

## GENDER ROLES AS INDICATORS OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN A COLONIAL NOVEL: R. E. OBENG'S *EIGHTEENPENCE* - A SOCIO-HISTORICAL SOURCE MATERIAL

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The colonised man who writes for his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and the basis for hope.<sup>1</sup>

We are wedged uncomfortably between the values of our traditional culture and those of the West. The process of change which we are going through has created a dualism of forms of life which we experience at the moment less as a mode challenging complexity than as one of confused disparateness.<sup>2</sup>

Colonial literature in Africa hardly deals with the role of men and women in the changing socio-cultural order. It is therefore curious to observe that in the first novel of the Gold Coast, *Eighteenpence*, by Richard Emmanuel Obeng,<sup>3</sup> the author chooses gender as a main theme in his work. Sonia Lee's observation on the African novel (in French), that 'the feminine character often plays a secondary role' and that 'in the changing contemporary society she seems to remain a constant factor because the societal changes imposed upon traditional life by modern times are seen almost exclusively in the life drama of the male protagonist'<sup>4</sup> - therefore does not apply in this early colonial novel.

*Eighteenpence* also seems atypical considering Esther Y. Smith's statement:

Studies of inequality in colonial Africa rarely focus on the status of women. Studies of women in African literature rarely focus on the colonial period, and when they do, tend to show either strong young women pursuing individualistic and materialistic goals of modern society.<sup>5</sup>

and senior schools. He retired in 1937 having been a headmaster for many years, and then moved back to his hometown. It was as a pensioner in

Abetifi that R. E. Obeng, 1877-1953, an Akan, native of Abetifi, Kwahu, was a teacher trained by Basel Missionaries. His adult life was spent in what is today the Eastern and Ashanti Regions of Ghana, where he taught in what were then called junior he started to write. *Eighteenpence* remains his only major work published in English. R. E. Obeng's lifetime bridges the era of precolonial and colonial Kwahu, and his adult life coincides with a turbulent political period in this part of the Gold Coast. In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kwahu experienced unprecedented upheavals. As a result of education, the emergence of wage labour, an increase in trading activities and the beginning of cash-crop farming, a new class emerged: a young, educated and wealthy group of men<sup>7</sup> who challenged the authority of the chiefs and the aristocracy, because the traditional courts had degenerated into tribunals of extortion.<sup>2</sup> Konaduwa can thus play on popular local sentiment when she suggests self-interest permeating the traditional authorities:

When Konaduwa saw him [Kweku Anyinam, a trusted minister to Nana Addo Kwame, the Adontenhene] she shouted more loudly and repeated the words she first spoke to Akua Aday, her rival, at the beginning of the quarrel. She then lay strong emphasis on these words: 'You say the Adontenhene and his elders, including Nana Adoma Hemma, the Queen mother, are all **extortioners** [emphasis mine]. You will be answerable to the owners of this town' (p. 15).<sup>3</sup>

The novel is set in Abetifi, Kwahu in 1913. The Kwahu State had just emerged from Ashanti overlordship and had been incorporated into the Gold Coast Colony in 1901. The state coffers were empty, and the society was in a state of transition. Whilst the chiefs and elders wanted to maintain their traditional Akan predominance within the parameters possible under colonial hegemony (e.g. judiciary and economic power), the young men wanted to break the extortionary judicial practices of the chiefs and gain representation on the traditional councils. Consequently, the period 1905-1930 experienced three destoolments and three abdications in the paramountcy of Kwahu.<sup>9</sup> Because the political movement that challenged the traditional hierarchy was organised within the 'asafo companies',<sup>10</sup> women were naturally excluded.

The effect of these upheavals was the undermining of traditional authority and an upsurge in individual entrepreneurship unequalled in the colony. Wealth, as a result of the emerging money economy, came increasingly to rest with this new class of educated young men, for it was in education that the colonial system found the most effective means to suppress and change its subjects. Through the boarding-school system the child was separated from its family and indoctrinated with a new religion and social outlook and promised prestige and wealth as the rewards of assimilating the alien culture of the coloniser. It was this new, essentially male, middle class that came to act as a catalyst for the emerging Euro-Christian ideology. Parallel to the shift in the social status of men towards education and money, there was also a transformation in the role of women in society.

*Eighteenpence* evidences the changes taking place in Akan society by illustrating the transition from a matrilineal polygamy to a Euro-Christian conjugal monogamy. This transition is depicted through the male and female personae in the novel. The changes in societal ideals and practices echo Engels hypothesis based on Morgan's researches, namely that the transition from the matrilineal society to the patrilineal society, from the polygamous to the monogamous, "coincided with the subordination of the female sex".<sup>11</sup> Engels further contended that:

Monogamy arose from the concentration of considerable wealth in the hands of a single individual – a man – and from the need to bequeath this wealth to the children of that man and of no other:<sup>12</sup> - and that as a result, - the reckoning of descent in the female line and the matriarchal law of inheritance were thereby overthrown, and the male line of descent and the paternal law of inheritance were substituted for them.<sup>13</sup>

Thus according to Engels, it was the emergence of a capitalist economy in which wealth increasingly came to be the prerogative of males that weakened the position of women both within the family and within society. This hypothesis presupposes that women were economically independent prior to the introduction of the money economy and that the introduction

of a new economic order put them at a disadvantage and therefore made them subject to oppression. Whether Engels' thesis holds universally need not concern us here. The main thrust of *Eighteenthence*, however, demonstrates that the transition from traditional Akan society to the Euro-Christian model affected the roles of women. Thus a changing economic environment not only caused the changing status of women, as Engels suggests, but through the influence of the Euro-Christian ideal of marriage that is conjugal cohabitation, the role of the wife within this institution changed drastically.

Akan society is matrilineal and structured vertically and horizontally through a complex hierarchy of chiefs and sub-chiefs that formerly constituted a highly advanced system of checks and balances. Behind every chief there is a 'queen mother' who is the kingmaker and the final arbiter in stool matters.<sup>14</sup>

Though the Omanhene is the 'All-powerful' in the State, yet in his capital he has some elders, including the Queen-mother, who can correct, oppose or depose him, if he does not obey them. (p.123)<sup>15</sup>

The human being is central in Akan society and should not be violated. As a matrilineal society, consisting of matrilineal descent groups the Akan trace descent through their matrikin to a common ancestress. The children of any union, although named by the father whose 'soul' they inherit, have the 'blood' of their mother and belong to her clan.<sup>16</sup> A man must provide for the upkeep of his wife and children, but it is his sister's children who will inherit from him. His wife and children therefore have no stake in his property. A woman's offspring inherit from their maternal uncle, and it is the maternal uncle who is eventually responsible for the welfare of the children of the family. There is, thus, in the matrilineal system of the Akan an inbuilt conflict potential between the male and the female, because a man's allegiance is primarily not towards his wife and children but towards his matriline, whilst a woman's allegiance is towards her matrikin. Marriage among the Akan is therefore a contractual arrangement, as seen in the detailed agreement of Konaduwa's marriage to her new husband, Amoako, (72-74) which contains specific detailed provisions apportioning financial and social responsibilities between the two families involved.

Polygyny is practised, but is subject to assent by the first wife, who according to tradition should be given precedence over any co-wives. Marriage in this matrilineal system is a loose union easily dissolved. Not only do spouses often reside apart, but a woman is expected to be financially independent, and is therefore involved in wealth generating activities. Their proceeds are kept strictly apart from the domestic budget, the responsibility for which rests on the husband. As Meyer Fortes observes, "This ensured virtual legal equality between the spouses, as regards control over personal income and freedom of divorce".<sup>17</sup>

Francis Pine supports this view,

...in certain pre industrial societies with complex divisions of labour, such as the West African indigenous states, although male and female economic spheres can best be described as quite distinct, it can be argued that the relatively high status of women resulted at least partially from their monopoly over certain areas of the external economy, and their right to control their own labour and the products of their labour...<sup>18</sup>

Again, Meyer Fortes argues that social change as a result of "modernisation" undermines the "traditional family patterns in favour of a western type conjugal family.."<sup>19</sup>

The most inexorable element of female subjugation within the conjugal family was her economic dependence on her husband. Christine Oppong observes:

There is undoubtedly considerable evidence to indicate that matriliney is particularly vulnerable to the spread of private property ownership and inequalities in the distribution of wealth.<sup>20</sup>

It is not argued in this paper that the traditional Akan past constituted some utopia for women, but that "modernism" eroded her status in society, for as Elaine Savory Fido observes:

...for all the suggestions of possible advantages to women in traditional cultures, tradition was certainly not ideal, <but> modern influences such as British sexist colonialism further complicated gender relations.<sup>21</sup>

It is doubtful whether E. R. Obeng had read Engels (or Morgan for that matter),<sup>22</sup> yet it is obvious that the author of *Eighteenpence* recognised that in abandoning the polygamous matrilineal way of Akan society and adopting a monogamous patriarchal Euro-Christian societal ideal that is the conjugal family, the role of the male and the female both in society and in marriage had to change.

As societal realities change, so do the societal roles. *Eighteenpence* chronicles the transformation taking place in Akan society through its main characters, male and female, and defines the coeval societal realities existing in Kwahu within the time frame of the novel.

With the folk-tale as the superstructure, *Eighteenpence* narrates the story of Obeng Akrofi, the intended hero, who destitute and therefore reliant on his own resources, sets out on a quest for wealth. He has to overcome sexual temptation represented by the woman Konaduwa (who also fulfills the folkloric role of the witch), the lure of gold in the form of a disputed treasure trove, as well as obstacles in the form of injustices and natural disasters, to emerge at the end of the novel successful in his pursuit. Akrofi's metamorphosis from indented labourer to Midas incorporates the parabolic lesson of the folk-tale.

Structurally both the opening and conclusion of the story attest to this format:

In the ancient and salubrious town of Abetifi the country of Kwahu, in the reign of Nana Addo Kese Pambuo, there lived a man whose name was Obeng Akrofi. Obeng though kind-hearted, was as poor as a church rat (p.1)

Akrofi and his wife led a life of happiness, enjoying their wealth and were kind and compassionate to all who were fortunate enough to fall in with them (p.163).

Embedded within this superstructure are two distinct narratives, so that *Eighteenpence* ostensibly consists of two parts hereafter referred to as Part I and Part II. Part I of the novel depicts the values of traditional Akan society and narrates the woman Konaduwa's legal imbroglios and

embroidments resulting from her desire to divorce her husband Owusu. In this part the folk-tale is used as a subversive form with a female hero to castigate both the colonial and the traditional authorities. It is Konaduwa, who describes herself androgynously as “a masculine woman” (p.49) and who is referred to and treated as mad by her male antagonists, who is given the licence to criticise the prevailing power structures. As Phyllis Chesler says: “.. for a woman to be healthy she must ‘adjust’ to and accept the behavioural norms for her sex ...”.<sup>23</sup>

Konaduwa deviates from societal norms when she calls men “fool” (p.5), “senseless fellow” (p.6) and “ridiculous creatures ... [and] cowards too.” (p.14). The author tells us on more than one occasion that, “... for a woman, she had no right to charge him with “Fool”, according to the established custom of the Akan” (p.28). He further says, “It is a fixed custom among the Akan that the word “Fool” is not spoken to any man by a woman.” (p.76).<sup>24</sup>

Part II, which aspires to be more novelistic in form and content, adheres to the convention of a male protagonist. It chronicles Akrofi’s journey towards “assimilation” and thus demonstrates the “modern” state. This binary division of the work effects an antithetical balancing of the thematic as well as the structural texture of the novel, while it at the same time contrasts setting, narrative action and personae. In keeping with the novelistic tradition, the protagonist Akrofi is an “individual”, beholden to no-one; yet the individual as exemplified by Akrofi (a necessary element of the novel) also ties in with the folk-tale hero: the loner who sets out to conquer the world.

In the context of African literature, the novel as a distinct form is of course very recent. In the Gold Coast as elsewhere it presupposes a reading public that had been homogeneously exposed to English education, and in the Gold Coast this class of people was as everywhere else distinctly middle class. Obeng thus wrote for an audience that had had exposure similar to his own. The emerging middle class in the Gold Coast was a first generation bourgeoisie and was therefore still familiar with the literary tradition of their own culture:

To reiterate, Part I of the novel is set in Kwahu in 1913, in the reign of an historical Adontenhene.<sup>25</sup> The State of Kwahu has been incorporated into The Colony of The Gold Coast and already the break-up of the old order is noticeable. Two judicial systems operate simultaneously: the traditional tribunal of the Omanhene, on the one hand, and the colonial courts of the District Commissioner along with the High Court of the colony's capital Accra, on the other. The confusion of this state of affairs lends itself to exploitation by Konaduwa, who craftily drags the various lawsuits brought against her from one court to the other till in the end all charges are dismissed on some flimsy excuse of "jealousy".

Akrofi is used in the opening of Part I as the initiator of the action, when he borrows eighteen pence from Owusu, Konaduwa's husband in order to purchase a cutlass to start farming. After his first test, temptation by the woman Konaduwa, he is pushed aside.

Subsequent to his first encounter, Akrofi appears only sporadically and then only as a minor figure, for Konaduwa hi-jacks the tale. This erratic and cantankerous woman is the real heroine of Part I, for it is she who overcomes all obstacles to live "happily ever after" (p.75). When she appears on the scene, it is to break out of her predicament as Owusu's sidelined first wife. She hopes to find an ally in Akrofi and therefore plays on his sympathy. The setting is Owusu's farm where Akrofi is supposed to work alongside Konaduwa to repay his debt. She tells him:

I never knew that poverty was so bitter. How is it that on account of eighteenpence a man of your age works until his back is going to break? Your hands will be sore and painful, and your palms so full of blisters that you cannot squeeze the water from your towel when you take your bath this evening (p.5).

She taunts him, ridicules him and when he answers back, twists his utterances and creates a highly volatile situation. Akrofi's loyalty to Owusu remains intact, however, so he responds rather snootily to Konaduwa's onslaught and eventually leaves the farm after having described his creditor's wife as "dangerous as a loaded gun" and one whose "words are as poisonous as a snake". (p.6).



Meanwhile Konaduwa remains on the farm and lets her imagination run away with her. She fears that Akrofi might inform her husband about her indiscretion and envisages the repercussions, so she mischievously plots her defence by gross exaggerations and vicious lies about Akrofi's behaviour. Konaduwa's subsequent tantrums are therefore carefully staged spectacles calculated to cause the utmost havoc and get the maximum attention. Arriving home late after dark having worked herself into a state of uncontrollable rage as a result of her fear, she accuses Akrofi before all of Abetifi of physical and sexual assault and insinuates that he has been bought as a slave. She charges her husband, Owusu, with neglect and with having purchased Akrofi for eighteen pence: all very grave matters in Akan society, where sexual behaviour both within and outside marriage is strictly regulated and where domestic slavery had been abolished by the colonial authorities upon Kwahu's incorporation into the Colony.<sup>26</sup> She then swears the Oath of the State,<sup>27</sup> that Owusu must divorce her, and in the ensuing exchange, the name of the Adontenhene is mentioned. The quarrel has now escalated beyond any domestic dispute. An avalanche of litigations is initiated, and it is the ensuing court hearings that constitute the narrative mainstay of Part I.

The conclusion of this section of the novel is in many ways an anticlimax in that Konaduwa is re-suppressed into marriage to get her off the stage so as to preempt any possibility that she might stalk Akrofi in his renewed attempt at gaining riches. Konaduwa is a realistic creation. We know what she looks like she is desirable as a woman with a gap in her teeth, which is a sign of beauty among the Akan. We hear her voice in various fora all over Kwahu, publicly and privately. We know she stammers, but that she is a very eloquent speaker. We recognise her intelligence, her stubbornness, her aggressiveness, her untruthfulness, and her sense of humour. We know that she has relatives and that these are willing to intercede on her behalf. We know she divorced Owusu and later married Amoako. Although Konaduwa is made to represent the traditional Akan woman in the book, she does not embody the Akan ideals of a woman: these are that she be a soft-spoken and modest creature. This, Konaduwa is definitely not, when she describes herself as a "masculine woman" (p.49). Yet Akan culture

accommodates “the Konaduwas”, for “strong” women feature prominently in both historical and folk-loric traditions.<sup>28</sup> It is in view of this that Akrofi’s wife, whom he acquires in Part II of the book, is so totally out of context and must be seen as an ideal of a different culture.

The character of Konaduwa has several functions. She is the one who symbolises Akan culture and who is the foil to Akrofi’s “modern” wife. Konaduwa is the subversive female hero who is used to expose the confusion caused by the two concurrent judicial systems, and to castigate both the colonial and the traditional authorities in her two court representations. The first is addressed to the colonial District Commissioner and the second to the traditional court headed by the Omanhene. To the District Commissioner she says:

If you ask me this one hundred times, I will remain mum for as many times. Even if I know that I am guilty, I will never tell you that I am guilty and ask you to pronounce judgement against me. If I tell you that I am not guilty, you would not let me go scot free; but if I say that I am guilty, you will at once pronounce judgement. The Governor sent you here to decide cases before you get your pay, and if you have not fully learnt how to try cases, you should go back to your own country to learn your law properly and also how to judge cases without troubling a woman by asking her “Are you guilty or not guilty”. (p.30).

And to the Omanhene:

Is it because of a case between a wife and her husband that all the Kwahu chiefs and potentates have met here today? The proverb is true – ‘ Every knife is out when the bull is down!’ If I were not a woman, I would tell you that you have time to spend, no, to waste. A case which the District Commissioner could not settle, who else has power here to settle and punish me? If I should have been punished, why did not the District Commissioner see to it? Let me ask this, or remind you, or waken you, if you are sleeping. In the olden times when our ancestors judged their high cases in Kumasi, was any case returned from there to be judged by you so that you could inflict punishment? Answer me this! If not why do you want to cheat me because I am a woman? I will make no defence, and if you can judge the

case and punish me when I have not spoken,... I am a masculine woman, and if you like try me! I warn you it is dangerous to play with fire. (p.48-49).

Konaduwa is thus "the Other", whose voice and actions fall outside Akan decorum, yet she is utilised by the male author to express the sentiments of the colonised Kwahus.

Konaduwa represents an attempt at balanced characterisation showing a complex persona with positive and negative personality traits and actions, for as the Adontenhene says: "How true it is that women are of different kinds" (p. 80). The females created in Part II of the book within the approximation of a Euro-Christian utopia are, however, deprived of any semblance of personality. We are introduced to a wife who is not named, who is permitted to make two utterances, is insubstantial and marginal to the story, and is introduced more as a necessary piece of narrative inventory than as a character that has a role to play in the novel. Then towards the end of the book we are suddenly confronted with three flower-daughters, Rose, Violet, and Lily. These are also totally irrelevant to the plot and are there merely as objects for Akrofi's sermonising. When they are introduced to the story for the reader to know they exist, they are already young women whom their father (not their mother) fears might be contaminated by the world. These saintly flowers are totally mute.

Akrofi's modern wife is thus a voiceless and nameless nonentity who enters a western-type marriage and is created to embody the conventions of the novelistic woman, most enthusiastically idealised and most thoroughly subordinated.

Everything that Konaduwa stands for and exemplifies, every action initiated by her, has its antithetical manifestation in Akrofi's wife. The latter is thus created as a shadowy apparition. Whereas Konaduwa is beautiful and sexually attractive, Akrofi's wife is plain. Whereas Konaduwa stands up for her rights as an individual, free to divorce and remarry whom she likes, Akrofi's wife is commodified as a useful housekeeper and attempts suicide, when she believes her husband dead. Whereas Konaduwa's voice rings loudly and assertively at the fora in Kwahu, Akrofi's wife is allowed to

utter two inconsequentialities in the whole section of the book she features in: "*Little drops of water make the mighty ocean,*" (p.93) an utterance that so impresses Akrofi that he decides to marry her, and "*Help father! My husband is dying!*" (p.152) voiced towards the end of the tale when she sees Akrofi dangling from a tree in an attempted suicide. This mute creature has all her other actions either described or interpreted.

When Amoako marries Konaduwa, he is required to enter a detailed contractual arrangement as stipulated by Kwahu custom, and he agrees to leave his home in Akim to settle in Abetifi with his new wife. This is to safeguard Konaduwa's economic independence, as it clearly spells out the responsibilities of each party in case of any dispute.

Akrofi, on the other hand, removes his wife from her family to his farm, and they both stay outside any kinship system. As Ian Watts commenting on novelistic conventions of the conjugal family observes, "... on marriage the couple immediately sets up as a new family, wholly separate from their own parents and often far away from them".<sup>29</sup>

It is only when Akrofi's uncle Dawoanom (the folkloric villain who also represents Akan demands on Akrofi in his new realm) emerges on the scene to create a crisis situation that Akrofi's wife falls back on her relatives:

...[Dowoanom] turned to Akrofi's wife and said: "In this country, every woman who marries goes back to her relatives,... you have never gone back ... and you never have the mind to". (p.148)

When Akrofi's wife is compelled to leave her marital home to go back to see her relatives, "Her sisters' children, who had not seen her before, hailed her with enthusiasm..."(p.150). This is most unusual in Akan custom where these children would be considered as her own.

If Konaduwa has children we are not told, but that Akrofi had many children, we know. Whereas in Akan tradition the offspring of any union belong to the mother, Akrofi's children are described as his. How far his wife featured in the procreation is not clear. Her father states that "They have given us three grandchildren..." (p. 158), so we can assume that the three saintly flower-daughters, Rose, Violet and Lily, so pure, modest and

innocent as if not conceived in a sexual act (155-157) were her offspring. But as sons (one of them the successful Sam) feature in the book, we must assume that these are Akrofi's by other liaisons. In the new order of things, the woman's mother-right has thus been taken away from her.

As an indication that the author lost the tale he set out to tell in Part I, Akrofi is reintroduced at the opening of Part II, Chapter 13. The main character of Part II is undoubtedly Akrofi, and the author, in order not to lose control of the story a second time, so carefully controls the narrative that it becomes flat and disjointed. In this section the novelistic conventions of asexual romantic love within marriage, of individualism and solitude, feature strongly. The Akrofis live alone in a big house far away from Abetifi and any relative. The wife is not "... his better half ... but united [they are their] own better whole" (p.151). Akrofi has fully devoured his wife. She cannot exist outside him.

Whereas Part I maintains a linear sequence and adheres to both temporal and spatial conventions, Part II is circular in that Akrofi initiates his pursuit in Abetifi and returns to Abetifi having succeeded in his quest and become exceedingly wealthy. Apart from this definite anchorage, Part II is in many ways futuristic, set in a vague location within an uncertain time-span somewhat outside the influence of Akan custom, in a realm Akrofi has created for himself. Here the author sets out to demonstrate the desirability of the "modern" way. Through the extensive use of retrospect, Obeng rationalises Akrofi's actions and creates a new persona. We learn that he is interested in farming because he once worked as a gardener for a European in the mining town, Obuasi. There he was taught the basics of modern farming: spacing of plants, weeding and the use of modern insect control. When Akrofi gives moral advice, we are shown personal glimpses into his somewhat dishonest and chequered past which preordains a flawed character. Certainly Akrofi is not the virtuous hero of the folk tale: he is untruthful (105), vindictive (104), violent towards his underlings (135), yet subservient towards the Europeans, whom he refers to as "masters" and to whom he speaks in a broken pidgin mode. We might have expected this by the author choosing a "nobody" in traditional terms as the protagonist of the novel. In this way Obeng sabotages his own creation and his own

message so that Akrofi becomes progressively unsympathetic, and the Euro-Christian realm he has created progressively less desirable.

In order to appreciate the changes taking place in Akan society one has to take a closer look at Akrofi himself. The author, to reiterate, has chosen a nobody, according to the Akan hierarchy, as the embodiment of the new mode. He has no family, which is most unusual, (this aspect belongs to the folk-tale convention). He also does not belong to the new educated elite, for we are told he is illiterate. Furthermore, the slur of indebtedness and possibly slave-descent is attached to him. And he gradually evolves as an antipathetic character.

Akrofi's pretense at being who he is not at Obuasi is repeated in his creating a planter role for himself in a non-Akan setting; a manifestation of behaviour that is essentially dishonest. This dishonesty is further demonstrated through the climax of the novel; his winning a case against the Omanhene of Kwahu in the colonial High Court in Accra. The upheavals that have taken place in society are clearly demonstrated here. Not only is the highest authority in the Kwahu State subordinated to the colonial authorities in Accra, far removed from his own realm, but an inconsequential citizen of Kwahu, possibly of slave descent defeats him in court. Additionally we get the impression that "right" did not win the case, but rather the craftiness of Akrofi's lawyer. All these suggest that the new order of things is sinister, hypocritical, and self-serving.

Whereas Akan society is matrilineal, Akrofi in his new realm chooses to create a new society based on patriliney within which the institution of marriage is conjugal. The author projects this change as progress, which implies that the matrilineal system was proffered backward in the developmental continuum, and patriarchy an improvement on it. Senanu<sup>30</sup> discussing some early Ghanaian novels (*Eighteenpence* not included) notes that these early novelists, are the chroniclers of [colonialism as the transmitter of modernising tendencies] through the introduction of Western-type education. If they convey any awareness of the conflict of traditional systems and values with colonial institutions, they nevertheless suggest that the overall effect of the colonial experience is beneficial.

At the outset, one could make the same observation about *Eighteenpence*, but the author of this book delves deeper than this. Akrofi is not “educated” (as mentioned above), but an imposter. He creates a make-believe world in which he masquerades as a colonial settler having abandoned his Akaness. The author exposes him by devulging that Akrofi repeatedly assumes an Akan guise in order to be accepted by “them”. (136; 150). Akrofi is thus on the one hand portrayed as acculturated, in that he has abandoned his own tradition and considers himself apart from and above his own people; on the other hand, however Akan tradition besieges him and beckons him again and again and compels him to conform. As a result, when his “callous and conscienceless brute” of an uncle (151) appears on the scene demanding to be treated as behooves an uncle in Akan tradition, Akrofi fails to protect his wife from physical threats, thus leaving her no option but to seek refuge with her apparently forgotten parents. Akrofi’s cowardice is further demonstrated in his attempting suicide rather than confronting the evil as exemplified by this same uncle. To make sure the reader appreciates Akrofi’s dastard streak, the author twists the narrative so that Akrofi can rationalise his own suicide as a result of his wife apparent failure to conform to his wishes. He actually blackmails her into returning home.

Return to me in two days to meet me alive or in three days to see my grave. If you come at the time specified, I will drive the callous and conscienceless brute from the house, so that we may live happily as before ... if loneliness and love will not urge you to come back, let not my letter. (p.151).

Obeng’s creation, Akrofi, is nothing more than a pathetic semblance of what he purports to represent. The author has given the protagonist his own name, Obeng. Additionally, Akrofi is not a Kwahu but an Akuapim name (from whence R. E. Obeng’s father hailed). Cast as the author’s alter ego, the protagonist was undoubtedly initially conceived as an ordinary fallible human being who was to demonstrate the moral of rewards for hard work, but as the tale progressed, R. E. Obeng proved incapable of delving dispassionately into his own psyche and therefore abandoned his own creation, subverting him and undermining him.

R.E. Obeng, the author, was himself very much aware of the contradictions of the new order of things. As a male he lived his life uncomfortably straddling the two cultures that made demands on his existence. In the Gold Coast as elsewhere in Africa Christianity tended to focus on sexual morality, causing extreme gender tension with regards to marriage and procreation. The alien restrictive ideals imposed upon both men and women created severe anxiety especially in the female who found herself caught between the expectations of two cultures.

In *Eighteenpence* the "Other" exemplified by the female protagonist, Konaduwa, should be interpreted as Obeng's yearning for a voice, while the author's alter ego, Obeng Akrofi, represents the despicable reality of the colonised male. R. E. Obeng's own experience of women was varied and in many ways contradictory. He had a strong, independent mother: a wealthy trader who bought slaves in Salaga yet ended her life as a presbyter in Abetifi. Obeng's family claims that the character Konaduwa is based on his mother, Akua Kuru Animwa. His wives, with the exception of his "matrimonial" wife Rose Nyante, tended to be much younger than himself and have been described as "quiet" (might the word "docile" be used?). He severely restricted the movements of his own daughters, and in his will he expressed disappointment in them (because they did not live up to his ideals as symbolised by the fictional flowers Rose, Violet and Lily?).

It should not be overlooked that an additional result of economic and educational opportunities brought about by colonialism was the privileged position achieved by males. An educated man could thrive in his "modern" society. Both the colonial administration and the missionary societies were male oriented and accorded some employment opportunities to men; skilled and unskilled. Women, on the other hand, had less educational and employment opportunities, and the role model imposed on the women within the system was totally alien to Akan culture. Whereas the educated Gold Coast male could get away with the straddling of two cultures; publicly conforming to the new establishment norms of acknowledging one "matrimonial wife" while at the same time keeping other wives married according to "tradition", this option was not open to the educated woman. Akan culture expects a woman to bear children and the missionaries



expected their converts to bear children within a "Christian marriage". But few Akan men would (or could) take on the responsibilities of an educated wife who had severed the bonds with her matrikin and hence expected a conjugal marriage. The males in traditional society, as portrayed by Obeng are not worthy of emulation. They appear weak: Owusu lets his second wife and his mother do his fighting and quarrelling for him while he unsuccessfully attempts to play the mediator, a feeble voice among hawks. Amoako is totally obliterated under the spell of Konaduwa, even to the extent of migrating to and resettling in Konaduwa's hometown and of taking responsibility for her debts. The chiefs do quite often appear frivolous, wasting time and effort on grand appearances and lengthy court hearings with indecisive conclusions. The detailed life histories of both Akrofi and Dawoanom suggest fundamental character flaws causing inconsistent behaviour; unreliability, irresponsibility and cowardice. Obeng shows that the Akan male is ill equipped to take on the mantle of male supremacy that is so central to Euro-Christian thinking.

By marginalising Akrofi's wife, by reducing her to an insubstantial appendix, Obeng demonstrates things to come. In the new order of the Euro-Christian hegemony, women are no longer individuals with a stake in society. The female as exemplified by Konaduwa has been silenced. This is elucidated by the "climax" of Part I which becomes an anticlimax. The author, having built up a brave, vocal woman, suddenly deflates her and suppresses her into the stereotypical mould of a "jealous woman" and then marries her off as any other female, thus leaving the message that unattached females are dangerous to established order. Konaduwa's rebellion consequently appears to have been for naught, a temporary upset. Yet the author could have pursued the narrative to a very different conclusion. Akan society accommodated alternative female role models, for women did not as a rule cohabit with their husbands. So long as they had children who had identifiable fathers, and so long as they contained their sexual activities within the socially permissible, women could live and function on their own. It was therefore not "modernism" that killed Konaduwa but her creator. Konaduwa became too powerful a female for Obeng to cope with. So the "new order" is introduced, women are now

reduced to marital bondage; dependent, voiceless, and vulnerable. Their future role is to espouse meekness and self-effacement. In the colonial pecking order, where the male has been reduced to a second class citizen in his own country, it is the woman who has lost out totally: she has been utterly sidelined.

## Notes

1. Franz Fanon, 1968 *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove Press, p.223.
2. Abiola Irele in privately printed *In praise of Alienation* cited in Kwame Appiah 1992 *In my Father's House*, Oxford Univ. Press: Oxford, p. 54.
3. Some scholars may argue that Casely Hayford's *Ethiopia Unbound*, published in 1911, is a novel.
4. Sonia Lee's 'The awakening of self in the heroines of Ousman Sembene', in *Sturdy Black Bridges*, ed. Roseann P. Bell et al New York: Anchor/Doubleday 1979 as quoted in Carole Boyce Davies, 'Maidens, mistresses and matrons: Feminine images in selected Soyinka works', in *Ngambika*, ed. Carole Boyce Davies and Ann Adams Graves, Trenton, N. J.: Africa World Press, 1986. P. 76.
5. Esther Y. Smith, 'Images of women in African literature: some examples of inequality in the colonial period', in *Ngambika*, *ibid*.
6. *numerante* (Simensen, below, uses the term *commoner*)
7. Jarle Simensen, 'The Asafo of Kwahu: a mass movement for local reform under colonial rule', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, VIII, 1975: 383-406.
8. All page references are from the 1998 edition of *Eighteenpence*, ed. Kari Dako. Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers.
9. See note 7.
10. The 'asafo' were groups of young men who in foregone times constituted the warriors of the Akan.
11. Rosalind Delmar, 'Looking again at Engels's "Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State"' in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972, p. 273.
12. Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, ed. Eleanor Burke Leacock, New York: International Publishers, 1972, p. 138.
13. *Ibid*. p. 120.

14. The 'stool' is a symbol of kingship in Akan society.
15. a) The Omanhene is the 'primus inter pares' among the chiefs of the Akan state.  
b) The Queen Mother is not necessarily the biological mother of the chief, but an elected female of his matriline.
16. The Akan concept of the human being consists of a soul (kra) and matter: blood (mmogya).
17. Meyer Fortes in foreword to *Middle Class African Marriage*, by Christine Oppong, London: Allan & Unwin 1981, p.x.
18. Francis Pine, 'Family structure and the division of labour: female roles in urban Ghana' in Hamza Alavi and Teodor Shanin ed. *Introduction to the Sociology of 'Developing Studies'*, New York: Macmillan, 1986, p.390.
19. Meyer Fortes, p. x in Christine Oppong, ed. as note 17
20. Christine Oppong. *Middle Class African Marriage*, London: Allan & Unwin. 1981, p.12.
21. Elaine Savoury Fido, 'Okigbo's labyrinths and the context of Igbo attitudes to the female principle' in *Ngambika* p.225.
22. So far as can be ascertained, R. E. Obeng's personal library (a glass fronted bookcase) consisted mostly of well-known British novels and books of law (a subject he was very interested in.)
23. Quoted from Shosana Felman 'Women and madness: the critical fallacy', ed. Cathrine Belsey and Jane Moore, *The Feminist Reader*, New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989, p. 134.
24. See also Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*, Accra/Tema: Ghana Publishing Corp. 1974. "For a woman to call a man "fool" for whatever cause, is unpardonable, no matter the degree of provocation, or difference of age, or degree of relationship. Such is conceived of as a challenge of blows. Yet he should not accept it or he is socially branded as a coward, a fool, a bully – "a woman fighter"." (p.93).
25. The Akan hierarchy of chiefs is arranged in a system that reflects the strategic formation in which the Akan went to war in days gone by. The *Adontenhene* led the vanguard. The seat of the *Adontenhene* of Kwahu is in Abetifi.
26. The non-Akan reader of the novel might not consider the significance of Konaduwa's allegations. Sarpong, *ibid*, mentions as civil transgression: "Sexual intercourse in the open even with one's own wife " (p.51) and "Traditionally... if a man touches, not holds, a woman's nose, ear, head or breast, he is supposed to have had sexual connection with her. If she is

married, her husband is entitled to an adultery fee from the man..."(p.115). Rattray as quoted by Jack Goody in 'A comparative approach to incest and adultery' (*The British Journal of sociology*, Vol. 7, 1956,p. 286-306,) refers to 'oman akyiwade' (tribal offences), which include 'ahahantwe' as sexual intercourse in the bush with an unwilling married or unmarried woman or own wife. The sanction for this offence was death. If the woman was willing however, 'ahahantwe' was defined as 'efiesem' (household offence) and the sanction was ridicule and adultery payment.

27. The Oath of the State constituted the mentioning of the unmentionable (the invocation of evil). This was an act that signaled the desire to have wrongs righted and to have a case heard before the chief.
28. a) The famous Yaa Asantewa, Queen Mother of Edwesa, can be mentioned here. She led the last attack by an Ashanti army against the British in 1900. (The Yaa Asantewa War).  
b) In the Akan trickster tale, Ananse is often outmanoeuvred and punished by his wife. Women are similarly often depicted as wise and givers of sound advice in Akan folk tales.
29. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972, p. 157.
30. K. E. Senanu 'Creative writing in Ghana', ed. A. W. Kayper-Mensah and Horst Wolff, *Ghanaian Writing*. Tuebingen: Horst Erdmann Verlag, 1972, p.13-31.