this. And this is why I use Ogun as a representative symbol because it represents the Promethean reality of our existence. (Interview with John Agetua in When the Man Died 39).

Notes

1. **Seven Tenets of Orile-Orisa**

OBATALA FULFILS. Purity, love, transparency of heart. Stoical strength. Luminous truth. Man is imperfect; man strives towards perfection. Yet even the imperfect may find interior harmony with Nature. Spirit overcomes blemish--be it of mind or body. Oh peace that giveth understanding, possess of our human heart.

TWO: SEEK understanding of the signpost of existence. Is knowledge not within and around us? If the Supreme Fount of Thought sought counsel of ORUNMILA in the hour of crisis, why will you by-pass the seer of signposts, O seeker of knowledge? Wisdom may slumber on the gums of infants--lucky that man who patiently awaits the loosening of infant tongues. IFA maps the course through shrouded horizons.

THREE: OGUN set the example: follow. Virtue wears the strangest garb--comradeship in strife, meditation in solitude, the hardy route of self-sacrifice . . . Life is multiple and strange. The death of fear liberates the will that sets forth where no mind ever trod. OGUN liberates: Rise beyond his shadow.

FOUR: JUSTICE is the mortar that kneads the dwelling-place of man. Can mere brick on brick withstand the bloodied cries of wrong from the aggrieved? No more than dark withstands the flare of lightning, roofs of straw the path of thunderbolts. SANGO restores.

FIVE: HONOUR to ANCESTORS. If blood flows in you, tears run, bile courses, the soft planet of brain pulses with thought and sensing, and earth consumes you in the end, then you, with your ancestors, are one with the fluid elements. If the beast knows what herbs of the forest are his friends, what plea shall man make that boasts superior knowledge, yet knows no empathy with moisture of the air he breathes, the juice of leaves, the sap in his roots to earth or the waters that nourish his being? Man may speak OYA, OSUN, ORISA-OKO . . . yet mind and spirit encompass more than a litany of names. Knowledge is ORISA.

SIX: ORISA preaches Community: Found it! This no honest men will deny: man has failed the world or the world has failed mankind. Then question further: What faiths and realms of values have controlled our earth till now? And next: since their gods have failed, may ours not yield forgotten ways that remedy?

SEVEN: THE WILL of man is placed beyond surrender. Without

the knowing of him by man, can Deity survive? O hesitant one, Man's conceiving is fathomless; his community will rise beyond the present reaches of the mind. ORISA reveals Destiny as SELF-DESTINATION.

[Obatala, Orunmila, Ogun, Sango, Oya, Osun, Orisa-Oko are deities in the Yoruba traditional religious pantheon. Orisa severally implies deity, divinity or the unified, monistic godhead.] (WEST AFRICA May 18, 1987: 964: republished from Positive Review by Kole Omotoso)

2. See Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike, Toward the Decolonization of African Literature (Washington, D.C.: Howard UP, 1981).

3. "Babalawo, i.e. literally, 'fathers of the secret,' in other words, guardians of the word" (Irele, "The African Imagination" 55).

4. "Sometimes translated 'praise poetry,' oriki are actually equivalent to names--names which can indicate undesirable qualities as well as desirable and which are seen as being in some way the key to a subject's essential nature. By uttering a subject's oriki, one is calling upon or unlocking hidden powers; the activity of naming is thought of as being effectual. . . . Spiritual beings are invoked and empowered by the utterance of their oriki." (Barber 503)

5. Richard Priebe reports that "Kofi Awoonor is fond of saying that there is not one novel here [in The Interpreters] but five or six novels, each with its own plot and protagonist" (Myth and Realism 81).

6. A slightly different version of the discussion of the five protagonists of The Interpreters has been published under the title "'To Dare Transition': Ogun as Touchstone in Wole Soyinka's The Interpreters" in Research in African Literatures 20 (1989): 60-71.

7. Noah is an alter-ego of both Egbo and Kola, just as Joe Golder is of Egbo and Peter of Sagoe. These relationships are discussed in detail in the present writer's essay "The Second Self as Vision of Horror in Wole Soyinka's The Interpreters," in Black American Literature Forum 22 (1988): 753-65.

8. The anglicizing of Yoruba names can cause misinterpretation. The Ogun river has no connection with the god Ogun. The two words are pronounced and written differently in Yoruba.

9. Adire: dyed cloth. The oriki of Ogun: the chant of Ogun's praise-names.

10. Iron, as the symbol of Ogun, is "used voluntarily in law courts in Yorubaland for the taking of oaths by witnesses to affirm that the truth will be told" (Adeboye Babalola, "A Portrait of Ogun as Reflected in Ijala Chants," as quoted in Barnes Africa's Ogun 150).

11. See the present writer's article "The Second Self" for a detailed explication of these parallels between Joe Golder and Egbo.

12. According to New Religious Movements in Nigeria, edited by Rosalind I.J. Hackett, there are approximately 1500 distinct indigenous religious movements in that country. Moreover, leaders of at least two of these "are regarded by their followers as God" (West Africa 18 July 1988:1295).

13. Nigeria, whether under civilian or military government, has retained a role for its traditional ethnic rulers, some of whom have also held regional or national office. Three of the "Terrible Quads" of the novel have the titles of traditional rulers but the country is clearly under the rule of the army. In a June 1966 conversation reported in The Man Died, Soyinka denigrates three of the first four military governors, referring to the eastern one as "a ceremonial fop," and the northern one as "the polo-playing drunk," adding, "I don't care much for your Mid-West man either." (170)

14. Other similarities between the actual community of Aiyetoro and the fictional communities of Aiyétómò and Aiyéró are as follows: the holding of all property in common; the paying of taxes annually in one sum for the whole populace; technological development and economic prosperity; boat-building and fishing as important sources of income; the fame of the smithy; the sending of the community's young men out to acquire the skill of new industries; being an object of sociological studies; a founding history rooted in violence. (See E.M. McLelland, 1966; Stanley R. Barratt, 1977).

The community of Aiyetoro "had established, within the first 25 years of its existence, hospitals, a fishing industry, a shoe factory, a textile factory, a bakery, tailoring and laundry services, a cabinet workshop, an electrical department, an internal telephone service, pipe-borne water, a water and land transport system, a technical school, a secondary school, a primary school, a kindergarten school and an adult education programme (Omoyajowo, 175; 88; Barrett, 1977: 2-4)" (Mbon, Friday M. "The social impact of Nigeria's new religious movements" in Beckford, James A.

New Religious Movements 184).

By 1969 Aiyetoro had a population of over 1200 (Barrett, "Introduction" The Rise and Fall of an African Utopia).

15. Although Nigeria had no totally planned city at the time of the writing of Season of Anomy (the decision to create the new capital of Abuja being arrived at only in 1976), the description of Gborolu's "geometric bungalows and high-walled state of welfare being" invokes the sheltered modernity and exclusivity of many government residential areas in large Nigerian cities.

16. With regard to the necessity of the African writer's distancing himself from the turmoil of his country, Kofi Awoonor in 1972 spoke as follows:

> The more we stay in Africa, the more we get drawn into raw conflicts that surround us, the less sensitive, the less aware, the less sharp our work will be. I defy Chinua Achebe to be able to write anything at all on the Biafran conflict which will be first rate. I do not think he will be able to do it. I have seen a few poems he has written, and I liked the lyricism as well as the concern, but they remain for me too anguished to be literature. (Palaver 59)

17. According to Dan Izevbaye, the name Taiila is Sanskrit for oil and thus "Taiila stands for the soothing power of restorative oil" ("Soyinka's Black Orpheus" 250).

18. Sandra Barnes in Ogun: An Old God for a New Age declares: "No other supernatural figure lends itself as appropriately as a symbol of civil unrest and revolt as Ogun" (44). The value of the cult of Ogun, as she sees it, is that it "concentrates on uncontrollable human power that threatens to disrupt the social order, and ideologically transforms it into supernatural power that can, instead, be used to maintain social order" (30).

19. In his notes to "Idanre," Soyinka describes the Mobius strip as "[a] mathe-magical ring, infinite in self-recreation into independent but linked rings and therefore the freest conceivable (to me) symbol of human or divine (e.g. Yoruba, Olympian) relationships" (Idanre 87).

Conclusion

In the words of Achebe, "Africa is not only a geographical expression. It is also a metaphysical landscape--it is in fact a view of the world and of the whole cosmos perceived from a particular position" ("Thoughts" 63). This viewpoint has enabled African writers to create literary masterpieces, including those studied here, in which the metaphysical co-exists harmoniously with a close and critical observation of society. For a Western reader, the implications of the concepts in the novels may seem to be more social than spiritual, but it must be remembered that in African thought every aspect of life is spiritual.

Nwoga believes that the "sense of cosmic optimism" pervading African writing is "bolstered by the writers' consciousness of a continuing general belief in a universe manipulated by spiritual agencies" ("Conceptual" 284). Whether or not the writers are believers in the doctrines of any religion, they are "too close to a traditional context of religious practice to be adherents of any mechanistic materialistic theory of the universe" ("Conceptual" 284). Consequently, in even the most bleak portrayals of contemporary West African life, such as _Fragments_ and _This Earth, My Brother . . ._, a note of hope is almost always

present, often provided by means of a metaphysical concept, such as the water-spirits that function as regenerative archetypes.

In some West African novels, such as The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born, the metaphysical element is so nearly imperceptible that it may be overlooked in a cursory reading. More often, however, as in The Arrow of God, the spiritual ambience is so pervasive that the reader, immersed in it, absorbs it almost unconsciously.

Usually the aim of the West African writer in integrating the metaphysical with the everyday is to illuminate the present difficulties of African society and to offer possible solutions and directions. To do this, the writers freely appropriate the spiritual concepts and practices of their homelands. Chidi Amuta speaks of Armah's "very creative transposition of the narrow occultic fraternity of Akan healers into a revolutionary potential with continental implications" (140), and adds: "This is a case of using the particular to illuminate the general which is of the very essence of all great art" (140). Soyinka has similarly transposed the Yoruba religious commune of Aiyetoro. The Yoruba gods in particular, with their internal and external complementarity, function in the writing of Soyinka as compressed metaphors through which he can energize his vision of the world and challenge his readers to begin to implement that vision. According to John J. White, "[a] mythological

novel is largely successful when it manages to present the reader with an important/realistic theme and at the same time makes him feel the chosen analogy has enriched his understanding of the primary material" (90-91). Novels like Achebe's Anthills and Soyinka's Season of Anomy are successful in this way.

Not all of the metaphysical concepts and elements in African writing function as myth or analogy, however. Sometimes they serve separately or simultaneously such aesthetic functions as symbolism (Joys of Motherhood), plot complication (No Longer At Ease), characterization and expression of theme (The Concubine). For whatever purpose they are employed, they are always integral to the realism of the works in which they appear. While immersed in these works the reader unconsciously absorbs the metaphysical atmosphere in which they are steeped. This atmosphere is authentic because the writer who has created it is at home in it.

A non-African reader can never be at home in such a world, but by approaching it from an Afrocentric viewpoint, one can learn to understand and appreciate it. Although some African literature can be read and enjoyed without any knowledge of the religious concepts that underlie it, works of any depth and/or complexity, such as the ones presented in this study, require more than such a superficial reading. For example Soyinka's Interpreters can be read mainly as a satirically realistic portrayal of a few months in the lives

of five young men in Ibadan and Lagos. But vivid and interesting as the novel is at this level, such a reading misses its essence as would a reading of James Joyce's Ulysses as if it were merely the story of a day in Dublin in the lives of Leopold Bloom and Stephen Daedalus.

According to Joseph Okpaku, the only valid job of a Western critic of African literature such as the present writer, is to interpret it for Western audiences. To be able to do this he or she "should study African culture and the aesthetic and philosophical implications of the particular piece in question within the context of that culture" (18). Having done this, "he can recast the meaning and profundity derived into his own Western cultural context in order to make it relevant to his own culture" (18).

In this study I have attempted to carry out his mandate.

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