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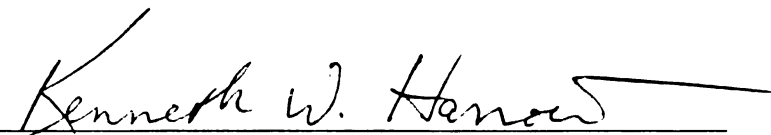
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**BETWEEN AFRICAN WRITERS AND HEINEMANN EDUCATIONAL  
PUBLISHERS: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF A CULTURE INDUSTRY**

**By**

**Olabode Ibironke**

**A DISSERTATION**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**English**

**2008**



## ABSTRACT

### BETWEEN AFRICAN WRITERS AND HEINEMANN EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHERS: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF A CULTURE INDUSTRY

By

Olabode Ibironke

The dissertation undertakes a new approach to the study of African literature, which it derives from the interdisciplinary field of enquiry associated first and foremost with Lucien Febvre and his *l'histoire du livre* (*The History of the Book*). It examines the role of media production technology, the impact of the printing industry, editorial theory and practice, the socio-economic dynamics of publishing, and the survival of books in relation to changes in social structure. It argues that we can understand the historical changes in the African world by reading those changes primarily through the prism of the history of literary production. By exploring the historical context for the emergence and decline of the African Writers Series, a series dedicated to the publication of African authors by the British publishing house of Heinemann Educational Books, the dissertation formulates a paradigm for understanding socio-historical changes in Africa. It demonstrates how knowledge of the historical and political contexts of the production of literature, the material life that publishers, authors and products inhabit, and the international and transcultural dynamics of production and transmission necessarily challenge the conventional understanding of literary texts.

The dissertation identifies the specific characteristics that the various markets in which the African Writers Series was circulated engendered in the texts. That is, how writing for an educational market, or general market, or even trade market affected the

consciousness of the writers, and the dynamics and function of textual production. It posits that the worldliness of African literature as a product of dispersion and dissemination through international travel and marketing effectively ushers in a post-authenticity moment of African and Postcolonial literature that moves away from a culture-based to a market-based theory of literature. It performs a reading of literature by tracking author/publisher relations within the contexts of the production and reception and concludes by proposing the term international literature as a postcolonial re-appropriation of the Marxian appropriation of the term “world literature.” Working from this theory of literary production, the thesis offers a fresh approach to canonical and non-canonical texts of modern African literature by writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, T.M Aluko, Thomas Akare, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Olaudah Equiano, among others.

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## **Dedication**

**To my wife Funmi,  
To my daughter Abigail,  
And to my Mother Abigail:  
To all whose beauty, love and wisdom have made my life worthwhile**

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

In 2003, Becky Clarke announced regretfully through the H-Net list on African Literature and Cinema Heinemann's decision to discontinue the African Writers Series. No sooner had this decision been public had ProQuest/Chadwyck-Healey aired plans to digitally archive the entire Series as a Literature Collection. These apparent transitions and transformations, eclipse and reappearance of the African Series, along with an opportunity offered through my work with certain readers for Heinemann in the United States academy, stimulated my curiosity to investigate, in Derridian formulation "why and how do the [culture industry], the editorial process, and memory in general practice their hierarchies, in terms of a body, a corpus, a problematic, a thematization, a language or an author" ("Canons and Metonymies" in *Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties*, 1992: 198). The production of the Series by itself, and of cultural production in general, is reflective of a selective procedure that attests to the power of an established regime of taste and judgment. At the same time, however, the movements of textual objects in and out of currency within a cultural milieu serve as indices of the evanescence of aesthetic and cultural artifacts. A study of the reasons for the eclipse of the Series undertaken in this dissertation necessarily reveals the "philosophical, institutional, editorial, or political" (Derrida: 199) factors that aggregated to make the Series possible. In other words, the study highlights what Appadurai has demonstrated: how the circulation of (literary) objects cannot be separated from prevalent social, political and cultural norms; how book production could be argued to operate according to and/or induce cultural designs (11).

As a comprehensive and original examination of the matrices of the formation of the canon of African literature, constituted in large part through the Series of literary publications by Heinemann Educational Books that was promoted through a network of offices that connected London, Ibadan, Nairobi and New Hampshire, the dissertation proposes a reading of literature to be performed by tracking author/publisher relations within the contexts of the production and reception of the Series from its inception in 1962 to the end of its golden age in 1984. It assumes that the preeminent and unique place occupied by both the publishing house of Heinemann, which produced an enormous portion of the literatures of post-independent Africa, Asia, the Caribbean Islands, the Middle East and the Pacific, as well as the African Writers Series, position them as the necessary sites for the development of a theory of literary production that potentially bears significant implications for literary studies in the fields of Subaltern, Minority, Postcolonial, Transatlantic and Global literary studies.

The core of the project is in the attempt to view the literary text from the point of view of the material history of its production. In other words, the necessity of the dissertation derives from two major silences in the field of African literary criticism: first, the silence on the significance of how pedagogical and institutional moments propelled and appropriated literature in Africa; and second, the general absence of an approach to literature understood *in relation to* its material history and the imperatives of the cultural institutions and industries of its production. These silences have occurred, as I argue, precisely because not much literary criticism has been informed by editorial criticism and the history of publishing, or the History of the Book. The dissertation is thus innovative

in its attempts to reverse this situation and to bring together the varied streams of criticism generated by professional academics and editors.

The dissertation explores a new and interdisciplinary approach to the study of African literature, which it derives from the interdisciplinary field of enquiry associated first and foremost with Lucien Febvre and his *l'histoire du livre* (*The History Of The Book*). This approach examines the role of media production technology, the impact of the printing industry, reading habits, editorial theory and practice, the socio-economic dynamics of publishing, and the survival of books in relation to change in social structure. The larger question that the dissertation attempts to impact by adopting this approach is the following: Could we understand the historical changes in the African world by reading those changes primarily through the prism of the history of literary production? In other words, could one view the process of literary production and the process of the making of modern Africa as cognate processes? By exploring the historical context for the emergence of the African Writers Series, a Series dedicated to the publication of African authors by the British publishing house of Heinemann Educational Books, the dissertation aims to understand the reasons for its eclipse in a deeper effort to formulate a paradigm for understanding socio-historical changes in Africa.

The Series maintained an extraordinary success until 1985, which made it arguably the preeminent postcolonial literary collection. James Currey, editorial director at Heinemann Educational Books between 1967 and 1984 and manager of the African Writers Series, described the success in the following way: “[The African Writers Series] became, partly accidentally, an exploitative part of Heinemann’s strategy in Africa. Again and again it gave Heinemann a presence which seemed far greater than the real



size and strength of the firm. It was a key factor in enabling Heinemann to seize educational contracts from under the noses of established companies with a far longer presence than upstart Heinemann” (quoted in Caroline Davis: 2005: 234). The enabling context of the Series was constituted, in part, by the hangover from British imperialism and colonial education. This context, the dissertation suggests, guaranteed against the grain of the Series that their initial function, along with those of other “Third World” Literatures in English, was first and foremost the securing of the global triumph of the English language, the aid it gave to the fostering of the British Commonwealth project and the cultural dominance of Englishness, which in return afforded the writers international recognition. The parallel emergence of cosmopolitan centers of artistic production in a number of African cities such as Ibadan, Nairobi, and Johannesburg, the particular atmosphere of the postcolonial/post-independent city, similar to those of Paris and London, the dissertation argues, served to provide the main thoroughfares for artistic creativity and added vital material, imaginative and international dimensions to the character of African literary texts.

Codifying a moment of intense cultural outreach and of the internationalization of African literary production, the Series was as much a function of globalized regimes of political, economic and educational institutions, as it was also a direct consequence of the activities of international publishers and educators. Through an examination of editorial notes and criticisms, readers’ responses and correspondences in the Publisher’s archive, extensive interviews with publishers and writers, reviews of the works of academic critics, and a symptomatic reading of literary texts, the dissertation draws a portrait of the

processes of literary production as a whole, which constitute what Theodore Adorno, from the standpoint of Marxist literary theory, calls a “culture industry.”

The dissertation insists on emphasizing the importance of redefining the nature, *raison d'être* and function of [African] literature in a way that is informed by the contingencies of its production and reproduction. It advances the proposition that literature must be read neither as a medium, nor as an expression, but as the continuous manifestation of complex relations. Such a redefinition could provide an aperture through the labyrinthine paths of entanglement of Africa and the world based on a fundamental understanding of the relations of production of African literature. In conducting this research, I have consulted the Heinemann Educational Books archives, held at the University of Reading, England, which include Radio and Newspaper Reviews of the African Writers Series, literary reviews and interviews, as well as editorial comments and readers reports.

Because a majority of the writers from Africa that are most widely available and read either as part of a curriculum or for pleasure across the world have been brought forward by an International publisher, the study of the author-publisher relationships, editorial comments and readers' reports, rules of publication concerning format and style, would greatly illuminate the most enduring questions in the study of modern African literature: Did the avenue of international publishing dictate the imperative of writing in European languages? For whom does the African write? Were there pressures from “outside” on the writer to make certain aesthetic choices? The ultimate problem of classification of African literature today as World literature rather than as National literature, the more conventional classification, poses the question of how the history of

the literature addresses the experience of cosmopolitanism, which is becoming the single most important philosophical concern of the moment.

Of relevance to the metaphysics of African writing is what W.E.B. Du Bois called the contradiction of “the double-aimed struggle of the black artisan” who on the one hand feels the burden to articulate the truth of his existence, an already “twice-told tale” to the (white) world, and at the same time to address his art to that world in such a way that seeks to “escape contempt.” Beyond this double aim, the study identifies a multiplicity of aims and strategies that are difficult to put together under neat categories. Contrary to Du Bois, the study construes the effects of multiple aims not as something that “could only result in making him [the black artisan] a poor craftsman,” but something that allows the texts to acquire the status of an international literature as opposed to world literature in the conventional sense of classics of non-western literature.

The stakes in this repositioning of African literature through an understanding of the conditions of the production of African Writers Series are a new focus on the writer’s relation to his/her world situated primarily within the context of the intricate networks of personal and institutional relations connecting a broad spectrum of international locations. In this sense, the study extends one of the major concerns of contemporary literary theory in interrogating international organizations as sites for understanding the interconnection between literary imagination and “the world” and its complex interplay of economics, politics and culture. The result is the appreciation of the value of relationality as an analytical tool. Works by Michel Foucault, who adopted relationality for his study of western institutions of power and Pierre Macherey, who reinvented it in

his study of the materiality of the text in *A Theory of Literary Production*, serve as the points of departure.

In *Ethics, Institutions and The Right to Philosophy* (2002), Jacques Derrida addressed those aspects of Kantian philosophy dealing with the relationship between politics [conflicts] and writing, cosmopolitanism institutions and modern subjecthood, thus pointing to the challenges of a study of writing in Africa that illuminates and attests to the institutional, philosophical, political and aesthetic judgments that create and shape the literatures of Africa, and perhaps, the idea of Africa itself. The institutions, philosophies, traditions and sensibilities at stake are reciprocally transformed by the literatures. This is why Derrida's contribution to the institutional turn in contemporary thought, which is also interestingly an internationalist turn, is significant for creating the possibility of connecting Kant's writings on aesthetics with his political writings, and for bringing into focus, within the metaphysics and economy of knowledge production, the place of international institutions such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

In posing the question of the right to philosophy from a cosmopolitan point of view, Derrida first asks, "where?, in what place, can a question take place?" The form of this question, he argues suggests "a sort of implicit contract, a supposed affinity, as if a question should always be first authorized by a place, legitimated in advance by a determined space that makes it both rightful and meaningful, thus rendering it possible and by the same token necessary, both legitimate and inevitable" (2002:2). But why is UNESCO such a place of privilege for posing the question of philosophy? Derrida argues that because philosophy has never had "one sole memory," the "definition of a

philosophical task and of a right to philosophy should be formulated in its cosmopolitan, and therefore international or interstate dimension” (5). This cosmopolitan dimension is what UNESCO prescribes in its charter, thus contracting a commitment, which it is duty-bound to uphold, between states and peoples, “to provide the philosophical culture or education that is required for understanding and putting into operation these commitments made to the international institutions” (4). Similarly, this dissertation is based on the premise that organizations such as the Commonwealth, the British Council, the United States Information Service, and most important, international publishers such as Heinemann Educational Books, none of which has received the kind of theoretical attention that Derrida gives to UNESCO, can be brought under the same rubric of an international and cosmopolitan commitment to sharing a “culture and philosophical language.” From the moment of their existence on, “they are committed to make possible, first and foremost by means of education, the access to this language and culture” (3).

Indeed, the aspect of UNESCO’s purposes and functions not addressed by Derrida but which his analysis impacts, is the role of UNESCO as an international publishing house, with about 120 titles annually under its imprint, a function that brings UNESCO in direct relation with Heinemann Educational Books with which it not only co-published some of its literary works from Africa and elsewhere but also competed for manuscripts for its own African Authors Series, published under its Collection of Representative Works program. At least two of UNESCO’s stated purposes and functions also express HEB’s own overall operations in Africa, that is, to:

- 1) Give fresh impulse to popular education and to the spread of culture

2) Maintain, increase and diffuse knowledge: By initiating methods of international cooperation calculated to give the people of all countries access to the printed and published materials produced by any of them.

The purposes and functions articulated by UNESCO coincide with those of HEB as Alan Hill's autobiography (1998) shows. The emergence of the publication of the African Writers Series, marks a transformative moment in the history of British and postcolonial publishing, because coming at a time when the school systems implanted by colonialism had grown into vastly expanding school markets, leading to the conviction of most foreign publishing houses that the only market in Africa was for educational textbooks, it was unusual to find a publishing house at the time that was not an educational publisher, and most of all, for that educational publisher to take on the task of publishing fiction for school use and general readership. Thus, the publication of the Series was an adventure, a revolutionary act, at least from the point of view of Alan Hill. The publication came from a "radical, nonconformist, missionary ethos outraged" (*In Pursuit of Publishing*: 123) by the fact that "big British publishers regarded West Africa only as a place where you sold books, not where you published them." According to Hill, "the idea that you could publish books by African authors, and especially by creative writers, had not yet occurred to these great houses.... They were taking their profits out of West Africa, and putting nothing back in the way of investment in local publishing and encouraging of local authors" (122-3). Thus HEB, like UNESCO encouraged local authors, gave fresh impulse to literary education and the spread of culture: an increase and diffusion of knowledge that made available to people of different African countries, literatures produced by their own writers. This demiurgic act makes HEB the institutional

space where the question of literature in book form, modern literature in Africa, is both legitimate and inevitable.

Having put in relief the question of the place where the question of modern literature in Africa ought to occur, the question of textual production as such then must be presently posed. One of the theoretical models for this work, as already stated, is Pierre Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production*. If ever critical attention ought to be paid to the text's lack of complete awareness "of the means of its own realization [or] of what it is doing" (27), it is in this context of the multiple exigencies of production and consumption of international literature. This crucial and most important discovery by Macherey of the textual unconscious springs directly from an approach that views the text neither as a sole creation of itself nor of the author but as a product of a complex process of total production in which both the text and the author participate, albeit as essential parts. Every theory of literary production proceeds from and arrives at the principle explicated by Macherey that the "book is always the site of an exchange: its autonomy and its coherence are bought at the price of that otherness, which can also be, on occasion, an alteration. A true reading, one which knows how to read and knows what reading is, ignores none of this multiplicity" (100). Macherey demonstrates all the dangers of book history and production theory approaches. By focusing on the process rather than the human agents, they become impersonal, and by implying a necessary relation between creativity and material processes, they become determined. His attempt to grapple with these methodological limitations is rather quite interesting:

We could account for this latent knowledge (which necessarily exists, since without it the work would be accomplished no further than if the explicit

conditions were not realized) by recourse to *the unconscious of the work* (not of the author). But this unconscious does not perform as an understudy—on the contrary, it arises in the interior of the labour itself: there it is at work—nor as an extension of the explicit purpose, since it derives from a completely different principle. Neither is it a question of another consciousness: the consciousness of another or others, or the other consciousness of the same thing. There is no understudy creative-unconscious to the creative pseudo-consciousness: if there is an unconscious it cannot be creative, in so far as it precedes all production as its condition. It is a question of something other than consciousness: what we are seeking is analogous to that relationship which Marx acknowledges when he insists on seeing material relations as being derived from the social infrastructure behind all ideological phenomena, not in order to explain these phenomena as emanations from the infrastructure, which would amount to saying that the ideological is the economic in another form: whence the possibility of reducing the ideological to the economic (92-3).

The tortuous route Macherey has taken in order to avoid the reductive fallacy speaks to how treacherous materialist and contingency theories could be. How is one to acknowledge the relationship between literary creativity and the infrastructures of publishing, mass media, school systems, libraries, club houses and other social networking facilities that constitute and enhance those channels through which literature is disseminated and not credit the enabling mechanisms and conditions with the ultimate power of realization of the text at the expense of the author? Keenly aware of the caricature of vulgar Marxism, and determined to wrest Marx away from economic determinism, Macherey struggles to resolve this theoretical impasse inherent in the original hierarchy between matter and spirit, between infra and super-structure. He reaffirms with Marx on the one hand that material relations derive from social infrastructure, that is, the particular configuration of social infrastructure determines the possibilities of relations but declines on the other hand to accept the implication that ideology therefore derives directly from the infrastructure. Rather than attempt to hold off the implications of taking social infrastructure as a given in a theory of literary and



ideological production, this dissertation assumes that infrastructures, authors, texts etc, stand in relation to and not “behind” one another in such a way that one is neither precedent nor causative to another, but that the possibilities of one is already engendered in the processes and conditions of possibility of another. All are “products” of all. However, seeking not to reduce the unconscious of the text to an epiphenomenon or substratum, Macherey leaves it as the noncreative condition of textual production. By noncreative, Macherey avoids the traps of Psychoanalysis and Marxism yet allows us an understanding of the inner workings of creativity and role of publishers, etc. of the culture industry as a non creative support of creativity, which even the self reflexivity of a text cannot recognize.

The dangers of accounting for creativity via the material conditions of production have been evident for example in scholarship on Shakespeare. Reconstructions of the conditions of textual production in Elizabethan England such as presented in *In Search of Shakespeare* (2004) much as they enrich understandings of the text, also open up the speculations as to whether Shakespeare actually wrote the plays credited to him, or whether the texts were products of collaboration or benefited from multiple improvisations from outstanding actors employed by Companies that produced Shakespeare etc. This tendency to second guess the authors or appear to diminish their geniuses is the least desirable aspect of the book history approach. Yet the approach enables access into certain dimensions of discourses and relationships that illuminate the perspectives which the text assumes. In the archive one finds letters between editors and authors in which both articulate a clear sense of their operational and philosophical trajectories. Keith Sambrook’s letter, for instance, describing the publisher’s role in the

development of a new canon of literature in Africa, cited in chapter one, is crucial in understanding the imperatives of educational publishing in relation to the selection of texts in the series. The suppressed portions of Soyinka's preface form the point of entry to the questions of modernism and the critique of the educational criteria and the institutions of production and consumption of African literature. Here and there one finds statements that are to be found nowhere else in the entire oeuvres of the authors. In the very early stages of Ngugi's writing, he, like Nurudin Farah and Bessie Head, displays a penchant for engaging his publishers in personal correspondence that seems to offer a justification for his writing:

You remember the talk Judith, you and I had over the novel in Africa at one of your pubs. I said that the great novel from Africa must take count of the impact of African nationalism, that it seemed to me this one big movement that has affected the lives of so many millions could not possibly be left out of any creative writing that aimed at capturing the whole vision of Africa. African writers to-day stand in relation to their community, in the same position as the late 19thc. Russian novelists, the Elizabethan writers (16<sup>th</sup> C) and Greek dramatists (5<sup>th</sup> BC) - who gave expression to the emotional and intellectual consciousness of their society poised between the past and a new era. Whether African writers will have as bigger hearts as their counterparts, remains yet to be seen. Of those writing now, Achebe has the best chance of doing this, if he lets his heart go. (12-10- 64 James Ngugi to Keith Sambrook)

While conversations like the above broaden the scope of speculations about the purpose, function and meaning of literary texts and the comparative field within which they operate, other documents in the production files of the authors are far more definitive in the way they impact our understanding of the challenges facing the writers. Achebe's unpublished article buried in his file entitled "Publishing in Africa: A Writer's View" remains one of the most provocative and thorough reflections on the subject of African publishing. Achebe asserts, "when we speak of the book trade we blur the

difference between merchandizing and a very delicate process of bringing one mind into communion with the mind of his fellows. This process is not akin to the cloth trade or the beer trade. When I put on a shirt I am not in communion with the factory hand who made the yarn, nor even with the tailor who sewed it (especially if it is mass-produced). When I drink, I do not think of the man in the brewery who saw the bottle fill with lager or pressed the button that sealed the cap. But when I read, somebody is talking to me; and when I write, I am talking to somebody. It is a personal, even intimate, relationship" (2). Publishers, booksellers, critics, as intermediaries, however, cannot merely be "mindless conduits or a conveyor belt" but must be a part of the same "historic and social continuum" that writers share with their community of an "unarticulated feeling of a shared destiny, a journey toward the future" (6). Achebe's sense of the role of the publisher in Africa requires that he no longer be a catalyst but a part of an "organic interaction" between writer, publisher [middlemen] and audience that responds to "the possibilities and dynamics of change"(9). He therefore concludes that "It stands to reason that he cannot play this role from London or Paris or New York" (7).

These amorphous materials which might rather be considered print culture or publishing history have significant implications for literary theory. If nothing else, they provide a relevant context for understanding the general politics of writing. As Peter Shillingsburg put it:

But while that may seem to suffice for structuralists busily sweeping away textual surfaces, it is clear that semiotic and reader response critics might profit from knowing what editors, who have traced composition, text transmission, and relations between publishers and authors, can tell us about the context that an author brings to utterance in the act of creating a work of art. Clearly, it makes a difference not only what particular text we are responding to but also what we

know about the creation and provenance of that text. (*Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age*: 26-7)

Shillingsburg succinctly articulates the significance of the argument of this dissertation that literature must be understood *in relation to* the history and imperatives of the cultural institutions and industries that produced it. This, indeed, is what is mostly glossed over in contemporary theory since not much of literary criticism has been informed by editorial criticism and the history of publishing. The few that have attempted this in African literary criticism like Adele King's *Rereading Camara Laye*, Charles Lawson's *The Ordeal of the African Writer* and *The African Writers Handbook* published by Hans Zell, among others, have all focused exclusively on authorship and the cultural imperialism of publishing. Nevertheless, the dissertation is not an institutional critique but a critique of institutional productions of literature and literary products. It attempts to maintain a right balance between institutional and textual critique, which forms the primal concern of literary study. This equation Derrida highlights in relation to philosophy,

Although philosophy [read literature] does not amount to its institutional or pedagogical moments, it is obvious that all the differences in the tradition, style, language, and philosophical nationality are translated or incarnated in institutional or pedagogical models, and sometimes even produced by these structures (primary and secondary school, university, research institutions. (14)

This dissertation, in elaborating the process of literary production in Africa, adopts a method of periodization not based on chronology, but on developmental or evolutionary stages of the publication. This paradigm, deployed by Michel Foucault in describing the social-life of the "apparatus"—a term that recalls Althusser (that is, mechanisms of governmentality, systems of constraints, ensembles of techniques or strategies), holds that apparatuses emerge within a set of local situations from urgent needs which are very quickly erased or overshadowed as the apparatus undergoes

strategic elaboration in its diffused presence within the social body. The final stage of the development of the apparatus is the stage of its strategic completion, its overall dominance through minimal exertion. However, the process of the eclipse of an apparatus is the least explained in Foucault. The life of an apparatus breaks off suddenly and completely like a line that is terminated when another intersects it. This is the essence of the archeological method, aspects of which this project will synchronize with Winckelmann's theory and history of art. Winckelmann also divides the social life of a work of art into three stages, namely: the stage in which it begins as a necessity, the stage where it perfects beauty and the final superfluous stage. More than a mere literary history or an archeology of aesthetic form, this project gives archeology a genealogical edge in characterizing the various developments within the Series, in Geoffrey Hartman's terms, as the history of the interrelationship between Genius, genius and genius loci, that is, the power relationship between the writer, the history of writing behind him and the spirit of the place in which he writes, its *Zeitgeist*.

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. The introductory chapter deals with the theoretical considerations for the formulation of a theory of literary production in Africa. The second chapter examines the years between 1962 and 1968, in which Evander (Van) Milne (1962-63) and Keith Sambrook (1963-68) served as African publishers at HEB. The orientation of the Series during these years was strictly tilted toward educational publishing in the British tradition, and the editorial policies conformed to the educational criteria. It so happens that the educational criteria for the selection of fictional works were not simply imposed; they underscored the mutual interest of authors and publisher in an enlightenment conception of the nature and function of writing. Through an examination of Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting*

*Narratives*, Achebe's "Novelist as Teacher," *No Longer at Ease* and other writings by African writers that suggest an investment in enlightenment, the chapter reveals how the Series fitted into the larger cultural and political projects of The British Commonwealth precisely because of the educational criteria.

The third chapter plots an alternative genealogy of African writing which already manifested in the writings that preceded the Series and that thematize and problematize African modernity, the emergence of the postcolonial city and the crisis of nationhood. These concerns find their best expressions in the novels and poetry of Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, Ayi Kwei Armah et al. The appearance of these writings in the Series coincided with the appointment of James Currey as the African publisher at HEB in 1968 and represents a significant shift from educational publishing to general publishing. It explores the aesthetic requirements of general publishing within the context of the emergence of cosmopolitan centers of artistic production in a number of African cities such as Ibadan, Nairobi, and Johannesburg in particular, it focuses on the specific history in Ibadan of Mbari Productions, which had first published locally the writers that Heinemann Educational Books would later help to canonize through the Series as authors of African, Postcolonial and World literature. It demonstrates that the particular atmosphere of the postcolonial/post-independent city, the admixture of its political and cultural histories, served as the main enabler of artistic creativity and added vital material and imaginative dimensions to the production of the African Writers Series during the period from 1968 to 1984. Theorizing the relationship between the postcolonial city and literary production is conducted against the backdrop of works such as Raymond Williams' *The Country and The City* (1975) and Sylvia Beach' *Shakespeare and*

*Company* as a way of highlighting parallels between literary production in the metropolis and the postcolony.

The fourth chapter examines archival materials in an attempt to read the final versions of the literary texts for invisible texts. A critique of readers reports and “foul matter” demonstrate a search for authenticity that paradoxically represented the changing attitudes at the time of independence when it became ideologically expedient for liberal politics to promote authentic African voices and African self representation, voices which at the same time had to be kept distinct and pristine, in order to demonstrate a break from colonial domination. It examines Shillingsburg’s claim that “editors have almost always seen their roles as assistants in the author’s quest for the ideal text—the text the author wishes the public to have” (76). It examines the role of the editor in relation to the condition of translation.

The fifth and concluding chapter examines the publisher’s entrepreneurial role in the marketing of African literature, as one that is more important than “tinkering” with manuscripts. His or her genius, like that of a sailor, must manifest in an aptitude for predicting the currents and the tides of the market place and of the culture that could either propel or turn against a particular publication. This is the moment of decision that the publisher is always to encounter. In this chapter, we also access the language of publishing, how the “market” represents the absolute measure of value, the aggregate of all socio-cultural judgments. It also examines the differences in marketing along the lines of gender and genre.

The study concludes that the questions of language, audience, aesthetic and impact of the African Series could be most productive only if reengaged, as this book

does, within the context of international literature and book history. This approach opens up a new line of thinking about writing in terms of the right to fiction and allows us to move past the central issue of stereotypes in the anthropological episteme that persistently dominates the understanding of African, Ethnic and non-Western literatures. Drawing on David Damrosch, Christopher Prendergast, Pascale Casanova and Franco Moretti, the study proposes a reconsideration of African literature as world literature not in the conventional sense, but in the sense of a cosmopoetics dictated by the conditions of its primary production in a global market; an international literature that codifies the historical changes in Africa only in relation to the world. Conversely, this proposition renders the historical context for the emergence and eclipse of the African Writers Series as a basis for a new paradigm for theorizing world literature in conjunction with the concept of the universal.

The dissertation is thus overall a reflection on the proposals of Roger Chartier in *The order of Books* (1992), which considers the electronic version of the Series, “an archive of historically significant material, which makes available works that might never generate enough interest to be worth a print publisher investing in a new print run, but would nonetheless still be valuable to researchers,” and how such archive fits into the model of libraries without walls.



## CHAPTER TWO

### The Commonwealth Period of African Literature.

The British Commonwealth as a political entity had a shaping influence on publishing, on the consciousness of African writers as such, and was determinate in the initial formulation of the African Writers Series. The analysis that follows will bear on how the impact of the Commonwealth was generated, especially through the production of culture and language and how it figured in post-independence politics and politics of culture. In so doing, it examines the issue of the production of the book as a factor that is tied to the political configuration of the times. In addition, it will examine how the anti-colonial discursivity of African literature that was being generated at the time of the Commonwealth in texts like *No Longer At Ease* by Chinua Achebe could be argued to have acquired some authority from a particular strand of Abolitionist discourse, that of Olaudah Equiano, and how the publication of the African Writers Series fits into the larger context of book production historically.

The complex and original question that the African Writers Series presents, and which predominates over all others, concerns what constituted the necessity for the creation of a literary series that specifically targeted Black African authors. Subsequent to this is the question of what difference, in the final analysis, such specialized publication made? Approached in the mode of a historical inquiry, these questions seek to highlight whether the publication of the series was an offshoot, an effect, of certain overdetermined causes, or whether it is a novelty, representing a radical departure from the general practices of book production in the Anglophone world. The multiplicity of forces or

factors that might be credited with the emergence of the series found an anchor in a publisher with the pivotal instinct and ability to react to new writings, and with the enthusiasm and commitment to put significant resources behind such works not merely as a form of “service” but as a highly fruitful and portentous venture. The success of the Series as a preeminent postcolonial publication points to a convergence of intellectual, business, cultural and political economies and interests. This convergence of interests and judgments serves as an index and matrix for much larger relations. It made the Series possible and may or may not have been within the power of the publisher to stimulate and control. On this note, the productive powers of the publisher do not solely account for the success of the literary work. According to certain formalist critics, a literary work was first to be evaluated on the basis of its unique and transcendental qualities. More recently, theories that question the inherent value of texts have sought alternative approaches to discourse analysis in institutional and historical frames. Within the fast spreading phenomenon of the institutional turn in literary studies, the varying degrees of resistance and accommodation that characterize the relationship between writers, institutions and texts are now being explored for more adequate explanations of the emergence of aesthetic form and the means and ends of its reproduction. Parts of this dissertation address these concerns, especially as they are manifested in the publication of the African Writers Series. In this chapter, the focus shall be limited to the changing dynamics of political configurations that facilitated the emergence of the Series, and upon which theoretical speculations about its historical success could be based. Cognizant of the unwieldy landscape in which is situated the social life of texts, I shall nevertheless

proceed with the assumption that any account of the history of the African Writers Series must not fail to incorporate the sociological history of the text.

The African Writers Series emerged at the very historical moment in which homological processes in book and cultural production, and revolution, were in operation across the world. In Latin America for example, Doris Sommer and George Yudice have highlighted the evolution of one of African literature's historical cousins. They describe the 60s as the Boom period of Latin American Literature. The terms of their theorization are crucial to an understanding of the global processes that played cognate roles in the emergence of the African Writers Series. According to Sommer and Yudice, the 60s was significant for the enormous international success of Latin American literature,

[I]t was more than an explosion of narrative creativity; in fact, some observers are skeptical about the amount of work produced during that decade, pointing out that many of the books published then were formerly ignored works that represented a backlog for publishers to exploit once interest in Latin America had been established. The real explosion, then, may not be in the production of literature, but in its reception and market distribution. At home the process of modernization begun, in the 1930s, and greatly enhanced by the period of import substitution industrialization of the 1940s and 1950s was finally showing results in the field of mass communications. New consumer magazines such as *Primera plana* and *Siempre*, as well as major newspaper literary supplements, not only created a new reading public, but also provided the means (along with radio and TV variety shows) for transforming the writer into a superstar on a par with singers and movie celebrities. And thanks to parallel advances in education, for the first time Latin American writers could count on a broad readership. At the same time, Spain's publishing capacities helped to launch the Boom by breaking the regional deadlock that often consigned novels to their national boundaries (*Theory of the Novel* 860).

The analysis of the Boom period of Latin American literature mirrors the conditions of the production of African literature in the 60s, and aptly assumes a global validity when the experience of South Asia in the same period is considered. G. N. Devi (1989) in his analysis of Indian literature was first to argue that the 60s should rightly be

classified the commonwealth period in Anglophone literature because it was the period in which Indian writers in the English language were accorded global appreciation, which in turn enabled Indian critics to establish their authority over Indian literature similar to the one English critics once had over English literature, one effect of which was to institute an imbalance in appreciation of Indian English literature over Indian language literature. The commonwealth period is thus the period of cultural production in 20<sup>th</sup> century colonial history bounded in both extremities by independence and greater nativism.

It is easily demonstrable that the emergence of the Series and African literature as a whole was not an isolated occurrence but a structural part of an historical ensemble. The universal resonance of the significance of the 60s has been theorized by Fredric Jameson, among others. However, exploring the interconnections between historical processes in the 60s as they played out in different geopolitical zone is not the same as Jameson's attempt to formulate a "unified field of theory" in which "the discovery of a single process at work in First and Third Worlds, in global economy, and in consciousness and culture" is affirmed (207). Positing a causal relationship between African Writers Series and the historical forces that coincide with its emergence amounts to asserting a determinative logic of history. What is central to Jameson's theory is an internal logic of historical capitalism as the "ultimately determining Instance." His theory of history as necessity reproduces a poor blend of Hegelian and Marxian dialectics, and negates the optimism that uniquely defines the political struggles and cultural productions of the 60s. The 60s were significant according to Jameson precisely because "the enlargement of capitalism on a global scale simultaneously produced an immense freeing or unbinding of social energies, a prodigious release of untheorized new forces: the ethnic

forces of black and 'minority,' or Third World..." (208). He also argued that the "surplus consciousness" dispersed and diffused throughout that period constitutes a "sense of freedom and possibility—which is for the course of the 60s a momentarily objective reality, as well as (from the hindsight of the 80s) a historical illusion—can perhaps best be explained in terms of the superstructural movement and play enabled by the transition from one infrastructural or systemic stage of capitalism to another" (208). His historical overdeterminism thus effectively marks with fatalism all historical change, especially the powerful surge of transformations during the period. Jameson's theory of a unified and causal process is a methodological pitfall that must be avoided in the task of contextualizing the Series and postcolonial literature at large.

Indeed, it is the conception of Africa as a product of a history external to it, generated by a conflict with and convergence of European forces, that provides the imperative for African discourse to traditionally position itself as an articulation of Africa's "ontological sovereignty." In discussing African literary production, therefore, a full understanding of the conceptual complexity by which theories of literary production have always engendered a parallel relation to social production is required. As master narratives of social ontogenesis these discourses have served as means for establishing the ontological status of African societies. They defined the specialization of African knowledge and its production not as a paradigm imposed from without but as an ideology actively pursued from within. The nature of the ways by which the production of knowledge engenders social production is evident in the works of major thinkers and Africanists such as Nkrumah, Mudimbe, Mbembe and so on. This complex concept involved the idea of Africa that is unavoidably articulated to evoke an exceptional or

essential association with the structure of the society and human nature, that is, that the very “soul” of the continent, its flora and fauna, its geography and climate, its culture and discourse, and the foundations of its very humanity are inseparable, thus making Africa and *the African* both impenetrable and impregnable. This peculiarity, or particularity by which the art of representation in African is theorized, betrays a difference that has its roots in colonial metaphysics, one that is paradoxically inherent in postcolonial grammarology. If the rationale for the creation of an “African” literary Series is to guarantee an authentic voice, the constitution and rationality of that authenticity have in effect reinforced the colonial ideologies of difference. Most illustrative of this problem is the question, which may well now be the central motif of African thought, raised by V. Y. Mudimbe in *The Invention Of Africa*: “Does it mean that African *Weltanschauungen* and African traditional systems of thought are unthinkable and cannot be made explicit within the framework of their own rationality?” (x). Given that all questions of rationality assume multiple systems and modes of being, the presumption of an exclusive interior of *Black* experience and expression, its classification into a distinctive genre that asserts its own rationality necessarily leads to a metaphysics of difference. In this chapter, the study of the African Writers Series is intended to unravel the invisible workings of those presuppositions that undergird the specialization of the Series and its universal adoption. While the question of difference being highlighted here is clearly not the invention of the Directors at Heinemann, they by and large form the historical *apriori* by which African cultural identity in England was cultivated and the general practices of African book production established. In other words, though at first glance, astute marketing strategies dictated the imperative and expediency of targeting Black authors for the Series, the

decision has its ineluctable reality only within a history that already sidelined and neglected those writers.

The approach taken in this chapter of positing a direct relationship between sociopolitical transformation and knowledge production is one derived from the interdisciplinary field of enquiry associated first and foremost with Lucien Febvre and Jean Martin, and their *l'histoire du livre* (The History of The Book). The central claim made by Febvre and Martin is that book production has always been implicated in social change, or that social change is always accompanied by book production. Reversing the gesture of Simon Gikandi's *Maps of Englishness* (1996), which studied "the relation between the texts of colonial culture and the larger contexts in which they were produced" (xvii), this chapter is an attempt to unravel how African literary production factored in the changes in the structures and instruments of empire, and to formulate a paradigm by which we could understand the historical changes in the African world by reading those changes primarily through the prism of the history of literary production. It explores the historical contexts for the emergence of the African Writers Series in the mode of book history.

The history of publishing in Europe certainly reveals the strong ideological motivations that propelled it. The ideological orientation of the print industry, its role in the initiation, acceleration or decline of the most crucial conflicts of history, has been eminently documented. From the time of parchments to the introduction of paper, the history of the book is implicated in "intellectual, social and economic upheavals," (Febvre and Martin, 11) because of its "incomparable power for both transformation and propagation" (10). According to Febvre and Martin, after the Monastic Age, in which

“the monasteries and other ecclesiastical establishments associated with them [...] enjoyed an almost complete monopoly of book production” (15), the introduction of paper into Europe “occurred at the same time as the bourgeoisie emerges as a class” (15). The introduction of the printing presses also coincided with the emergence of the Modern Age and with the rise of the nationalist aspirations in Europe. How these historical transitions occurred is explained by the following logic of movements: “Just as printing favored the growth of the Reformation, so it helped mould our modern European languages” (319). The struggle between the humanist printers and the religious printers of the reformation devolved into a competition among national language printers as “printing helped raise national languages to a level at which they could provide a means of expression for a national literature” (324). Febvre and Martin further argue:

The establishment of national literatures everywhere had begun to split up the book market, a process which was encouraged by the development of effective political and religious censorship. Permanent divisions were established between the cultures of the different countries of Europe. (274)

If book production was so deeply implicated in the emergence of modern European nations, it is no surprise, then, that this moment would become the touchstone in the study of nationalism; after Benedict Anderson seized upon it to make the argument now celebrated that the print culture gave rise to nationalism. What is however not explained in Anderson, but which Febvre and Martin carefully map out but do not theorize, is not how different forms of local imperatives took advantage of the print culture for their preservation and eventual transformations, but how print culture reflected the “international character of the book trade” (296)!

The activities of the guild of booksellers in reorganizing the commercial network that was suitable to bookselling produced the book trades whose international nature



could be perceived as vital to the constitution of modern European identity. Indeed, in the late fifteenth century, the book fairs in Lyons and Frankfurt were important to this.

“Lyons was a hive of business activity: ‘almost on the border of Italy and France, in contact with Germany through Switzerland, it is thus the warehouse of the three richest and most populous countries in Europe’” (227). The King of France and local authorities granted generous privileges to all traders attending the Lyons fair, which included tax exemptions and the opportunity for foreigners visiting the fair to enter and leave the country unhindered. Though the book trade in Lyons was huge and outstanding, it was superseded by the Frankfurt Fair. The Emperor became the protector of the Frankfurt Fair’s privileges providing soldiers to escort book merchants. The same dynamic of internationalism which obtained in Lyons because of its geographical location, enabling booksellers to import Italian, German, and Swiss books into France, obtained also in the Frankfurt fair:

The fairs slowly became the rendezvous for everyone engaged in the book trade, a centre of swarming life, a picturesque scene which writers of the day, such as Henri Estienne, took pleasure in evoking. While booksellers and their assistants leaned from the doorways and windows of their shops and shouted to the passers-by the titles of the new books they had on sale, hawkers passed up and down crying their almanacs, prints and pamphlets containing an account of current events. Authors would be there in the crowd with a manuscript for which they sought a publisher or to watch the sales of their books, and men of letters would gather to seek work suitable to their talent as translators or correctors of the press. In Henri Estienne’s words, Frankfurt was the “new Athens” where you could see celebrated scholars talking and debating amongst themselves in Latin before an astonished public and elbowing aside players who had come to the fair to seek employment from the impresarios who gathered there to form theatrical companies. Shakespeare would have found it a fascinating sight. (230)

The idea that mid-sixteenth century Europe was the “new Athens” born at this historical moment in these fairs has persisted through the Enlightenment to date; this is the idea of

modern Europe as a unified Latin culture, which clearly saw itself as the direct heir of the ancient Greek civilization.

The decline of the book trade did not however occur until after the Thirty Year War in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. “Literature and learning were still international in the 16<sup>th</sup> century despite the decline of Latin” (332). The international book trade declined with the triumph of the Leipzig Fair, which did not publish in Latin but in vernacular. Publishing from this point forward ceased to be an international affair. In the very last chapter of *The Coming of the Book* (2000), there is the almost lamentable tone about this decline. Anderson’s theory of print culture and nationalism derives from focusing exclusively on this period, but even if we were to accept the proposition that the vernacular language press fostered certain forms of community and consciousness, by the same token, the international language press must have given rise to international entities as well.

At no point in the history of the world did humanity come as close to the idea of a world language as in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, “French was pre-eminent... as an international language but it could never fully occupy the place left permanently vacant by the disappearance of Latin” (332). With the return of international languages, it became possible for the publishing enterprise to return to its international vocation, especially in Latin America and the Francophone and Anglophone worlds, and hence support the emergence of what we now term “world literature.” The era in which the English language achieved its preeminence is the era of the British Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Period of African Literature, which is the subject of this chapter is thus the moment in which the book trade regained its international character, stimulating in its wake, a new international literature.

Comparable arguments have been made in speaking to what Jean-Francois Lyotard calls the post-modern condition. The postmodern condition of knowledge according to Lyotard is one in which the dynamics of production are radically transformed from their initial moment described and critiqued in Marx' *Capital*. The dramatic shift in the function of the narrative and the crisis of narratives that characterize this condition is directly linked to the system of mercantilization of knowledge. This system consists in the consolidation of new forms of capital which have different modes of accumulation and circulation. The basis for such dramatic shift is the changes in the technologies of production. The theory of technological determinism is one that has influenced the thinking of several authors from Heidegger to Walter Benjamin. According to Lyotard, "economic growth and the expansion of sociopolitical power seem to be natural complements" to "the general paradigm of progress in science and technology" (7). Indeed, "technological transformations can be expected to have a considerable impact on knowledge" (4). The changing nature of power in a postindustrial society is no longer based on economics but on knowledge, that is, knowledge capital. "Thus the growth of power, and its self-legitimation, are now taking the route of data storage and accessibility, and the operativity of information" (47). Lyotard's notion of the operativity of information shall be taken up later in the third chapter when the subject of the selection of African novels for the sole purpose of operative information would be discussed. Here, we are concerned about his theory of the relations between narrative and the technologies of social transformation and how his formulation of the concept of knowledge capital parallels concepts such as "cultural capital" by John Gullory and "literary capital" by Pascale Casanova.

It is no doubt the case that the production of the African Writers Series is reflective of the significance of the Commonwealth as a constitutive power for a new form of cultural and literary capital. According to Casanova in her book *The World Republic of Letters* (2007), it is the international capital derived from the international literary space that the activities of international publishing feed that produces great writers. “In reality, the great heroes of literature invariably emerge only in association with the specific power of an autonomous and international literary capital” (109). The double meaning of the term “capital” in Casanova’s theory should not escape us: Capital, both in the sense of capital city, center of political and economic activity and capital as the totality of the enabling resources of production. These literary capitals provide “both a common measure of literary value and a literarily absolute point of reference” (109). These capitals include London, Paris, New York, Rome, Barcelona and Frankfurt (164). These capitals also serve as consecrating authorities that “permit international writers within each space to legitimize their position on the national level.” The story of the emergence of Chinua Achebe as a writer told by Alan Hill corroborates the power of consecration that Casanova elaborates:

[*Things Fall Apart*] was slower to catch on in Africa. In the University of Ibadan, six months after publication, they didn’t take me seriously when I told them that one of their alumni had written a great novel. “What! Chinua Achebe write a novel! How ridiculous...!” However, the book soon made its way into the best-seller lists throughout Anglophone Africa. It went on to sell 3,000,000 copies in the Heinemann edition alone throughout the world. Add to the figure the sales of the American edition, and those of the translations into at least 45 foreign languages (in itself another record) and the overall circulation of this novel world-wide is phenomenal even by the standards of the twentieth century. (121)

The story of Achebe and the Commonwealth is a testament to how the “Age of colonization was characterized in large part by a process of linguistic and cultural

unification” (116). As centers of global power, culture and art, not only do the metropolitan capitals “supply theoretical and aesthetic models to writers on the periphery; [their] publishing networks and critical functions jointly strengthen the fabric of universal literature” (109). In talking about the Commonwealth Period of African literature, one is highlighting an example of how linguistic territories were emerged around metropolitan capitals and how “each linguistic territory has a center that controls and attracts the literary productions dependent on it.” That is, how “In the aftermath of decolonization, then, the major literary centers have been able to go on maintaining a sort of literary protectorate...” (117):

London today, even if it now finds itself in competition with New York and Toronto, continues to be central for Australians, New Zealanders, Irish, Canadians, Indians and English speaking Africans; Barcelona, the intellectual and cultural capital of Spain, remains a great literary center for Latin Americans; Paris is still central for writers from West and North Africa as well as for Francophone authors in Belgium, Switzerland, and Canada, countries where it continues to exercise influence by virtue of its literary eminence rather than any power of political control. Berlin is the leading capital for Austrian and Swiss writers and remains an important literary center today for countries of northern Europe as well as for the countries of central Europe that emerged from the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. (117)

From the world map of “literary protectorates” outlined by Casanova, our concern is the London axis, which is “a center on consecration whose legitimacy is universally recognized” (119). In order to establish the notion that these centers have through political and historical reasons accumulated literary capital that launches great writers, Casanova explores the careers of writers such as Faulkner, Joyce, Beckett etc. who were all consecrated in Paris. “The case of James Joyce—rejected in Dublin, ignored in London, banned in New York, lionized in Paris—is undoubtedly the best example” (109). The African Writers Series is one of the most remarkable expenditure of the cultural and

literary capital of London. The writers who were published through the Series, and they were virtually the most prominent, enjoyed instant international exposure. It is important to note therefore that most of the writers were sometime more known abroad than in their own countries. "Consecration by London has allowed them to enjoy literary existence on the international level." Indeed, the power of London cannot be better illustrated. "This power, and the correspondingly large share of literary credit it implies, continue to confer real literary legitimacy upon writers from Commonwealth nations" (118). The African Writers Series also marks the moment of ascendancy of the literary power of London and the beginning of the Commonwealth period of African literature.

The beginning of the commonwealth period, coinciding with the period of national independence of the African colonies, clearly indicates, as Robert T. Robertson stated, an anticipation and realization of the demise of the political and economic empire. As a result, "The British poured a great deal of energy into cultural affairs beyond the seas in the two decades 1945-65—in activities of the British Council, the BBC, London publishers (especially Penguin, Longmans and OUP), and in placing Britishers at the head of educational, media, theatre and all other cultural activities in the Empire turned Commonwealth" (3-4). That the African Writers Series was born in this period by Heinemann Educational Books, a London international publisher, competitor and collaborator with Longmans, Penguin, OUP etc, already invites the question of the relationship between the Commonwealth and the Series, and its production, marketing, appreciation and overall effects.

An examination of the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century publishing foregrounds the issue of rights in a way never before experienced in the book trade. The grand issue of legitimization is crucial in any discussion on postcolonial publishing. The book trade, being part of the wider fronts of European expansion, could not be separated from the general politics of trade as such. But insofar as publishing is not about the book in itself, but primarily about the right to re/production and the right to a territory, that is, the right to control a territory for the re/production and dissemination of the book, the question of rights becomes paramount. Whereas the right to re/production is conferred through a contract between the author and the publisher, the foundational right over territories is solely a right granted by a political history. These vestigial rights of the publisher operate as a form of archaic mercantilism within the modern economy of exchange. The publisher's right is thus political, as much as it is proprietary in both senses of property and propriety. The African Writers Series is, it can be argued from the Jameson perspective, a child of overdetermined factors. These factors govern and are coextensive with the destiny of the Series: first, London publishers by default had the "natural" rights over the territories of the former British Empire; second, the school systems implanted in Africa by colonialism were maturing and it was to be expected that this would produce Black self-expression as had been seen with the emergence of Black British authors of the late eighteenth century such as Olaudah Equiano. And third, there were economic conditions that permitted English publishers to market their books abroad in locations where there was no well-established local or national press.

In a correspondence with a US publisher, James Currey, the third editor of the series from 1967-84, writes, "It is conventional for a British publisher to have exclusive

marketing rights in the Irish Republic, Burma, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Pakistan and trusteeships, as these were once in the British Empire and there are strong marketing links” (HEB archive). If the boundaries of Empire were to bequeath exclusive marketing territories to a British publisher, they equally delineated the ecology of African discourse, authorizing a double legitimation of aesthetic form and its reproduction. Indeed, the Empire was particularly crucial in circumscribing the imaginary against which claims to a heritage were being made by the African writer. It constituted the *a priori* affinity between the creative and publishing ventures that formed the basis for aspects of the Commonwealth as a project that in part explored “the common heritage in language, culture and education...” (The Commonwealth website). The immediate community of writers to which African writers belonged was not comprised of those of the same nationality, but of those of the Commonwealth.

The influence and friendship of Caribbean writers on African authors such as Ngugi is well known. It could even be argued that it was this commonwealth project of a community of writers that Achebe acknowledges and celebrates when he writes, “to call my colonial experience an inheritance may surprise some people. But everything is grist to the mill of the artist. True, one grain may differ from another in its powers of nourishment; still, we must in the manner of those incomparable artists of *Mbari* accord appropriate recognition to every grain that comes our way” (Achebe, 1991: 3). This act of recognition from the point of view of traditional aesthetics enables the harmonious order of creative vision and social stability. According to Achebe’s articulation of this principle, “any presence, which is ignored, denigrated, denied acknowledgement and celebration can become a focus for anxiety and disruption” (3). This community of



writers was bound together by the same experience of British colonialism which had handed them a common language. The adoption of English as a language of instruction, creative writing and official business in former British colonies, which was to form the bedrock for the formation of the Commonwealth, was something more than a ritual appeasement.

The reality of the Commonwealth cultural and literary project was sounded by intellectuals like Paul Edwards who, in a fascinating expose on West African Narrative, provided an account, now standard argument, for the adoption of English. He argued that “it might be unwise to pursue complete linguistic, as well as political, independence” because “political independence is resulting in even more communication between West African nations and the rest of the world, so that a common language is going to be indispensable” (3). The place of English as an international language thus assured dictated, *quid pro quo*, that “there are certain advantages too which the African who writes in English will have over vernacular writers, the most obvious being a far wider audience.” According to Edwards, “He will also have a rich and complex literary tradition in which to work” (4). This line of reasoning certainly resonated with African writers who chose to write in the English language. As a matter of fact, the role of African writers in a new nation, Achebe urged, is to “do the work of extending the frontiers of English... to accommodate African thought-patterns... through their mastery of English”! Thus, the African writers’ mill is packed full of every conceivable grain opening the possibility of a literature that is the true form of world literature. The elementary fact that national literatures in the postcolonial 20<sup>th</sup> century were not written in vernacular but international languages renders Anderson’s work at best Eurocentric,

and at worst dubious for ignoring that fact. Instead of a nativist fragmentation of the language of empire, or the “empire fighting back,” Achebe and other writers took a more philosophical, unaggressive but productive posture which was in his words, “merely to ask what possibility, what encouragement, there was in this episode of our history for the celebration of our own world, for the singing of the song of ourselves, in the din of an insistent world and song of others” (Achebe, 1991: 3) The partnership of HEB and African writers in establishing a community of African writers came precisely from Heinemann’s capacity to provide that platform essential for the universal celebration of the African world.

One of the consequences of establishing a community of writers based on the pre-established commonwealth community was the production of texts that stimulated and cultivated a general Anglophone reading public, one to whom the Series is directed. James Currey, in preparing the translated version of Bebey’s *Le fils d’Agatha Moudio*, in 1970, states: “I have the English-speaking African reader in mind. The African Writers Series is aimed at them” (Heinemann Educational Books archives). The question that arises then is who is this English-speaking African? What does the African Writers Series mean to him? What does this English-speaking African share in common with other English-speaking people of the world? How does the AWS interpellate the English speaking African? In refusing to do a hardback edition of Ngugi’s *Petals of Blood*, the editor of another major British publishing house, T.G. Rosenthal writes: “none of us feels it sufficiently crosses border between Africa and a British market sensibility” (HEB archives). Is then the English-speaking African that being whose sensibilities traverse the borders of Africa and other English-speaking people of the world? This problem of the

reader's sensibilities underlies Ali Mazuri's complaint to James Currey over the editorial comments on his novel, *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*, when he says "I am surprised that in your assessment you feel that this book is so African that the response in the United Kingdom is likely to be limited" (HEB archive). The English speaking African reader of the Series is squarely the commonwealth man.

In short, it becomes increasingly evident that this Series of publications inadvertently or deliberately aspired to some sort of cosmopoetic character. The outcome of such dynamics is that the finest examples of the African novel, because of their orientation, are fundamentally World novels, perhaps, the first of their kind. The notion of world novel here refers to novels whose condition of production and consumption require and engender global networks, cooperation and understanding. This orientation forces us to consider a theory of literature from a cosmopolitan point of view. It is no less than this cosmopoetic sensibility of the Commonwealth Man that must have struck Paul Edwards in noting how desirable the Series was as part of the offering for establishing Commonwealth literature. He writes in a letter to Keith Sambrook, in 1963, "I've been asked to teach a course in the Dept. of African Studies on Africa and other Commonwealth literature in English.... So your African writers series is going to prove very useful. I wonder whether there is any possibility of extending to a Commonwealth writers series" (HEB archive).

Although it may be argued that the Commonwealth identity was epiphenomenal in some sense, some of the most enduring effect of the publication has been the promotion of a Pan-African identity. As Casanova has observed, "In fact, there was a desire on the part of publishers to create the impression of a group by gathering together

under a single label authors who had nothing, or very little, in common. This labeling effect (which may be compared, for example, with the promotion of the Latin American 'boom' of the 1960s) turned out to be an extremely effective marketing strategy" (120). This act of group labeling as a marketing strategy is what is responsible for the preference for treatment of literatures in African first and foremost along continental rather than national classifications. It is easy to speculate that had the editors taken Paul Edwards's suggestion to convert and expand the Series into a Commonwealth Writers Series, the Commonwealth label could today have displaced and superseded that continental label just as the continental African label became superordinate to national labels.

In David Damrosch's *What is World Literature*, there are analyses that are analogous to the one presently being made in this chapter. The insistence of T.G. Rosenthal on only publishing an African text that "sufficiently crosses border between Africa and a British market sensibility" constitutes a core moment of realization of a world literature: "[W]orld literature can also be found when a work circulates across cultural divides separating speakers of a single widespread language.... A Senegalese novel written in French can enter world literature in an effective sense when it is read in Paris, Quebec, and Martinique" (Damrosch: 212). The transculturation that marks the works of P.G. Wodehouse, which by Damrosch's estimation, constituted world literature in "a very real sense," is all evident in African literature, which is completely missing from his considerations—except for one secondary quote of Achebe on his use of the English language. "Not only was [Wodehouse's] work often focused on themes of transatlantic travel and linguistic incongruity; he was actually writing directly *for* an

international market, comically exploiting each country's myths about the other and playing with the many varieties of English he encountered" (121). What is peculiar about Wodehouse is not just the transculturation but how he writes about these cultures "*as if from outside*," that is, "his cultural double vision" (213).

The Commonwealth Period is thus a decisive moment in the trajectory of the globalization of English. In fact, the globalization of English may not have occurred without the initial stage of the Commonwealth. The proper transition of Commonwealth literature was therefore not Postcolonial literature but International literature as it represented the nascent conditions of "worldly transformation and dislocation" of the fictional universe (220). The very conceptualization of Commonwealth literature, it is interesting to note derived not from Britain or its colonies but from American professors, who at the MLA conference in 1959 organized a sessions on British Commonwealth Literature. Robert Robertson has argued that these American professors standing outside the Commonwealth were able to recognize in the emergent new literatures in English from independent or about to be independent British colonies, that very moment English language crossed the threshold to becoming a world language. "With the explosion of the English language all over the world, carried by settlers, traders, missionaries and officials, the social world was so enormously enlarged that it, like the Commonwealth itself, had to form itself into constituent parts, and each in turn produced its own version of contemporary literature in English" (6). The importance of the emergence of these literatures to criticism and scholarship paralleled the beginnings of scholarship and teaching in the field of American literature some two decades earlier (4). However, the sense of connection these American professors bear toward "commonwealth literature"

was not just the familiarity of the situation but also “the natural outcome of deep currents inside the corpus of literature in English itself. The response of its writers to a heightened sense of place was prompted by the diaspora of English speakers all over the globe, and that explosion of the language recovered for the literature, an emphasis on place, the *genius loci*, which had been stifled for a long time by the centripetal concentration necessary for the building of a world language and a great literature” (6).

There is no doubt that the consciousness of the British Commonwealth, of the world without and beyond, formed a major part in explaining the need or necessity of the Series but certainly created the market for it. The commitment of the founding director of Heinemann Educational Books, Alan Hill, who also started the Series, to the idea of the British Commonwealth is never in question. In publishing a book on Commonwealth literature, by that title, the proceedings of the first Commonwealth literature conference in the United Kingdom convened by A Norman Jeffares held at Leeds University, Hill writes in 1963:

We wish to promote this book very vigorously throughout the British Commonwealth. Quite obviously, on such a small printing there will be no profit to be made on this deal. In fact, quite the contrary. However, we feel that the Conference is such a milestone in the cultural history of the Commonwealth that the publication of the proceedings in book form is a matter of the first importance. (HEB archive)

The idea of the Commonwealth clearly supersedes the commercial interests of publishing. And, the African Writers Series most certainly constituted, in its own eminent right, a milestone in the cultural history of the Commonwealth. Its promotion in the Anglophone world underscores the preeminence of the book as a means of mastery over the world, as argued by Fevbre. And the African Writer invented from the renewed

attention brought on by the cultural institutions of the Commonwealth was fully ready for the spectacle he was to become, even as his art served as a form of outreach to the world. For how else could the boom period of African literature in the West be explained? Fevbre and Martin have clearly stated how the cultured reader in Europe from the 16<sup>th</sup> century on was more interested in the East, the Turks, the West Indies and the Portuguese territories: "Books on America only came fourth, while Africa and the southern hemisphere hardly seem to have excited any interest" (282). Even earlier works by Africans that seem to have made some impact all vanished with the Abolitionist movement. Works such as Olaudah Equiano's narrative would have remained permanently eclipsed by trends in British literature of travel narratives and modernist writing, if it had not been reprinted in the African Writers Series.

Although the idea of reprinting Equiano originated at Nelsons, that it was finally published by Heinemann Educational Books confirms that unique position of Heinemann in the publication of African literature. The story of the reprint is told in a letter on May 15, 1963 to Paul Edwards by HEB editorial director, Keith Sambrook:

When this idea first came up at Nelsons you will remember that I was very enthusiastic about it and, after leaving Nelsons, I assumed that the original plan would go through. Your decision to remove the manuscript, however, gives me the opportunity to pass on to you a proposal which Chinua Achebe, who is the editorial adviser on our African Writers Series, made a month ago. He had read extracts from Equiano in the Nelson anthology and in Hodgkin's Nigerian Perspectives and was anxious to bring out an abridged text in our Series. (Equiano file: HEB archive)

The reemergence of Equiano speaks to the sense of *déjà vu* with which new African Writings in the 60s were greeted. The resonance of the Series was developed against the background of national independence just as that of the slave narratives was against the

background of the abolitionist movement. A tradition of protest and a form of continuity was thus suggested between Anti-colonial and Abolitionist discourses with Equiano's slave narrative as the bridge between the two movements. Indeed, there is a sense in which anti-colonial discourse takes on and completes the rhetorical motions of the abolitionist discourse. Though without due credit to him, Equiano was among the first to propose "legitimate trade" as alternative to slave trade. But "legitimate trade" in a mercantilist economy meant securing monopolies over territories, monopolies that could not be guaranteed without forms of subjugation. The implementation of trade in Africa and the rest of the colonies thus contradicted the Laissez-faire politics of the free market that apparently formed the basis for Olaudah's proposal. Equiano's narrative engendered not just a topical abolitionist rhetoric, but much more importantly, a solid proposal for future relations with Africa based on the ethics of commonwealth, common humanity and mutual benefits, ethics that were in opposition to slavery and colonial rule. His narrative was not only out of print by the 1960s but had also become very rare! Keith Sambrook stated this in a letter to Chinua Achebe, on April 3, 1963: "It's extremely difficult to get hold of a copy. There is a copy of each of the nine editions up to 1827 in the British museum, but we could only get these through Photostats. Edwards has a copy, and there is one in the Fourah Bay Library and one in Edinburgh" (HEB archive).

In the introduction to the African Writers Series edition of *Equiano's Travels*, S.E. Ogude argues that "*Equiano's Travels* conferred on written African literature a legitimacy and sense of grounding based on its relative antiquity" (viii-ix). This same grounding was clearly being sought for modern African literature by Lalage Bown in her *Two Centuries of African English*. Though there is no clear statement as to why this text



caught the interest of Achebe and Keith Sambrook, its editor, Paul Edwards offered some points worth consideration. According to Edwards, it is the “simplicity and naturalness which gives the book much of its character and interest” (xxiii). He goes further to describe the element of “skilful dramatic simplicity” which he would also prescribe for African writers in general. In a critique of bad West African writing with “its fondness for the long and obscure word, and the elaborate tangled sentence”-- a clear mark of imitation-- Edwards encouraged plainness in style arguing that it is ridiculous to waste words when “they are doing nothing that simple language couldn’t do better”. He concludes, “So when I praise plainness it is not to condemn all elaboration, but only this kind of wasteful display. And though the writing here is, on the whole, plain, it is often powerful” (7). The point here is that in form and content, Equiano’s narrative served as a veritable point of reference for the emergent African literature of the 60s. The same cliché of observations, after all, was made in the glowing reviews of Achebe’s works. “His literary method is apparently simple, but a vivid imagination illuminates every page, and his style is a model of clarity” (121), writes *The Times Literary Supplement* reviewer.

However, these juxtapositions do not take into consideration that Equiano’s was an abolitionist, generic slave narrative. What commonwealth literature introduced by its very classification, was a geopolitical ramification in modern literary studies by which writings from the colonies were marked apart from those of the metropolis. The geopolitics of the Commonwealth created an imperative for an understanding of commonwealth literature as primarily an interpretive enterprise. As The Irish Times special correspondent put it, “In emergent Africa the importance of the creative writer cannot be over stressed, Africa today, more than ever before, needs talented indigenous

writers to interpret it to the world and vice versa” (22 Nov 1967 Achebe file, HEB archive). The point has been elaborately argued elsewhere that modern African literature functions as a canon of translation (Ibironke: 2004). If T. G. Rosental’s objection that Ngugi’s *Petals of Blood* did not sufficiently cross that borderline of British readership sensibility were taken together with the transparent simplicity that Paul Edwards advocated, and if they are to be understood properly, it must be within the context of the interpretive framework of the geopolitics of the commonwealth. This expectation forms the history of African writing--it is not a merely external factor. As Pierre Macherey correctly analyzes, “This history is not in a simple external relation to the work: it is present in the work, in so far as the emergence of the work required this history, which is its only principle of reality and also supplies its means of expression” (93-4). The historical presence in literature as a form of textual reality can be illustrated in Achebe’s third novel *No Longer At Ease*.

*No Longer at Ease*, a title taken from T. S. Eliot’s *The Journey of The Magi*, expressing what Achebe calls “the resonance of an immemorial anxiety” (2001: 19), captures not only the moment of a return, Obi’s return from England, but also transmutes the drama engendered in that return onto a much broader stage. The dramatic action of the novel revolves around the moment Obi takes a stand behind the box, as a spectacle of wonderment. At the end of the novel, in the very last paragraph the narrative motif is presented: “everybody wondered why. The learned judge, as we have seen, could not comprehend how an educated young man and so on and so forth. The British Council man, even the men of Umuofia, did not know. And we must presume that, in spite of his certitude, Mr. Green did not know either” (194). Achebe’s exploration of how the

colonial and commonwealth situations present the enigma of estrangement is fundamental to any understanding of his works. In *Things Fall Apart* after Okonkwo returns from exile, the reactions to his actions are similar to the one expressed in the passage above. After he unilaterally intervenes on behalf of the community and beheads the emissary of the white man, everyone asks bemused as they scrambled “why did he do it?” The insanity of Ezeulu, in *Arrow of God*, Achebe’s third novel, is the direct result of the overwhelming confluence of the events heralding Ezeulu’s failure to hold the community together under the indigenous religious traditions, and the act of desertion by the gods leading to his inability to rationally comprehend the erosion of his power. Obi in this case of *No Longer at Ease* had become unknowable to everyone. It is here that Achebe breaks from Mudimbe and his own affirmative ideology by depicting a character that cannot be understood even within “the framework of its own rationality.” Not “even the men of Umuofia,” his clansmen, could explain his actions.

The task of the commonwealth writer was thus to provide the explanation for an action whose determinate field has broadened beyond its immediate locality. Achebe like the postmodernist writers “puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself” (Lyotard 81). What makes Obi’s actions inexplicable is based on a singular issue: he was “an educated young man and so on and so forth.” The elliptical use of the phrase “and so on and so forth” in this passage connects to the only parenthetical moment in the novel and it answers directly and elucidates the final moment of bewilderment. In the first chapter of the novel, the narrator presents Obi’s bio-data as follows:

At the age of twelve or thirteen he had passed his Standard Six examination at the top of the whole province. Then he had won a scholarship to one of the best secondary schools in Eastern Nigeria. At the end of five years he passed the

Cambridge School Certificate with distinction in all eight subjects. He was in fact a village celebrity, and his name was regularly invoked at the mission school where he had once been a pupil. (No one mentioned nowadays that he once brought shame to the school by writing a letter to Adolf Hitler during the war. The headmaster at the time had pointed out, almost in tears, that he was a disgrace to the British Empire, and that if he had been older he would surely have been sent to jail for the rest of his miserable life. He was only eleven then, and so got off with six strokes of the cane on his buttocks). (9)

The transgressive act of bribery for which he is put on trial at the end has precedence in this letter and disguises the real ironic tone of the novel which is to be found in the subtext: how could he betray and squander such a “privilege”? This letter to “the enemy” also stands in for the subversive nature of African writing from a colonialist point of view. A comparison is clearly being forced between the headmaster in the Hitler story and the judge in the bribery scandal. The parenthesis itself is prefaced by the remark “no one mentioned nowadays.” That preface and the elliptical “and so on and so forth” mark the moment of metalepsis in colonial discourse by which omission is transfigured into absence, and absence into a radical ontological difference which Obi embodies at the end of the novel. Achebe’s argument appears to be that the suppression of the historical memory of the colonial subject, the occlusion of preexisting situations, which is necessary to the commonwealth project, and all its institutional networks of universities, communication infrastructures and commerce, will be the very nemesis of that project.

Apart from the interpretive function of the texts that has been identified above, the crisis of the man of education in *No Longer at Ease* points to a specific history that must be understood in order to bring clarity to the crisis condition depicted in the novel. The thematization of the corruptibility of the man of education runs against the grain of the narrative and promise of emancipation through education. Education has been crucial in the legitimization of the enterprise of Empire and the Commonwealth precisely because it

was the original element of the humanist principle that “humanity rises up in dignity and freedom through knowledge” (Lyotard: 34). The assumption of this principle according to Lyotard is that “knowledge finds its validity not within itself, not in a subject that develops by actualizing its learning possibilities, but in a practical subject—humanity [whose] epic is the story of its emancipation from everything that prevents it from governing itself” (35). The operation of Heinemann Educational Books is solidly within the ideological framework of the humanist principle.

Alan Hill’s effort to establish Heinemann as a serious educational publisher began in January 1946, a year before the independence of India. It was also at the moment of the victory over Nazi Germany and the triumphal return of the Labor Party. The educational publisher carried on the banner of enlightenment, after independence, where colonial education had foundered. The Africa Writers Series was part of the proposal “to publish across the whole range of writing intended for enlightenment, as opposed to entertainment” (67). During Hill’s visit to India shortly after independence, in 1956, he makes the following remark: “Three days in Bombay, spent visiting bookshops, schools, the university and the Education Department, were enough to convince me of the pervasive strength of the English language. The India which British soldiers and administrators had lost was being regained by British educators and publishers” (93). With the establishment of new governments and, perhaps, new societies, it was clear to Hill that insofar as the very idea of educational publishing came from “the general realization that a democratic society must go hand in hand with education” (176) an investment in “the liberating influence of our educational list” (Hill, 201) had become inevitable.



Hill's foray into African publishing came with a critique of Longman and Oxford University Press which he accused of simply "taking their profit out of West Africa, and putting nothing back in the way of investment in local publishing and encouragement of local authors" (123). Hill places his intervention along the same trajectory with the program of the Labor Party after World War I investing in the educational infrastructure of the colonies. "After the First World War the Colonial Office set up government secondary schools in Ghana and Nigeria. By the time I reached West Africa there was a flourishing school system, leading to British O and A Level examinations, and culminating in the new Universities of Accra and Ibadan" (122). The educational criteria therefore loomed large not only in the considerations of the publisher but also the writers as well.

Indeed, in what may be considered the Heinemann Educational Books charter, in December 18, 1963, Keith Sambrook, the general editor of the Series from 1963-66, wrote to Paul Edwards very early in the life of the publication the following letter:

I think I met everyone in Africa who is now responsible for organizing the teaching of African literature. It has taken on a rather frightening intensity. This is natural enough but, much as one is interested in new African writing and wants to see more writers of the quality of Achebe, some of the plans for honours courses in African literature are rather daunting. Your own letter seemed to me to strike a splendid balance.

In a way I suppose publishers are the key to all this. They can offer to publish indiscriminately and flood the market with a lot of third-rate material, or be extremely careful and slowly build up a body of African writing which will stand examination at degree level.

I have great hopes for the Equiano. There is great interest in Nigeria and elsewhere. I'd like to do other reprints of older African works, though again one has to be careful about reprinting things which are of *no particular value except as curiosities* (my emphasis. Sambrook in Equiano Archival files).

Sambrooks's staid but serious-minded proposal was to stave off the publication of materials that might sell solely because of the growing curiosity about Africa and African authors but which might not represent the best artistic tradition of the continent (personal interview). But it puts the implications of educational publishing into focus and points to the fundamentals of educational publishing and the selection of texts based on different criteria from general publishing, which shall be examined as the second phase of the publication of the African Writers Series in chapter 2. The difference between educational and general publishing is the restrictive nature of educational publishing as John St John who wrote the official history of Heinemann points out: "A good novel is a good novel anywhere; but educational books are only good in so far as they fit in with the syllabus and specific needs of an educational system. Their suitability can only be ascertained by discussion with teachers (not booksellers)..." (472). An example of this is the letter to the Schools Board in which Sahle Sellassie's *The Afersata* (1969) was being introduced to the school system in Ethiopia as the first novel in English which would help Ethiopian students in their efforts to acquire the English Language. Although, Sahle Sellassie wrote back to the publisher to correct the impression that the novel was the first Ethiopian novel, the letter by and large represents the standard HEB marketing strategy across Africa to cultivate the interest of Ministries of Education in making texts available for school use:

To Teachers of English in Ethiopia

We are sending you a copy of Sahle Sellassie's *The Afersata*, the first Ethiopian novel in English which we have published. We feel certain that after you have read it you will want your students to read it. We are sure that their knowledge of the background of this novel will increase their speed of reading.

We are taking the opportunity of enclosing our latest check list of the African Writers Series in which Ato Sahle Sellassie's book appears. These are paperback editions of books which have already been published and welcomed in



Britain and the United States. We hope they will capture the attention and pleasure of your pupils in their attempts to read English with greater and greater ease.

All orders should be placed with your booksellers or through your normal purchasing arrangements. (Heinemann Archive)

What is also counterintuitive about Hill and Sambrook's proposal for the development of an African literature educational list, what we should rightly term the educational phase of the publication, which is meant to be "extremely careful" in gradually building up a canon of literature, is that it runs against the grain of commercial publishing. Talking about the success that Heinemann has had and its reputation in England and a prominent fiction publisher, John St. John states as follows, "The prosperity of the firm depended as always very largely on books which, judged by strict literary canons, might with justification be classed as 'popular' or even 'second rate'. A high percentage of the reading and particularly borrowing public craved entertainment above all, even though the literary levels of such entertainment might vary. It is not to disparage them to say that many authors went out of their way to satisfy this demand" (355). The educational list therefore can only be construed as a devotion to the enlightenment and emancipatory promise of liberal humanism, which is the philosophy of the educational system as such.

It is in this context that the implicit didactic mission of African literature proclaimed by Achebe in "The Novelist as Teacher" coincides with the enlightenment ideology that undergirds the investments and commitment of the publisher. Achebe's view remains extant in African and postcolonial literary criticism to date:

Here, then, is an adequate revolution for me to espouse--to help my society regain its belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of the denigration and self-abasement. And it is essentially a question of education, in the best sense of that word. Here, I think, my aims and the deepest aspirations of my society meet.

For no thinking African can escape the pain of the wound in our soul . . . The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. In fact he should march right in front . . . I for one would not wish to be excused. I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past--with all its imperfections--was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them. Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct from pure. But who care? Art is important but so is education of the kind I have in mind. And I don't see that the two need be mutually exclusive. ("The Novelist as Teacher," 1965)

After over twenty years, in his last novel, *Anthills of the Savannah* Achebe continues to promote the same ideas articulated in "The Novelist as Teacher" through a character that serves for every intent and purpose as the author's mask. Through Ikem, and the role of the artist that he propagates in the *Anthills*, it becomes clear that the development of rational thought remains the centerpiece of the search for independence that motivated African writers in the 1960s. Ikem states, "We may accept a limitation on our actions but never, under no circumstance, must we accept restriction on our thinking" (*Anthills*, 223). The role of the writer is indissociable from that of the teacher: "I want instead to excite general enlightenment by forcing all the people to examine the condition of their lives because, ... As a writer I aspire only to widen the scope of that self-examination (158). The revolution of the mind that Achebe believes only education could facilitate, but which they were impatient to realize, he now argues "experience and intelligence warn us, will be piecemeal, slow and undramatic' (99). The task of re-education is one that requires a political support. Indeed, the ideology of educational publishing is fundamentally political and is instrumental to accomplishing democratic freedom by supporting "a good spread of general political experience, slow of growth and obstinately patient" (139). Through Ikem, Achebe provides a formula for social change through that revolution of the mind. Since "society is an extension of the individual" (99), the shortcut to change social relations is to give its individuals, "the

greatest present one human being can give another: the gift of insight" (96). Through this, self-reformation will be possible. Achebe argues that re-forming such a society must be achieved by democratizing the grand essentials of knowledge (insight) among the individuals. Ikem literally preaches to students at the University of Bassa, and by extension Achebe is urging the African youth, "You must develop the habit of skepticism, not to swallow every piece of superstition you are told... when you have rid yourselves of these things your potentiality for assisting and directing this nation will be quadrupled" (160-1). There is no doubt that Achebe is harking back to ideas developed at the very start of his career as a writer, which he expressed in "The Novelist as Teacher." Ikem starts his lecture at the University of Bassa on the note of what the novelist as teacher could accomplish: "Storytellers are a threat. They threaten all champions of control; they frighten usurpers of the right-to-freedom of the human spirit - in state, in church or mosque, in party congress ..." (153).

The attitude to the Enlightenment described above has resonance that is felt in black experience as a whole. Enlightenment meant emancipation. The most powerful expression and summation of this copulation of idea and condition is found in no other place than Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk*:

Slowly but steadily, in the following years, a new vision began gradually to replace the dream of political power, -- a powerful movement, the rise of another ideal to guide the unguided, another pillar of fire by night after a clouded day. It was the ideal of "book-learning"; the curiosity, born of compulsory ignorance, to know and test the power of the cabalistic letters of the white man, the longing to know. Here at last seemed to have been discovered the mountain path to Canaan; longer than the highway of Emancipation and law, steep and rugged, but straight, leading to heights high enough to overlook life.

Up the new path the advance guard toiled, slowly, heavily, doggedly; only those who have watched and guided the faltering feet, the misty minds, the dull understandings, of the dark pupils of these schools know how faithfully, how piteously, this people strove to learn. It was weary work. The cold statistician wrote down the inches of progress here and there, noted also where here and there a foot had slipped or some one had fallen. To the tired climbers, the horizon was ever dark, the mists were often cold, the Canaan was always dim and far away. If, however, the vistas disclosed as yet no goal, no resting-place, little but flattery and criticism, the journey at least gave leisure for reflection and self-examination; it changed the child of Emancipation to the youth with dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, self-respect. In those sombre forests of his striving his own soul rose before him, and he saw himself, -- darkly as through a veil; and yet he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission. He began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another. (6-7)

The earlier manifestations of the implicit faith in the liberating power and the potentialities of book learning could be found in texts like *Arrow of God*, *No longer at Ease* etc. During Ezeulu's exile and imprisonment in *Arrow of God*, he observes the district officer and his clerk; the narrative presents his observations in terms that reveal what W.E.B. Du Bois described in *Souls of Black Folk* as "the power of the cabalistic letters of the white man." Ezeulu was not impressed by the Clark, but the unusual event was that of the D.O. "He too was writing, but with his left hand. The first thought that came to Ezeulu on seeing him was to wonder whether any black man could ever achieve the same mastery over book as to write it with the left hand" (215). The fascination with "cabalistic letters," with the iconography of modernity constantly set apart the traditional man. Ezeulu is such a man, quite representative in most ways, smitten by the sword of letters and the seductive power of the enlightenment. So much so, he reinforces the wisdom of the decision to send one of his sons to school, upon his return to his village.

After a short pause Ezeulu spoke direct and to the point. He reminded Oduche of the importance of knowing what the white man knew. "I have sent you to be my eyes there. Do not listen to what people say---people who do not know their right from their left. No man speaks a lie to his son; I have told you that before. If

anyone asks you why you should be sent to learn these new things tell him that a man must dance the dance prevalent in his time.” He scratched his head and continued in a relaxed voice. “When I was in Okperi I saw a young white man who was able to write his book with the left hand. From his actions I could see that he had very little sense. But he had power; he could shout in my face; he could do what he liked. Why? Because he could write with his left hand. That is why I have called you. I want you to learn and master this man's knowledge so much that if you are suddenly woken up from sleep and asked what it is you will reply. You must learn it until you can write it with your left hand. That is all I want to tell you.” (234-5)

Although, the trademark subtleties of the ironic tone in Achebe's works create a sense of ambivalence, it also elicits sympathy for his mystified characters. As has been taken up by other writers like Cheikh Hamidou Kane, these characters are inexorably mystified, but in being thus mystified, they are unable to properly appropriate or decipher the consequences of their total subjection to “the book.” It is these ironies that underscore the transcendent narrative voice that is at once a view from outside as it is self-representation. Another one of such characters is Obi Okonkwo's father in *No Longer at Ease*:

Mr Okonkwo believed utterly and completely in the things of the white man. And the symbol of the white man's power was the written word, or better still, the printed word. Once before he went to England, Obi heard his father talk with deep feeling about the mystery of the written word to an illiterate kinsman: 'Our women made black patterns on their bodies with the juice of the *uli* tree. It was beautiful, but it soon faded. If it lasted two market weeks it lasted a long time. But sometimes our elders spoke about *uli* that never faded, although no one had ever seen it. We see it today in the writing of the white man. If you go to the native court and look at the books which clerks wrote twenty years ago or more, they are still as they wrote them. They do not say one thing today and another tomorrow, or one thing this year and another next year. Okoye in the book today cannot become Okonkwo tomorrow. In the Bible Pilate said: "What is written is written." It is *uli* that never fades.'

The kinsman had nodded his head in approval and snapped his fingers. The result of Okonkwo's mystic regard for the written word was that his room was full of old books and papers--- from Blackie's *Arithmetic* which he used in 1908 to Obi's Durrell, from obsolete cockroach-eaten translations of the Bible into the Onitsha dialect to yellowed Scripture Union Cards of 1920 and earlier. Okonkwo never

destroyed a piece of paper. He had two boxes full of them. The rest were preserved on top of his enormous cupboard, on tables, on boxes and on one corner of the floor. (127-8)

The fascination with “cabalistic letters” turns into a form of fetishization in which the use-value of book learning is subverted through mimicry. The contradiction during the time of Equiano was not in the promise of the enlightenment, but in the betrayal of that promise by White slaveholders. Equiano became the symbol of that promise and the object of mystification in ways that exposes that bankruptcy of the slaveholders and traffickers. He was approached by a mystified observer: “At last he asked me, ‘How comes it that all the white men on board who can read and write, and observe the sun, and know all things, yet swear, lie, and get drunk, only excepting yourself?’ I answered him, the reason was that they did not fear God, and that if anyone of them died so, they could not go to, or be happy with God” (128-9). The big schism here between knowledge and morality is the cause of perplexity for both Achebe and Equiano. It is the effort in regaining the moral authority of enlightenment that makes the publication of Equiano important in the Series. The moral argument of the abolition was based on the invocation of reason and religion providing precedent for the anticolonial discourse. The optimism of Equiano however contrasts with the pessimism of Achebe on the promise of the book. Clearly, all of Achebe’s characters see the might associated with the book, and not the right. (A critique of the instrumentality of the book shall be examined further in the second chapter.) The difference lies in the paradoxical attitude of contemporary African writers to the enlightenment. Whereas Abolitionists embraced the optimism of the enlightenment, modern African writers problematized its promise. In any case, the silence of the book that Equiano describes in his encounter already possesses the latent

prediction of betrayal. "I had often seen my master and Dick employed in reading, and I had a great curiosity to talk to the books as I thought they did, and so to learn how all things had a beginning: for that purpose I have often taken up a book and have talked to it and then put my ears to it, when alone, in hopes it would answer me; and I have been very much concerned when I found it remained silent" (35). In *No Longer at Ease*, the central puzzle is the inexplicable failure of the man of enlightenment. What Achebe is reaching for is the ambivalence at the very heart of the commonwealth project itself. The common culture fostered by the use of the English language operates at the level of formality which deprives the culture its ability to self-invent and reinvent. All is enumerated by Arthur Arnold in his piece "Britain's Legacy in Nigeria" when in part he states that "One of the more dubious legacies bequeathed to Nigeria by the British colonial rule was English as the official language; this in itself was not a bad thing but, perhaps because the colonialists themselves had been brought up on a diet of Latin, they left behind them no feeling or respect for the language as a living thing" (HEB archive). If the meaning of the commonwealth for all intents and purposes was unity in diversity, which means literally the same thing as separate but equal, then the commonwealth period of African literature represented a form of conservative emancipation. This is evident in the insight provided by D. J. Enright about the very notion of "Commonwealth literature":

The language of these (non-English) writers is English, and they have entered into competition with the Oxford Book of English Verse and its centuries – just like any other English poet. They will have to decide whether they wish to be judged by absolute, that is literary standards, or by special local standards. The world will urge them to partake of that new "subject" called "Commonwealth literature." (Quoted in Kamala Markandaya, 26)

Why bring back the echoes of the debates in the 60s about the commonwealth especially as the impact of globalization and the ultimate dominance of the English language have swept aside the Britain/Commonwealth binary? The attempt in this chapter was not simply a return to the question of the Commonwealth merely for interest in historical studies; it has served to contextualize and reconceptualize African literature within a political economy that at once stimulated and co-opted it. It has also served to highlight how the marginal status of African literature originated and was sustained; how the sentiments remain today as they had been in the 60s. The view of these writers as positioned abroad and only marginally related to the mainstream was very powerful. According to a review in the Irish Times,

The literature of those countries which were once part of the British Empire has bloomed with the advent of independence, the departure of the legions, and it has not lacked admirers and connoisseurs here in Britain. The parallel with later Latin literature, certain of whose chief authors came from the limits of empire, has been remarked on. (Boundaries: Achebe file, HEB archive)

The time therefore has come to reexamine the assumptions of what African literature was set to accomplish, if it has indeed extended the frontiers of English. In a highly instructive piece, Achebe offers the following suggestion: “That discovery that one is somehow superfluous is there, and waiting at journey’s end, for the weary traveler from the provinces. The great metropolis is not your little village; it has too many world-shaking concerns to be troubling itself about your insignificant homely affairs” (2001: 98). Beneath this remark is an indictment about the separate but unequal nature of the relations of Africa with the West, which has found expression in the use of different categories. The Commonwealth Period, like the colonial period maintained rhetorical categories of difference even as it proclaimed unity in diversity. The Commonwealth was



thus a code word, which meant, like diversity, the respect of, and keeping separate, irreconcilable differences. This separatist cultural politics underlying the specialization of Africa Writers Series, mirrored colonialist politics which “were actually founded on respect for indigenous customs and, consequently, on a diffuse culturalism” (Amselle, 2). It ultimately “amounts to an essentialist vision of culture, which is ultimately a modern form of racism. In this sense, ethnology can lead to a legitimization of exclusion (as in apartheid)” (Amselle, 2).

### CHAPTER THREE

#### **Ibadan: Postcolonial City and the Antecedents of The African Writers Series.**

The African Writers Series—African literature as an archive of writings—is an aesthetic formation that corresponds to the sociopolitical and imaginative forces that brought it together just as those forces are themselves being brought together through it. As political independence exerted an irrepressible centrifugal force within the British empire, the greater force of unification was not to be found in the political organizations but in the cultural. The unitary function in the field of culture as embodied by the Series is indicative of the deep contradictions within the ideology of common culture that the British Commonwealth actively promoted in the new multicultural nations of Africa. More importantly, the imperative of the literary function in modern Africa coincided with the simultaneous emergence of cosmopolitan centers of artistic production in a number of African cities such as Ibadan, Nairobi, Dakar, Abidjan, and Johannesburg. This chapter examines the history in Ibadan of The Mbari Club, which had first published locally the writers that Heinemann Educational Books would later help to canonize through the Series as constituting African, Postcolonial and World literature. The particular atmosphere of the postcolonial/post-independent city, the unique admixture of its political and cultural histories, served as a major enabler of artistic creativity and added vital material and imaginative dimensions to the production of African literary texts. The work by Africa's first Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka, illustrates the attempt by African writers to retrieve and restore a sense of stability in the city shattered by the disastrous and seemingly interminable transition from colonial to self rule, an experience that

uniquely defines the modern African/postcolonial writer as one who bestrides the immeasurable gulf of transition.

The rise of the postcolonial city represented a moment of intense cultural outreach and the internationalization of African literary production. The production of African literature was as much a function of global regimes of political and economic activities of international publishers and of the icon of postcolonial modernity, the educational system, as it was the direct reflection of the transformations of the city. This chapter demonstrates, through an examination of correspondences in the publisher's archive and a symptomatic reading of Wole Soyinka's autobiography *Ibadan*, and his novel *The Interpreters* that these superstructural and infrastructural elements produced effects in literature that are parallel to and intertwined with the structural and operational transformations within the postcolonial city.

As an imaginary formation, the Series crystallizes the processes of the disciplining of artistic imagination taking place within the contexts of historical moments and the *worldliness* specific to the individual artist. In other words, the African writer's existential alignment, together with the tension generated by the dialectics of change, constitute the generative principles of the African literary imagination. The world of the African writer, *the prison house* of his creative imagination, has been constrained by material forces of history in the same fundamental way as world-formation, as suggested by Heidegger. The effects of colonialism has, with the displacement of the old world and the institutionalization of a fledging order, presented to the writer a task, very much with the same obligation of illustrating the underlying structure of sensibilities.

In the postcolony, the immediate and visible manifestations of history have been most demonstrable in the transformations of space. As symbolic models, architectural styles engender parallel motifs in other expressive media: in the arts, painting, music, language, costumes, and modes of living, such that the grand orchestration of the culture effects a complete semiotic synchronization of the imaginary functions with the material effects. More significant is the power behind, and disseminated through, material structures. Mostly, with the infusion of colonizing structures such as churches, schools, post offices, colonial offices and residences, highways and railroads among many others, the landscape, the world, literally and figuratively, of most African urban centers where they were mostly erected, and their inhabitants, could never remain as they may have once been. This, in variations, is the ultimate theme of African literature and the lasting testament of the Series. Thus, African literature shares with other world literatures the essence of capturing the mobility of change and also of enabling resistance through the endurance of writing. The dramatic quality of the theme finds the most spectacular moment in the urban-turned-cosmopolitan centers of the postcolony. One of such centers is the city of Ibadan, in Nigeria, where the production and explosion of art in the 1960s effected a “Renaissance.” This chapter carries forward the theme of the previous chapter in evoking the genealogy of African literature as it emerged as part of the history of the book as a whole, the history of publishing in England and the West, and the specific requirement of political re/configurations such as the Commonwealth, but with a focus on its character as a product of a specific discipline of the imagination.

Given that literary forms, genres and collections have their moment in time, the moment and nature of their emergence is most often a response to an urgent need. One of

the most compelling works of literary criticism and history that examines how specific types of novels emerged in relation to spatial history is Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1975). Williams demonstrates in this work how each material mode of living in England has stimulated its own form of representation, and especially how the novels he examines record "direct observation of a new set of physical and sense relationships" (150); how in modern literature in particular, the "social character of the city was seen as the reality of all human life" (234). Beyond English literature to World literature as a whole, he writes:

In world literature, in Balzac, in Baudelaire and in a different way in Dostoevsky, the image of the city grew into a kind of dominance. Balzac had shown the social intricacy of the city, and its constant mobility; since his purpose was to describe this, the consequent image, though complex, is clear. Dostoevsky, on the other hand, emphasized the elements of mystery and strangeness and the loss of connection; comparably with Dickens but drawing on different ultimate responses, he then worked to create recognitions.... Baudelaire, meanwhile, reversed both these values.... There was a new kind of pleasure, a new enlargement of identity, in what he called bathing oneself in the crowd. (234)

Williams's magisterial explorations of the ways changing life situations and perceptions in the city equally transformed the imagination and modes of representation establish an important paradigm, however limited, for the present task of describing the relationship of the postcolonial city to the disciplining of the imagination as reflected in African literature, and of analyzing how the dynamics responsible for the transformation of the postcolonial city could be understood as structuring the apparatus of perceptions that stimulate and regulate the imagination of the African writer.

Alan Hill, the founding director of the Heinemann Educational Books, publisher of the African Writers Series, described his first encounters with two Nigerian cities as follows:

Lagos in those last days of colonialism struck me as the most terrible town I had ever seen. The heat, the humidity, the haze of Sahara sand brought by the “Harmattan,” were bad enough. The smells were worse. And I saw sights which begged description. Back streets about ten feet wide, with an open drain down the middle, into which people openly defecated: appalling squalor and filth everywhere.

Ibadan with its University was altogether better. I was the guest of Evans, the publisher, for a week—staying in their house, and spending the evening with the very numerous British academic community... nothing could prevent me from enjoying the African night. Sitting on the veranda after dinner, watching the fireflies in the magical darkness, listening to the chorus of cicadas and bull-frogs and feeling the embrace of the warm, velvety air of this immense continent, was an experience of which I have never tired. (*In Pursuit of Publishing*, 193-4)

What made Ibadan better also accounts for the extraordinary eruption of creativity that was witnessed during the 60s. In Hill’s description of Lagos and Ibadan emerges the two traditional images of the city. Lagos in this case would be in Raymond Williams’s characterization “the opposite pole from the ideal of civilized order” (Williams: 144). Ibadan however, with “its defining centers of culture and learning,” (152) marked by the “pursuit of industry and urbane pleasure... was the symbol of progress and enlightenment... the school of civilization and liberty” (144).

In the discourse of modern African literature, the city has played a much different function in the literature from those outlined by Williams. A crucial distinction needs to be made that enables us to comprehend the nature of the conflict to which African literature initially addressed itself. The city is first and foremost the revolving door to the greater world; a passage that is neither open nor closed. And, precisely because most of the institutions that function within it have their origins in and/or links to the outer world, its status as political capital is subordinated to its status as a hub.

John Pepper Clark’s poem “Ibadan” fully and concisely captured the essence of the city:

Ibadan,  
running splash of rust  
and gold – flung and scattered  
among seven hills like broken  
china in the sun.

The paradox of the city: treasured for its ancientness, deceptively decadent, bearing rustic innocence and golden civilization; casting forth the broken images of sunlight refracted in the brilliance of naturalized fragments at once irresistible and unapproachable. As already stated, a major achievement of African literature is the embodiment of mobility. The life and imagination of the African writer is always on the run. He/she is a writer in a time of change. The early African writer's journey starts typically at a tender age but always with the encounter of the colonial schools that tend to draw him or her away from roots. The glimmer of indeterminate yellow light from afar is gold, not rust, and sets a burning hope that displaces the certitudes, the comfort and security of home. The feeling of the embrace of the warm velvety air that Hill describes is not mere romanticism, but the real encounter of the space of enchantment. Nowhere has the encounter with school been more profoundly experienced as a space of enchantment than in African literature. From Ngugi's *Weep Not Child* (1964) to Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* (1972), or Laye's *The African Child* (1961), the young hero harbors a hope of emancipation entwined with the consciousness of responsibility. He ardently follows the train of progress to its terminus. These novels therefore cast their riveted eyes backward on that journey re-imagined as reflections of a journey, where ideals and fantasies are lamented, not fulfilled. This is why, as we shall later come to discuss, the true form of the African novel is the tragic form. A somewhat different version occurs with the Cameroonians Mongo Beti (*Mission to Kala*, 1964), and Ferdinand Oyono (*Road to Europe*, 1989).

Talking about his journey, from the eastern Nigerian village of Ogidi through Government College, Umuahia, to the University of Ibadan where he received a Bachelor's degree in English, to his now eminent position internationally as a writer, Chinua Achebe writes about what could be argued is the quintessential story of the modern African: "an awakening story in whose ambience my own existence had first begun to assemble its fragments into a coherence and meaning; the story I had begun to learn consciously... in Ogidi, the story that, seventeen years later at the university I still had only a sketchy, tantalizing knowledge of, and over which even today, decades later, I still do not have sufficient mastery" (38). The original conflict that modern African literature was devoted to unraveling as part of the larger attempt at decolonization was generated by the colonial school. Paradoxically, this conflict or crisis was a productive crisis as it formed part of the very condition of possibility of modern African literature.

Alan Hill stresses this same point in his narrative as follows: "As most of our West African Authors, during the early years of the AWS, had been educated at such British government-sponsored institutions, some account of them would be relevant. They were boarding schools, staffed by dedicated British teachers, giving a first-rate English grammar school education to highly selected Africans" (136). Just as Ibadan was to the West, Hill reveals that "Umuahia [to the east] was a rich breeding ground for Heinemann authors." The disciplinary regime in these schools, implemented through a rigorous curriculum, is only a part of the general regime under which colonialism disciplined most of Africa, especially regional urban centers such as Ibadan and Umuahia. Hill's pursuit of publishing in Africa and the establishment of the Series, was based precisely on the assumption of a kind of harvest of the first fruits of colonial



education. "It was clear to me that I should visit Africa, in particular West Africa – for more than one reason. Achebe was not an isolated phenomenon. He was a product of the newly established University of Ibadan" (122). Completely oblivious of the underlying critique of western education, Hill remained unaware of the subtext and the conflict dramatized in these novels even though it was available to him in different forms. In talking about the publishing mission of Heinemann in view of emerging market potentials in England and in postcolonial societies, he says, "Our concern was with English as the major subject in the school curriculum. In the hands of a new generation of teachers English was set fair to become the main cultural and humanistic focus of secondary education" (83). Thus according to him, editorial policy must be reflective of the new social developments: "My editorial policy was to concentrate was on two subjects – English and Science. English fitted the high literary tradition of Heinemann and had a world-wide market" (72). The central role of the regime of the English discipline in the cultural and humanistic education of the postcolony was seen as unproblematic by Hill. Yet, it is precisely this centrality that was to be challenged, reversed and extended through the Series.

The connection Hill makes between the time of independence of African countries, decolonization and the unprecedented outpourings of literary creativity is an important one. The roots of modern African literature, especially the Series, in colonial schools cannot be overemphasized. However, these do not fully account for the origins, nature and function of the Series. The historical moment in which Africa inserts itself into the consciousness of the world through its literature clearly reveals how the university is inseparable from the stimulation of public curiosity and intelligence, the

cultivation of a reading public, and the emergence of an educated class of Africans and of the bourgeoisie. However, the analysis of the sociology of the production of African literature would advance in a different direction if the observations and questions that Robert Wren raises in his book *Those Magical Years* (1990) were seriously considered. In a compelling argument, Wren makes the case that Ibadan has been responsible for producing such a huge number of authors that reducing the phenomenon to the offshoot of colonial education might not fully explain it:

What was the common energy that Achebe, Soyinka, Okigbo and Clark drew on? What powered the surge in literary art during the 1960's? The common locale was Ibadan, the common experience was University College, Ibadan, established in 1948, becoming simply UI, the University of Ibadan, well after independence in 1962. Other African universities, at Legon, Ghana, and Makerere, Uganda, had been set up simultaneously without such poetry, drama, and fiction. Why Nigeria? Why Ibadan?

Some say the question is inappropriate, as if literature were a spontaneous overflow of creative genius, inexplicable as it is unpredictable. It may be. Yet, at minimum, the tools of literature must be at hand, and for an international literature such as Nigeria's, the essential tools were manufactured abroad. In that sense, a colonial university in the 1940's and 50's was a tools supply depot. In the late 1940's, Britain setup similar institutions in Ghana, British West Indies, Nigeria, Uganda— literary tools depots of high quality all. And any good tools supply depot should do as well as any other, one would think. But colonial universities did not have equal results. Ibadan alone produced at least four writers worth world notice, two of them candidates for Nobels, and one a laureate. And that makes the question, *Why Ibadan?* more than idle speculation. Since the tools alone are not enough, what more was there? Might there be, even, a formula, a discoverable pattern underlying the creation of art, a context that needs only young people fed into it, as into one of the screaming, clanking Nigerian market machines that wildly mangle tomatoes and onions and peppers into a paste-like goo, the base of all good cooking? You just put stuff in, and you get the sauce. Not that simple, but as the rest of this book will show, something did happen. (Wren, 1990:17)

Wren in this passage appears to discount East African writers such as Okello Oculi, Okot p'Bitek, David Rubadiri, Ngugi wa Thiongo, all of whom were products of Makerere. He

also seems to overlook graduates of the University of Ghana at Legon, Kofi Awoonor, Efua Sutherland and Ama Ata Aidoo. However, the question “why Ibadan?” that he posed to all those who were part of the emergence of modern Nigerian literature, whom he interviewed, starting with the first president of the University of Ibadan, is an important question. It was also Wren’s method to put the production of literature within the material history of events, similar to what Febvre and Martin described in *The Coming of The Book*. What was consistent in most of the responses he got was the image of “a happy coincidence of people whose idea of the arts is that they should be a living form” (33). This conviction, identified by Martin Banham, among the community of students and teachers at UI in the 1950s and 1960s, is the same conviction expressed by Alan Hill and all the editors of the African Writers Series. In response to the question “why Ibadan?” Banham opines,

I suspect that in other places people were quite deliberately stopping any manifestation by firmly applying other criteria to what was the proper educational process or what was the role of the student or what was the role of the staff. I think clearly the last thing one must do is to look at a few expatriates as the stimulus, because the Nigerians themselves were the creative artists. But they did have the facility and the opportunity. That did something for it, to be given an audience. (33)

The notion that the expatriates and by extension, the publishers were not to be seen as the stimulus is consistent with Febvre and Martin’s methodological precaution in the study of book history, “We must, of course, be careful not to ascribe to the book or even to the preacher too important a role in the birth and development of the Reformation” (*The Coming of the Book*, 289).

Indeed, contrary to what was to be expected, as Wole Ogundele demonstrates, the University may not after all be credited with making Ibadan that much better a place, not to mention with stimulating literary creativity. In a familiar colonial ecosystem,

The University College Ibadan then was staffed mostly by such Europeans. They did their work very conscientiously in the classrooms or laboratories, but kept strictly away from either the students or the indigenous population.... In this regard, the university's role became reduced to merely training young people in the modern professions. Although a lot of research activities went on, nothing new or original that was a product of the interaction between the institution and its environment resulted. (Ogundele: 40-41)

All the foregoing characterizations are amply corroborated in the writings of most of the writers who lived through Ibadan, and were part of its literary golden age. An example is Wole Soyinka, the third sequel of whose autobiography is, as a matter of fact, titled *Ibadan*.

Soyinka's *Ibadan* is highly instructive in bringing together in a dynamic, vivid and personal relation all the forces, the special conditions that have made the postcolonial society peculiar. Conditions that bear directly on what was imaginable, thinkable and actionable. Like the archetypal young hero of the African novel of the 1960s, Soyinka's mount of transfiguration was Government College, Apataganga, located on the outskirts of Ibadan. In a most lyrical moment of self-discovery in the autobiography, on the very day of his return from England where he had been for five years as a student at the University of Leeds, Soyinka describes his natural affinity to Ibadan rather than Ake, his birthplace, thus:

But it was Apataganga that he looked for the deepest restoration of his long-absent self, in a far more complete sense than Ake... Apataganga had, he felt, defined him in some unchangeable way and the major craving he now had was to walk through the grounds of that school again while it was empty... Apataganga was where he had first *understood* conflict... from the very first entry through

those gates he had guessed that the place would mark him for life. There was something about Ibadan itself, a definite feeling, both restraining and exciting, that he had taken away with him after his final year in school. (Soyinka, 1994:16-7)

The point of this chapter returns ever more pungently. What is in a place? What in a place animates the imagination and permanently shapes the character of its inhabitants? What was in the “Gangling Rocks” of Apataganga, in the “Seven Hills” of Ibadan to hold such a tremendous importance for the personal lives and artistic careers of the writers? How is one to account for the spark of the imagination; what keeps the combustive intensity of creativity kindled? The answer is clearly far more complex than Robert Wren conceives of it. Neither is it simply the result or legacy of colonial education and the productive powers of the publisher as Alan Hill suggests. It is in that organic chemistry of material and individual histories, of matter and spirit, place, person and production as Soyinka’s story would illustrate. “Ibadan itself, with its rusted arteries, its ancient warrens and passions and intrigues, that would confirm what he had begun to be apprehensive about, in himself..., as having a preternatural affinity to a lightning rod” (17). Evidently, the conflicts that defined Soyinka’s life, which he experienced there in Ibadan, he is convinced, were unique to the place. Ibadan takes on a life and personality of its own with passions welling up in the shared arteries of its landscape. The underlying structure of the intrigues that it inspires lay deep within the labyrinth of its warrens. The human characteristics of passions and intrigues, the very stuff of drama to which Soyinka’s art is devoted, are simulations of the physical geography of the city. Soyinka’s personal temperament and artistic sensibilities thus shaped within the larger social drama are the lasting effects of the contradictory power of the city to restrain and to excite. It is in this sense, among others, that he says it was Ibadan that has “turned him into an adult” (17).

In another sense, Soyinka's very language of attaining adulthood in the city of Ibadan is loaded with all sorts of psychoanalytical undercurrents. One cannot but note the involuntary nature of the "turn." The sense of this involuntary turn is also present in Achebe's journey, as it is in most of the early African writers: from Ogidi, all the way through Achimota in Ghana, to the University College Ibadan. It altogether illustrates the overdetermined history of the postcolonial society that Achebe describes in *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988). But it also throws us squarely within the traditional narrative of country and city that Raymond Williams has traced in English literature: the journey cityward, though inexorable, is the journey into experience, into the passions of participation in the intrigues of the high-stakes drama of humanity. An overlay of pathos thereby forms around the tragic loss of innocence, of disintegration, of things falling apart. The autobiography, *Ibadan*, which ends with the author's detention and the civil unrest in the city, a prelude to the Nigerian Civil war, could very well take on the title *Things Fall Apart*. However, it does not purposefully, since it is ultimately against obstinate pessimism and the despair of disintegration that Soyinka, the *returnee*, the village protagonist, the academic monk, the civil rights leader and the revolutionary artist, came to uphold the emancipatory promise of the educational process that he, like other internationally acknowledged writers such as Okigbo, J.P. Clark and Achebe, began in Ibadan, Achimota, Umuahia, etc. Because colonial education promoted itself as a civilizational imperative, as liberation from superstition, a discourse that for the most part was very successful in its project of metamorphosis, the crisis of the promise of emancipation through enlightenment came into full reckoning in many works of early modern African literature. Thus, educated Africans were portrayed with a certain

elevation, a degree of messianic stature, which ultimately sets them up as tragic heroes. The hero as an epic hero is portrayed as the leader of the people. However, in the face of the Hamlet Complex as embodied in the character of Njoroge, in Ngugi's *Weep Not Child* (1964), a depiction of how colonial education failed because of its conservative emancipation, became necessary. The hero liberated from the traditional life of penury and subsistence is in "Third World" fashion thrown into a wider grid of subjugation in the modern world. From *No Longer at Ease* (1963), *Weep Not Child*, to *The River Between* (1965), the theme of the crossroads, of a tragic impasse is enunciated. In Nigeria, it was in the poetry of Christopher Okigbo that the mood would find its reverberating poetic voice, especially in his *Labyrinths* (1971). But also, the enunciation of the tragic impasse, brought about by the running aground of the projects of enlightenment and modernity, extracted a response that required the African writer to portray the courage to bear the black man's burden as a mark of coming of age, of autonomy from the colonial order and responsible adulthood. This second movement that asserts the masculinity of heroic struggle is what Ibadan produced in its writers.

It is a mark of classic historical irony that precisely at the moment the African writer came into full awareness of the limits of the emancipatory promise of enlightenment and subsequently embraced the disintegration of his world with philosophical equanimity, that Alan Hill's Heinemann Educational Books published the African Writers Series in the greater service of Enlightenment. Achebe, whose novel was the seed of the Series titled his first novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) to "the resonance of an immemorial anxiety" (2001:19). According to Achebe,

When my first novel appeared in 1958 with the allusive title *Things Fall Apart*, an offended and highly critical English reviewer in a London Sunday paper titled her piece—cleverly, I must admit—Hurray to Mere Anarchy! But in spite of the cleverness, she could not have known the cosmological fear of anarchy that burdened the characters in my novel and which W.B. Yeats somehow knew intuitively. (Achebe 2001:18-9)

His next two novels, *Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease* were to continue as sequels, the theme already having been enunciated in *Things Fall Apart*. The question is why it did not occur to anyone that the very novels taught to children as celebrating the authentic images of the African past and their humanity, were actually expressing doubts about their future?! That the independence of Africa, while it was rightfully expected to mark a significant turning point for the continent did not strike the same chord in its writers. From whence therefore came the anxiety of the writer? Could this also be a result of an immersion in Euro-American literature, with whom the writers are clearly familiar? Or is it part of a universal response to larger conditions of conflict and capitalist transformations? Instead of seeing the dawn of an age of enlightenment, the writer saw the anarchy to come. What is remarkable is that all these writers in the 1960s resisted the lure of exile and withstood the monster. This is not to say that the writer rejected altogether the enlightenment principle as clearly shown in Achebe's famous essay, "The Novelist as Teacher." The writer's instinct was to recognize the anarchy that threatened and to rescue society from the swirl. In this sense, the threnodic essence of the art represents not a finality but a work towards a restorative end.

Examples of the apprehensive mood and the anxieties that pervaded the literature could be found in most of Soyinka's works, *The Interpreters*, *A Dance of the Forests*, *Suns of Independence* by Ahmadou Kourouma among others. Contemplating his return to



Nigeria in 1959 and his choice of the University of Ibadan as a place to work, the signs of anarchy were already obvious to him even while abroad:

The signs were propitious – at least within the hallowed walls of academia; it was clearly time to return. Negotiating the conditions of his return was easy enough; all that remained was to negotiate the manner of homecoming, to create space around himself, large enough to insulate himself from, or confront, the menace of an incipient disorder, one that an apprehensive few had begun to suspect from the bearing and language of rival claimants to the midwifery of a new society; it was a disorder he preferred to diagnose as a common lust for power. (Soyinka 1994: 12)

What Soyinka perceives correctly here is how the process of decolonization occurred within the climate of an unstable system of power transference which encouraged all manner of adventurism. The main stage for this adventurism was the capital city. If political consciousness were to be the highest stage of consciousness, the political intrigues Soyinka witnessed in Ibadan were certainly a rite of passage for him and provided the appropriate context for his work. Even more than in the case of Achebe, Soyinka's anxieties were noted by the nation when the play he was commissioned to write for the celebration of Independence, *A Dance of the Forests*, was withdrawn at the very last minute, the committee having "discovered that the work struck a discordant note in the Independence suite – subversive, cynical, iconoclastic, that it mocked the glories of the past and was pessimistic about the future. The writer 'had been too long away,' lacked the patriotic spirit of hope and confidence that was needed for a nation that was taking the first step into a rose-tinted future" (67). The roots of the writers' anxiety lay in the obvious reluctant withdrawal of colonial power, the clear opportunism of political adventurers without a sense of mission, and the apparent incompatibilities of the nation. The writers were confronted with the specter of neocolonialism and "the increasingly corrupt and complacent class of rulers [who] existed solely to wallow in the abandoned

privileges of the departing colonial masters; their relationship to the masses was simply that of leeches and parasites” (216). While the politicians celebrated and indulged themselves, the writer was preparing the Noah’s ark for the maelstrom of the season of anomy. It was sooner than expected. The recognition of independence as a non-event and its portentousness eloquently described by Soyinka had revealed him to be clairvoyant:

The farewell smile on the British face was broken razor, the hand outstretched for a genteel handshake, or snapped up in a farewell salute, cunning crab claws whose sidewise sleight of motion hid the toxification of the passage it traversed, and the sowing of tares... (71).

It was at Ibadan, the hotbed of the national crisis that precipitated the war, that these writers observed the unraveling of the postcolonial experimental nation, racing to turn the tide of an even worse fate of total dissolution. The sense in which these writers took responsibility for the nation is unparalleled in the history of national birth literatures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A special correspondent of the Irish Times reports about the activities of these Ibadan based writers in the 1960s, around the same time Soyinka ends his autobiography *Ibadan*:

Mr. Soyinka is still detained for security reasons. Soyinka is suspected of arranging the purchase of arms for the secessionist Biafrans. Unconfirmed reports circulating in Lagos and London suggest that the poet Christopher Okigbo, who was the Nigerian representative of the Cambridge University Press, has been killed in action. He joined the Biafran army as a major at the start of the hostilities.... What is certain, is that present situation in Nigeria impose on the writers a mental and emotional strain of grave severity. A few weeks after the start of the war, a friend asked Mr. Achebe whether he still found time to write. He retorted: “who can write during a time like this? I’m learning to shoot instead. (Sic. Achebe Heinemann Files)

Similarly, another international journalist observed in an article titled “Two Bags Full”:

One thing Nigerian authors can’t afford yet is an ivory tower. A year ago, one playwright was acquitted of holding up a radio station. A month ago, one poet was principal actor in a gun-running melodrama. Nigeria’s leading novelist,

Chinua Achebe (an easterner like the poet), spent Christmas quietly with his London publishers. He arrived with two briefcases: in one, manuscripts for the Heinemann's African Writers series; in the other, pamphlets with pictures of gouged eyes and decapitated bodies, victims of the Ibo massacre (by Northerners) last October. (Achebe Heinemann Files)

The responsibility of the writer dominated all sense of personal life and ambitions. It was as if Ikemefuna's harrowing scream were addressing these initiates, champions of human liberties, "father, father, they are killing me!"

The political history and the crises of nationhood have a direct impact on the very choice of subject matter, themes, characterization, conflict, symbolism and significance of the writings, much as the writers insist on the separation of their lives' struggles from their works. The very definition of art either as "the affirmation of re-creative intelligence" or "transcendental, humane but rigidly restorative justice" (Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, 150,141), or as "restoration of celebration" (Achebe), is totally borne out of what Soyinka describes as "depth-experience." An examination of Soyinka's aesthetic theory proves its origins in the political crisis of the nation at Ibadan. The essay "The Fourth Stage" is Soyinka's equivalence of Achebe's "The Novelist as Teacher." In the mythopoetic formulation of Yoruba metaphysics, Soyinka identifies a dimension of existence he calls "the fourth stage":

The past is the ancestors', the present belongs to the living, and the future to the unborn. The deities stand in the same situation to the living as do the ancestors and the unborn, obeying the same laws, suffering the same agonies and uncertainties, employing the same masonic intelligence of rituals for the perilous plunge into the fourth area of experience, the immeasurable gulf of transition. Its dialogue is liturgy, its music takes form from man's uncomprehending immersion in this area of existence, buried wholly from rational recognition. The source of the possessed lyricist, chanting hitherto unknown mythopoeic strains whose antiphonal refrain is, however, instantly caught and thrust with all its terror and awesomeness into the night by swaying votaries, this source is residual in the numinous area of transition.

This is the fourth stage, the vortex of archetypes and the home of the tragic spirit (Soyinka, 1978:148-9).

It is past amazement that no one has commented on the contributions to political discourse that Soyinka's fourth stage represents. What is radical about the notion of the fourth stage is the subjection of all beings: the "gods," the ancestors, humanity and the unborn, under the same rule of laws, the laws "of the no man's land of transition between and around these temporal definitions of experience" (148), and most important, under the same governance of the gulf of transition. The ephemeral essence of being is thus emphasized as the truth of art in response to power, since art's only reference is temporality. The same is true of the Mbari temple of art that serves as the basis of Achebe's philosophy of art. In the annual reconstruction of the temple, the community comes together to contemplate itself in the old and new dimensions of its experience. In this sense, art plays a role in the coming together and being together of a community, which altogether undergoes constant redefinition according to the dynamics of its atrophy and expansion.

The African Writers Series is the most remarkable performance of Mbari in modern times. For London, the place chosen by the earth goddess Ala, under whose guidance Achebe sent his first manuscript to Heinemann is, like Ibadan, the no man's land of transition. After colonialism, the role of the artist becomes central in piecing together a broken history, in bestriding the immeasurable gulf of transition. Thus, the proper theory of African literature is the theory of Reconstruction.

The theory of the fourth stage refers in real political and personal history to the moment when chaos engulfed Nigeria in the course of its transition from colonial to self

rule, and the writer's homecoming turned into a journey homeward. Two years after his return, Soyinka writes as one whose "perilous plunge" and "uncomprehending immersion" mirrors that of Ogun in the immeasurable gulf of transition.

His Land Rover had taken him through at least two-thirds of the country, probing its ritual tissues for a contemporary theatre vision, or perhaps a mere statement of being. Despite it all, he was left with the strange sensation of being poised on the nation's airspace all over again, floating in a cloud of the uncertain and unknowable, wondering yet again what homecoming promised or would bring. (*The Interpreters*: 197)

The autobiography is itself a record of the transition from wonderment to total disbelief. "It was a strange, unsettling feeling. This was his own country, the space of earth in which he was spawned, and now he was learning, at the very late age of twenty-eight, that it was his prison" (327). The learning process concludes only at the end with the outbreak of violence. It was ironic that his father visiting him in prison, with his mother, "leant across the table and gripped his hands" and for the first time since his return years ago, said to him "welcome home" (368). The fourth stage refers to these extreme metamorphoses, these endless cycles of human stupidity, of disruptions and deferment of hope that has come to characterize the postcolony:

Would the unrest ever end, he began to wonder? This was proving very different from what he had envisaged as he grew neurotic in his haste to return home and... yes, do what, exactly? One crisis followed another until he sometimes felt that he was trapped in a time-warp, tossed into a centrifuge that spun him endlessly within a fourth dimension of existence, a diabolical *penkelemes* whirligig. (*The Interpreters*: 260)

The modern African writer is thus the writer of the fourth dimension and African literature, a literature of the transitions that attempts to capture the impermanent motions of change. With the strangeness of the experience comes its power of enchantment. This

impermanence and therefore permanent strangeness is itself inscribed in the very landscape of experience of Ibadan as a place of enchantment:

Yes, there was about Eleiyele an arcaneness, a collective eccentricity, a magnetic field for the bizarre married to its impermanence, a daily improvisation, of openness to a real world, a sense of integration into physical surroundings and humanity, all of which appeared to vanish when the campus moved to its new home that was scrupulously geometric and consciously collegiate. The old campus was stamped into the environment of Eleiyele, part wildlife, part civic centre, part college, market place, nightclub and village assemblage of elders and age-grades, arguing noisily, flitting silently through covered passageways and across overgrown lawns to raucous meeting places or solemn, attentive caucuses of mysterious wisdoms... (*The Interpreters*: 177)

Ibadan as a political city is restraining; the excitement it stimulates, however, is its cultural dimension, which has the even greater effect on the production of African literature in the 1960s. From the perspective of one of the leading writers of the time, we begin to appreciate the fascination of the likes of Robert Wren with “a discoverable pattern underlying the creation of art, a context that needs only young people fed into it.” “What more was there?” Not the University for sure, because as soon as the University of Ibadan was moved to its permanent site, it lost a vital sense of connection with its social environment, as Ogundele already points out. The Eleiyele that Soyinka describes was the temporary site of the University when he was an undergraduate. It was there that Achebe and the rest undertook their undergraduate studies. The University had moved from this location by the time of Soyinka’s arrival from Leeds. But while the University was at Eleiyele, what mattered was not what was going on inside it, as the dismal report cards of Okigbo, J.P Clark and even Soyinka reveal. It was what was going on around it, the physical surroundings and humanity, and the modes of sociality engendered in and by them that was to have the lasting impact on the production of art and culture.

The production of culture in Ibadan follows the logic of cultural formation about which so much has been written with regards to Paris, London and Athens. London in particular has had the same status of postcoloniality that makes the comparison all the more cogent. It is ironic, given the expectations of University education that the center of cultural production in Ibadan found a nexus in a particular club, one among several of those operating within the city of Ibadan—the one created by the German Austrian Ulli Beier. The name of this club was suggested by Chinua Achebe after the most elaborate traditional festival of arts in Igbo culture, Mbari. “MBARI Arts Club [was located] right in the teeming heart of Gbagi market and the surrounding streets that were only an extension of the market” (Soyinka, 1994:69). If within the Yoruba-African cosmology all roads lead to the market, the strategic location of the club within the restless hub of the market guaranteed its complete integration into every mode of life in the city.

In Wole Ogundele’s biography of Ulli Beier, Beier was credited with exclaiming, “it was impossible to sleep in Ibadan in those days” (105). The social life of the city, made particularly magnetic by these clubs, was “easy, friendly and relaxing.” According to Ogundele, “Ulli was on the dance floor in Paradise Club one night when someone slapped him at the back, shouting: ‘Hello Ulli, what are you doing here!’ When he turned round to look, it was the great Nnamdi Azikiwe himself, also out on ‘a night on the town’”(105). Mbari, though devoted to the arts, shared basically the same atmosphere:

MBARI Club was as much a social centre as a cultural-intellectual organization, and its social side needs stressing. It was a place for likeminded people generally interested in the arts and culture to gather freely and informally – something like the Paris Café but with an African character. There was a Lebanese restaurant upstairs which supplied very good food and drinks at any time, and very quickly too. At night members sat in the open courtyard to eat, drink, relax and talk. It was an open house kept strictly informal, with a library that anybody could just

walk into, wander around in, and browse to his heart's content. There were paintings and pictures everywhere. This made it possible for people not to have to wait for something to be happening in the place before visiting it. In any case something or other was always happening in the place and it was a magnetic point for the members, the university people, young American Peace Corps volunteers (who made it a place of cultural pilgrimage), and the townspeople generally. (Ogundele: 109)

Amid the political climate that created the *nouveaux riches* for whom “orgiastic socializing” had expanded and transformed the cultural dynamics of the city, the explosion in the music was unprecedented. As Soyinka recalls, “The history of musical rivalry among *juju*, *sakara* and *apala* bandleaders had a most lively chapter inscribed in the lyrics of the social music of the sixties, even as the bands also contended for the patronage of the *nouveaux riches* that arrived with Independence” (Soyinka, 183-4). For the political leaders and emergent bourgeoisie, “Orgies became a way of life at the top, social parties at the slightest excuse, parties that had no beginning and no end” (322). There were also the eating places that formed a complex of pubs all over the city where the history of Ibadan was written:

Risikatu's [was] yet another night roost of the Morocco brand, except that it had no resident band, and had never been discovered by the expatriates. Sometimes, however, an *agidigbo* group would stop by late at night, perhaps on the way from an engagement.... Mostly the *agidigbo* players were wandering minstrels, performing through the streets, then stopping, uninvited at a wedding or funeral, or child-naming.... But the *agidigbo* group at night, playing for themselves and fellow wanderers of the night was a different timeless sound. Risikatu's den, even to the smoky acoustics, was so suited to their tunes and sparse accompaniment that it seemed it was their constant patronage of the den that moulded the space and made it uniquely theirs (Soyinka, 182).

The power of the minstrels, of the artist and the writer to mold the city was almost limitless. The social exhibitionism” found apt expression in the word that captured the essence of the times: *Onilegogoro*, that is, “mansions of extravagant dimensions; reflected in the fashion and immortalized in highlife music. The awakening at Mbari in



Ibadan was exported to other towns and “outposts” as well. In the great upheaval in Ibadan, Soyinka reveals how he found redemption in the new artists at Osogbo and their experimentations: “It was to these that he looked forward when he set out for a weekend of escape from the violence and betrayals of Ibadan, to get drunk on art and palm wine, not neglecting dalliance with the languid courtesans, who blended the grace of rural discretion with an ardour that contented the most demanding...” (232). It is worth repetition that overall, it was this cultural caldron that started off the great literary period of modern African literature. The social environment described above encouraged the friendships between Ulli Beier, Soyinka, Okigbo, J.P. Clark similar to those that were produced during the Elizabethan period among William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe and Samuel Johnson, who were themselves Masters of the Revel. In Ibadan, “These friendships would have an intellectual focus in *Black Orpheus* and a social-cultural meeting point in MBARI Club” (Ogundele: 110).

The *Black Orpheus* publications which grew out of the literary activities at MBARI Club, are the foundational publications of anglophone African literature. Its first publication was by the reputable South African writer Ezekiel Mphahlele. Its first editors were Ulli Beier, Jahnheinz Jahn, Ezekiel Mphahlele and Soyinka. In Ogundele’s estimation of these contributions,

A more certain and quantitatively measured indication of MBARI’s impact can be gleaned from the sales of two of its publications[]; two thousand copies of books of poetry were sold; over three thousand printed copies of Yoruba children’s poetry in its English translation also sold out. After MBARI first published Soyinka, Okigbo, Clark and others, they became known abroad and international publishers began falling over themselves to grab their works. Thus, MBARI Club and *Black Orpheus* more than fully served the purposes for which they were set up. (Ogundele: 124)

The others referred to here by Ogundele, are among the most prominent in the canon of African writing today: Dennis Brutus, Kofi Awoonor, U'Tamsi, La Guma and so on. Ogundele's notion that the Mbari Club and *Black Orpheus* gave the writers a necessary exposure to the world at large underscores the cosmopolitan nature of artistic production in Ibadan, and the cosmopoetic nature of the writing it inspired. This accomplishment was actually lauded by Alan Hill:

Inspired by that remarkable German aesthete Ulli Beier (who contributed three anthologies of African Stories and myths to AWS), Mbari was an immensely formative influence during the 1960s, before the club came to an untimely end in the Nigerian Civil War. It was Mbari who first published Dennis Brutus, Christopher Okigbo, Alex la Guma and Okot p'Bitek (Ogundele: 142).

However, the real point of transition from *Black Orpheus* to the African Writers Series has gone unremarked in the literary history of the continent. The appointment of D.O Fagunwa, himself the preeminent Yoruba writer and probably the most translated of African language authors, by Alan Hill as the Heinemann representative in Ibadan was particularly strategic, much as was the appointment of Chinua Achebe as editorial adviser. This is because it was under the directorship of Fagunwa, in the Literature Bureau of the Western Region of Nigeria's Ministry of Education that *Black Orpheus* was published. The transference of the Bureau's authors was thus authorized in the person of the representative that Heinemann selected. Aig Higo who took over after Fagunwa's death, was himself, also a prominent member of Mbari Club! Thus the production of literary modernity within the postcolonial city in Africa could not be complete without their stories.

A study of literary production in Ibadan allows us to fully grasp the phenomenon of literary modernity as it plays itself out in the postcolonial city as a result of the sea-

change of socio-cultural and politico-economic forces that, thanks to Empire, now clamps most of the world in a combustive relation. From the account thus far, the parallels demonstrated between London, Paris, and Ibadan etc. reveal the leveling and homogenizing tendencies of modernity and the expanding circuit of world literary space, that is, the replication or metastasis of the nodal points of production and consumption. In other words, all that could be said about Ibadan has already been said about London and other major cosmopolitan cites. In Brooker's discussion of the modernist moment in the metropolis, he argues that "Though a different kind of metropolis from either city [Paris and New York], London performed a complex translation service across old and new worlds" (Brooker, 117). The connections between these cities guarantee a transatlantic transfusion of literary, cultural and intellectual movements. Pinpointing the example of writers such as Author Symons, "devotee of the Café Royal and of the Empire Music Hall, and the major conduit of French Symbolist verse into England," and literary phenomenon such as "transatlantic bohemianism", Brooker describes unique metropolitan civilization as it shapes literary tastes and artistic temperaments. "The impersonality of the city has fragmented both the city and its citizens who can only know London in part and never as a whole" (120). This mood and perspective expressed in the poetry of Symons "taught [T.S. Eliot] that there was a way to write about the ordinary dreariness of the American cities of St Louis and Boston which in phrases and fragments ("yellow evening", "sparrows in gutters", "vacant lots") would serve for London too" (122-3). On another plane, Ezra Pound meeting with Wyndham Lewis in Vienna Café had enlisted him in an international project of the metropolis that "envisioned a cultural axis connecting Paris, London and New York" (125). The centrality of the cafés,

restaurants etc. that was significant to the art movement in Ibadan was also considered crucial to Modernism in London, especially as they “energized the artistic experiment and experimental lives.... The London venues and symbolic geography of respective parts of the city played their part in this, too.... London café society, therefore, threw up a picture of contested boundaries and the collective life along with disarray and jarring hierarchies, as did modernist art itself” (129).

International literary modernism is not only defined by the parallel geographical character of the city, the histories and trajectories of events that those spatial elements give rise to are equally of importance to the nature and function of modern literature. Paul Edwards’s illuminating contextualization of the rise of modernism is important to our analysis of the Ibadan writers. Edwards points out that the outbreak of World War I “prevented the forthcoming violence and disorder” of trade unions and miners, seamen and dockers and labor in general. He argues that “Virginia Woolf’s statement about the change in human character is usually seen not in the context of the beginning of this period of violent social unrest and breakdown, but as tied to a particular cultural event, Roger Fry’s exhibition...” (135). Artistic sensibilities as they are presented in art, literature, music etc, necessarily represent the social ferment of the moment as expressions of an apocalyptic vision. Ibadan writers, as described in this chapter, manifest the disorder of colonialism and decolonization just as the trauma of capitalist and technological transformations were reflected in Modernist literature. “The violent cultural and political transformations that England appeared to undergo almost unconsciously from 1910 to 1914 were consciously celebrated in its manifestoes...” (138). What is also comparable to Mbari publications is the role of *The Egoist* in bringing

forward modernist writers in London. The attempt by Heinemann to bring Ibadan writers into the mainstream of British publishing is thus reminiscent of the sometimes failed but essentially difficult efforts to publish modernist writers. As Casanova has indicated, it was London, rather than New York that consecrated writers like Eliot, and it was Paris rather than London that first gave writers like Joyce international acclaim. The case of Joyce is even more fascinating. Having been rejected by London, he was able to publish *Ulysses* through Sylvia Beach's library club, Shakespeare and Company. In her book by that title, Beach documents how the bookshop and club became a "*poste restante*" for a wide variety of writers among whom were James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald, D. H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein. In a similar fashion, Mbari Club, too, became a cultural touchstone in Africa that was able to bring together from time to time and publish exiled writers from South Africa, Francophone writers such as Hampate Ba etc.

One of the most significant moments in the development of the editorial vision of Heinemann Educational Books came with the appointment of James Currey as the publisher of the series in 1967. Currey's predecessor, Keith Sambrook, came to African publishing at Heinemann in 1963 from Nelsons with a keen awareness of all that had been published by African writers and a decade of involvement in African educational publishing and school book publishing— primary and secondary school, with a little bit of college textbook publishing, but had done no literary publishing of any kind. Currey, on the other hand, whose parents were both writers, had grown up in an environment of great literary favor and thus was least predisposed to the educational criteria for publishing African texts in the series. One of the very influential neighbors of Currey's

parents happened to be Henry Swanzy whose weekly BBC radio program, Caribbean Voices, gave first hearing to and had helped in bringing forward the highly successful first wave of writers from the Caribbean such as George Lamming, Sam Selvon, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, V.S. Naipaul, Wilson Harris, John Figueroa and Derek Walcott. With visits to his parents' home by people like George Lamming, Currey had developed an alertness, as he calls it, for good writing that was not encumbered by any tremendous ideological structure. His earlier work with the Oxford University Press and close relationship with South African writers further established his credentials as a literary and general publisher.

With his hire, therefore, he brought to the Series a new inclination that stands in contrast to the earlier years. The exact nature of the Series and its classification as educational or general publishing remains a subject of intense conversation and often disagreement between these two earlier publisher/editors. However, the shift from strictly educational to general criteria is demonstrable in the kinds of writers that were actively pursued and brought on after Currey became editor. Among these are Wole Soyinka and Christopher Okigbo, the publication of both of whom, I would argue constitute significant landmarks in the African Writers Series and the materialization of the sense of the Series' continuity with Black Orpheus and Mbari publications, that is, the ultimate coming together of the exogenous and endogenous genealogies and trajectories of the forces of literary production in Africa. Soyinka had already appeared at this point in the Three Crowns Series that Currey ran at the Oxford University Press. It may well be that Alan Hill, Van Milne and Keith Sambrook were already headed in this direction toward a general market; moreover, since by the time of the inauguration of the Series a general

readership in Africa could hardly sustain a venture into the publication of fiction, it only made sense to explore the already established school market first. Indeed, everything Currey did throughout was with the active collaboration and advice of Sambrook.

The maturation of the vast possibilities of a viable general market in the 1970s signaled a break from the Commonwealth Period discussed in chapter one, even though the primary functions of British infrastructures, especially the educational, political and cultural ones, as the unifying and foundational forces of the postcolony would prove more enduring than their initial mention in the discourses and practices of literature that privileged the aesthetic as opposed to the didactic. Rather than publish anthologies of poetry for school use, with the exception of Lenrie Peters's *The Second Round* (1966) and *Satellites* (1967), the African Writers Series now frequently featured collections of poetry by individual authors, which in principle was supposed to be beyond the scope of the publishing interest as seen earlier in Sambrook's 1963 response to Kayper-Mensah, a Ghanaian poet:

As educational publishers, we are not really in a position to bring out first editions of original poetry. If you would be interested I could pass your poem on to a literary agent, David Higham Associates Ltd, who would, I am sure be interested in your work and would make every effort to place it with publishers of poetry (28 August 1963 Sambrook to A.W. Kayper-Mensah).

A similar policy statement with regards to content and level appropriateness of what goes into an educational series, which would have disqualified Armah (*The Beautiful Ones Are not yet Born*, 1969), Tayib Saleh (*Season of Migration to the North*, 1969), Soyinka (*The Interpreters*, 1970), and Okigbo (*Labyrinths with Path of Thunder: Poems*, 1971) among others, had there not been a redirection, flexibility or at least greater expansion of

editorial principle, is to be found in the rejection of the manuscript by another Ghanaian poet, Cudjoe:

I am afraid that your manuscript in the metrical structure of Ewe drumming sounds rather too specialized for us. The African writers Series is designed primarily for schools, and your treatment of this subject sounds a little too advanced for school children. Also I think the market for such a book would be too limited to justify a paperback, which has to sell in very large numbers if it is to be a commercial success. (Judith Verity to Dr S.d. Cudjoe July 18 1963)

James Currey in his essay “Chinua Achebe, The African Writers Series And The Establishment Of African Literature,” gives a comprehensive account of how the Series of publication systematically but steadily in actual practice did less and less with the inhibitions of traditional educational publishing:

Beti's *Mission to Kala* and Oyono's *Houseboy* were among the first titles which presented questions about what was “appropriate” for a school textbook publisher. One must remember that it was relatively soon after the permissive breakthrough provided by the *Lady Chatterley* trial. Penguin's printer Cox and Wyman went through the proofs of Oyono's *Houseboy* to search for four-letter words (the South African censors were to be more concerned by the “boy” finding a condom under his “madam”s' bed). Keith Sambrook and I were doubtful whether we could get certain novels such as Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* accepted because of a sexually violent death in London “in the land of jig jig”. Our colleagues reluctantly agreed to the acceptance of Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, in spite of the sustained and shockingly appropriate image of shit. We had a touch-and-go battle over Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood*, the heroic epic of labour resistance on the Dakar-Timbuktu railway line, since one of our colleagues maintained that it would be too long and therefore too expensive to be used in schools. (It became one of more than thirty titles which were to sell over 100,000 copies. The English translation far outsold the French original). (2003:578)

Indeed, by 1967, one begins to discern a certain kind of cautious openness. Given certain conditions, Currey would now not only publish the work of an individual poet, Christopher Okigbo, he would, in fact, consider publishing a critical study of his work as well.



We should be interested to see [your manuscript] although I must say that we find it very difficult to see our way to publishing individual studies of poets. However, sadly as we can consider his whole corpus we might be able to consider this in a different light. (Dec 4 67. Currey to Sunday Anozie.)

The sustained effort over three years to publish Okigbo, despite the great difficulty of his poetic style, due in part to its private nature and allusions, which ought to make him the least attractive poet for Heinemann's typically high school market, had nothing to do with any educational criteria but with the fine quality of writing found in the elitist aesthetic circle to which he belonged. This much could be deduced from Hill's letter to the Nigerian Heinemann manager: "Your letter to James re the Okigbo poems: I quite thought all this was cleared up. We printed the book long ago, as you know, all except the prelims. It is depressing to think that the works of this fine poet are still not available to the public because of all this wrangling amongst his friends and relatives" (Alan to aig dec 10, 1970). About 1970 therefore, an imperative seems to have crystallized and consolidated, which aimed to have collected under the HEB imprint, and made available to the general public through its distribution networks, works by the best writers from Africa, with little or no concern for the requirements and constraints of an educational list and firm. It was this aspiration that would eventually hit a hard rock in Ayi kwei Armah, the intense and hazardous pursuit of whose works has become the most well-known author-publisher controversy on the continent. In a telex message about one of Armah's works, Hill expresses this aspiration as follows: "Two Thousand Seasons: we feel that it is now too late for a hardback edition of this book, but we would be ready to put it in AWS. We do not feel it is one of his best books, but I think that we ought to have the whole body of his work under our imprint if this can be arranged" (Alan to Aig august 4 '76). Even in this phase of the life of the Series being articulated here, the school

systems remained its most assured destination. Having been built initially on school use, it was difficult for the Series to shed or transcend its educational label which thereby paradoxically guaranteed its success as well as setting the limits. This paradox marked a situation which constantly presented itself and remained unresolved, one that was significantly referenced in Currey's enumeration of the reasons for his retirement from Heinemann:

Many people have asked me why, when I set up my own business, I did not start up a counter African Writers Series. The reason is that I could see that the great African era of the African writers series was over. Because the market for the series was now predominantly outside Africa, I felt that the time had come for a partial change of tactics. Even the best writers had been under-recognized and under- sold in Britain. Reviewers and book shops tended to assume that because they were published by Heinemann Educational Books in paperback there were "just school books." (African Affairs)

The educational label which Currey attempted to overcome during his long career as editor and publisher proved to be just as unyielding as the "African" label that shall be discussed in the next chapter. In the end, it was against these labels, separate and combined, that the Series was forsworn by writers like Soyinka; his two works that became part of the Series got there fortuitously and by the sheer determination of the editors. The paperback edition of *Poems of Black Africa* which Soyinka edited was offered to HEB by a company in the Heinemann Group that specialized in fiction. Rosenthal's letter inviting HEB to join the project reads thus: "Just to remind you that we are doing Wole Soyinka's *Anthology of African Verse*, which I am sure you are going to want to put into AWS and I am delighted to be able to say that Soyinka has in fact already delivered all the poems and biographical notes etc. and all we have to do now (all!) is clear permissions (T.G. Rosenthal managing director of Martin Secker & Warburg Limited. to James. august 18 1972). Soyinka did not, however, spare any

opportunity to voice his displeasure with the whole business of deploying African writing for educational use. In the preface which was cut out from the final publication, he argues: “As a practising poet I am naturally concerned with the reduction of what I consider a continuing dialogue with humanity to an instrument of torture for teachers and pupils” (Soyinka Archival files). He further lays out the principle of general publishing to which he subscribes, a principle that shares its origins in the very ideological flowerbed of fiction. His sense of the literary is nevertheless not as antithetical to educational use as he imagines it. According to Soyinka, the educational system “may end finally in alienating the young reader from many poets for the rest of his life. I am convinced that the choice of poetry should be guided principally for the poem's capacity to arouse unaccustomed sensibilities in the young reader, selected as a principle of education not as an end. (I hope it is agreed that the former represents humanistic development and the latter, certificates.)” Soyinka’s critique goes to the heart of Alan Hill’s original vision of the Series, which was to move away from the practices of other British and European textbook-only publishing houses and invest in fiction. The materialization of the conditions for such venture coincides with Soyinka’s critique and with the publications of Okigbo’s *Labyrinth* and Soyinka’s *Interpreters*.

In a clear departure from the historical critique of colonialism in Chinua Achebe (with the exception of *A Man of the People*), Okigbo and Soyinka demonstrate a spirit of independence in recognizing the newness of history in the prescience and agency of the imagination, and in reaching desperately for the future anterior as it burrows through the threshold of an obstinate present. Soyinka and Okigbo do not chronicle colonial oppression, but present themselves to us as “herald-men of the future” (1970:13), and

their works as literature of the quest, this, according to Okigbo, “a fable of man’s perennial quest for fulfillment” (Labyrinths xiv). Okigbo’s use of the word “fable” in describing his own work is highly instructive as it sets this literature in contrast to historical discourse. An analysis of the aforementioned works by these two writers will illustrate the quest for fulfillment by the man and the artist, and the unbounded capacity of “poetry” to effect “humanistic development,” as well as the passion of publishers in alignment with and advancement of this movement.

Perhaps, the most illuminating description of the creative process that best represents in general terms, the artistic impulse animating the works of 1970s outlined in this chapter, (with their roots in the 1960s in the Mbari experiment), is by Soyinka in the said unpublished, suppressed portion of the preface to *Poems of Black Africa*; it bears reproduction at some length:

Consider the poet. Not the individual now but the general species. You have seen him often in the street with matted hair, rags, a bundle of brac-a-brac, barefooted and impervious to his surrounding. He is muttering to himself. The children stone him and call him madman. No, he is not a poet, not even the European publishers will touch him but wait - is there not perhaps a familiar method in his madness? He is talking to himself. His monologue is full of non-sequiturs, his tone switches abruptly from an angry snarl to a private joke that leaves him chuckling for minutes. He addresses an unseen passer-by and is strangely lucid, even wise. Aphorisms drop from his lips, his brows frown in concentration weighing a thought, an idea, rejecting or approving in loud debate. A childlike shyness overcomes him suddenly, he regresses into infantile memories and re-emerges with the mythical figures that once filled his young life, with key-words and phrases from that long-forgotten phase. Fantasies crowd his mind on a hot blistering afternoon; his fly-plagued, scabby exterior contrasts startlingly with the luminous peace that settles suddenly on his face...

It is a chain-reaction and it is endless. But now imagine one such marketplace lunatic who is fortunate in moments of lucid recollection when he can set down such a rag-bag of sensations and physical reality, and, there you have your “difficult” poet. The only difference is that the poet does not have to be actually mad. And he does organise his material but he does often talk to himself, and in a

language which, at first glance, is seemingly incoherent. (Heinemann Archive files for *Poems of Black Africa*)

Soyinka here defines what could be described as the lyrical poet. If we are to accept his definition of the African writer at this historical moment, we are bound to see a movement in the nature of writing itself, one that turns away from and against historicism in its radical lyricism. Soyinka may, however, be tapping into, if not evoking, a very long tradition in English literature of representing the poet as a madman as a way of parsing the paradox of that chaotic process of creative expression. The madness of the poet is the madness of the solitary figure. And what Okigbo says of his poetry is equally true of Soyinka's novels: "a poet-protagonist is assumed throughout;... a personage for whom the progression from Heavensgate through Limits through Distances is like telling the beads of a rosary; except that the beads are neither stone nor agate but globules of anguish strung together on memory" (1971, xiv). This represents a turn from depicting the hero as a village-protagonist framed by the tradition-modernity debate, to the hero as a poet-protagonist framed within the subjectivity-humanism debate: from the epic narrative to the lyrical form. In Soyinka's description therefore, the madness of the poet-protagonist is symptomatic of the problem of language and the impact on style in communicating the "comprehensive instinct to phenomena." The tension generated as this comprehensive instinct, "the swell of the silent sea the great heaving dream at its highest" (Okigbo, xiv), pushes against the unbreachable levees of language and is both the source of the pleasure and derangement unique to the lyrical poet. It is "the cruelty of the rose" (Okigbo, 27), or as John Dryden put it, "There is a pleasure sure, In being mad, which none but madmen know!" (*The Spanish Friar*).

The madness of the poet is not only related to language, it is also related to certain state of spiritual existence as is to be found in the prophet. Okigbo makes this leap between the poet's ability to articulate the feelings and thoughts of another and the prophetic ability of discernment and divination:

Screen your bedchamber thoughts  
with sun-glasses,  
who could jump your eye,  
your mind-window,  
And I said:  
The prophet only the poet. (9)

However, Soyinka's allusion to the method in the madness of the poet is a direct reference to *Hamlet*, and of course Nietzsche's madman. On the one hand, the correlation that is being sought in the imaginative function of the poet in relation to reality is one that has the most powerful expression in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

THESEUS:

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,  
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend  
More than cool reason ever comprehends.  
The lunatic, the lover and the poet  
Are of imagination all compact:

The dramatic shift in the cosmic relations of the new order of society became the most enduring feature of this new poetics. Post-independence, the writer's relations to self, to his environment, to his past and future had to be completely redefined. New foundations for human behavior had to be based on a vision of the human that was discontinuous with the past. This called for a new form of courage: the courage to imagine. The artist's ability to imagine the unimaginable, to "give airy nothing a local habitation and name" then comes fully into play. Okigbo very clearly shares Soyinka's lyricism as he invokes

figures in his own fable that fit the description of the poet Soyinka gives above such as Kepkanly, Jadum, and Upandru. The initiate, the poet-protagonist receives the watchword as he seeks to proceed on the journey through the labyrinths of life to the discovery of newness, not from mother Idoto, but from Kepkanly, “a half serious half comical primary school teacher”:

mystery which I, initiate,  
received newly naked  
upon waters of the genesis  
from Kepkanly.

Elemental, united in vision  
of present and future,  
the pure line, whose innocence  
denies inhibitions.

[...]

Mystery, which barring  
the errors of the rendering  
witnesseth  
red-hot blade on right breast  
the scar of the crucifix.

and the hand fell with Haragin,  
Kepkanly that wielded the blade;

with Haragin with God's light between them:

but the solitude within me remembers Kepkanly ... (6-7)

The refrain in this poem, *Initiations*, “And there are here/ the errors of the rendering ...,” underscores the failure of language to which Soyinka ascribes the difficulty of their brand of poetry. This difficulty is due in part to the radical form of solitude to which the poetic persona is subjected. It also arises from the attempt to see through other persons from that condition of detachment. The basic premise of the lyrical here is that identification can only be achieved at the moment of displacement, and that the burden of the past can only be relieved by a perpetual newness. The canonization of Okigbo, alongside Eliot in the

school curriculum in England, as part of the modernist movement speaks to the recognition of similar patterns of sensibilities and imageries which are deeply Bohemian Romanticism. According to Jonathan Culler, this privileging of the lyrical is significant to the extent that

Lyric is the foregrounding of language, in its material dimensions, and thus both embodies and attracts interest in language and languages—in the forms, shapes, and rhythms of discourse. If we believe language is the medium for the formation of subjectivity, lyric ought to be crucial, as the site where language is linked not only to structures of identification and displacement before the consolidation of subject positions but especially to rhythm and the bodily experience of temporality, on the one hand, and to the formative dwelling in a particular language, on the other. (2008: 205)

In an apparent effort to defend the Mbari school against charges of deliberate cultivation of obscurity, Soyinka offers a description that not only emphasizes the notion of the lyric as a dramatic monologue but that also proposes an examination of poetry as a form of dwelling in which the world is fundamentally reconstituted. Modernism restores the notion of the universe as a place of mysteries and the human journey through life as unpredictable and precarious. The epic of modernism proceeds with the poet-protagonist as a seeker whose moment of truth comes from self-sacrifice like that of Okigbo's initiate: a casualty of the mystery that he attempts to unravel on behalf of society. The notion of the poet as a priest whose revelation derives from the vicariousness of his temporal and material experience and the pre-subject status that underscores universal "structures of identification" thereby transcends the conditions of displacement and solitude. It is not an accident but a consistent principle of characterizing the poet-protagonist that Soyinka's heroes in *The Interpreters* are sculptors, writers etc who all reflect "the general species" of the poet. The technique of employing dramatic monologue in the novel serves quite ingeniously to remarry poetry to the narrative, the



aesthetic to the social, linguistic and social event, and the personal to the collective experience. Jonathan Culler further gives us an understanding of how the forces against “The Romantic notion of lyric as expression of intense personal experience, have adopted the model of the dramatic monologue as the way to align poetry with the novel: the lyric is conceived as a fictional imitation of the act of a speaker, and to interpret the lyric is to work out what sort of person is speaking, in what circumstances and with what attitude or, ideally, drama of attitudes” (201). However, in Soyinka’s dramatic monologues, he does not dismiss the romantic notion of poetry altogether. His is an effort to smuggle the narrative back into the poetics of the lyrical as an attempt to simultaneously address the questions of “what happens next” and “what happens now.”

Soyinka’s novel *The Interpreters* is in two parts. The first part is the narrative of the socio-political rot of the postcolony. The second part is an affirmation of the creative powers of man in being able to represent and thereby transform human existence. In other words, the novel explores the dialectics of reality and representation and how representation is always transformative of reality. The atmosphere of the novel is redolent of the same atmosphere of the club houses that has been described in the earlier section of this chapter, as helping to define the culture and art of the 1960s. Indeed, the narrative time of the novel centers on the moments the cohort of friends, whose individual and collective memories are being read and reread with a constant “interlude from reality,” spend together in their haunts: the clubhouses and art studios. Part of the atmosphere of the club, which sets a series of metaphoric associations in motion throughout the story, is the rain, the music and the mood of the characters. Sagoe, the journalist, expressed this connection as follows: “No I am low. Damn it, I *am* low. And that wretched band was

really to blame. They depressed me the moment they began to play. And then this transition from high-life to rain *maraccas* has gone on far too long. Rain rhythm is too complex and I am too slow to take it in. you too, tootsie” (19).

It is interesting how Okigbo and Soyinka share the image of water and the deluge in their works, especially in *Labyrinths* and *The Interpreters*. The novel begins with the intrusion of rain apparently amid “party privacy” at Club Cambana Cubicles where the patrons were being treated to drinks and highlife music. The clear sense of dissonance, of an aborted pleasure, brought about by the coming of the rains is captured in Egbo’s reaction: “The ‘plop’ continued some time before its meaning came clear to Egbo and he looked up at the leaking roof in disgust, then threw his beer into the rain muttering. ‘I don’t need his pity. Someone tell God to not weep in my beer’” (1). Soyinka announces the character of the *Interpreters* as “apostates” through this opening. The image of the deluge, which Soyinka uses as the image of apostasy, of the erosion of morality and cleansing, is likewise used by Okigbo in his poetry:

AND THE gods lie in state  
And the gods lie in state  
Without the long-drum.

And the gods lie unsung,  
Veiled only with mould,  
Behind the shrinehouse.

Gods grow out,  
Abandoned;  
And so do they ... (34)

This section of *Labyrinths* entitled “Fragments out of the deluge,” according to Okigbo, “renders in retrospect certain details of the protagonist and of his milieu— the collective rape of innocence and profanation of the mysteries, in atonement for which he has had to

suffer immolation” (xi). It is not until the second part of *The Interpreters*, as we shall come to examine, that we see the consummate image of the deluge represent apostasy and the offering up of the apostate as a form of ritual cleansing of the group of radical intellectuals, if not the society as a whole. It represents in the classic Soyinkean repertoire of symbolism, with the pregnancy of Egbo’s high-school girl friend, the hope for a new moral and social order.

To peel the layers one at a time, the mixed rhythms of music and rain parallel the mixed marriages and strange friendships in the novel. The intrusion of the rain for Egbo is painful particularly because it dispels his “dream of isolation” and triggers the resumption of his nightmare by bringing back to him the reminders of his obligations to the past, to his dead parents. The water, the “talkative puddle” speaks to him alone; in response to which, his sudden utterance, “Well, I made a choice. I can’t complain” (8), came as a surprise to his companions. The very last sentence of the novel, after it was known that Egbo has betrayed his girlfriend Simi by impregnating a schoolgirl, evokes this same reference. “Egbo watched her [Simi] while she walked towards him, eyes ocean-clams with her peculiar sadness... like a choice of a man drowning he was saying... only like a choice of drowning” (251). Why does water terrify Egbo in this manner? In the first flashback of the novel as the rain interrupts the music, we are transported back to his only visit to the place where his parents supposedly had drowned, and where “the mangrove arches spread seemingly endless....” He had gone there with his friends. Kola, the artist, had exclaimed upon seeing this sight, “the mangrove depresses me.” Egbo’s response is significant: “‘me too’ said Egbo. ‘I suppose I can never wholly escape water, but I do not love the things of death’” (8). So, Soyinka gives us the cue

right at the beginning of this novel that water, the deluge, is the symbol of death. If highlife music were the music of independence, it's being interrupted and disrupted by the rain is an image that had to be very troubling indeed to the interpreters.

Another symbolic moment of intrusion in the first chapter is when the *apala* musicians take the stage after the highlife band, without invitation or warning:

A new band took the stand, but they had not come to duel the rain. The small *apala* group had slowly begun to function as the string trio, quartet, or the lone violinist of the restaurants of Europe, serenade of the promising purse. This was an itinerant group, unfed; their livelihood would depend on alms. Normally their haunts were the streets, the markets and even private offices where they could practice a mild blackmail. They had a great nose for the occasion and were prepared for the naming-day before the child was born. They grew bolder, took in the urban needs, taught style to the new *oyinbos*, and became as indispensable to the cocktail party as the olive on a stick. First their tunes, then their instruments—the talking-drum especially—invaded the night-clubs. And later they re-formed, and once again intact, exploited intervals and other silences wrought by circumstance. As this group now did. Just the one box-guitar, three drums which seemed permanent outgrowths of the armpits, voices modulated as the muted slur by the drums' controlling strings. And they gauged the mood, like true professionals, speaking to each other not to their audience, who would, if they chose, not *know* this language. But fashion had changed. Denial was now old-fashioned and after the garish, exhibitionist, bluff of the high-life band, this renewed cause for feeling, hinted meanings of which they were, a phase before, half-ashamed. (21)

The *apala* group is different from the *agidigbo* group earlier mentioned in the discussion of Soyinka's *Ibadan*. All these musical groups together have a common history and functioned to express the unique post-independent spirit that permeated life in most of Africa in the sixties. The boom experienced in these musical productions is ripple of larger bursts in the production of culture to which the Mbari and the African Writers Series contributed immensely. In the case of the *agidigbo*, it was the transformational power of the art of musical poetry that captured Soyinka's imagination. *Agidigbo* and *apala* are both more culturally rooted and localized than Highlife which is not only

transcultural and cosmopolitan in style but also elitist. According to the narrator of this scene, as the *apala* band started to play, “The manager [of the club] stormed out suddenly, waving his arms about and shouting ‘Who let those people in?’ But that was only to test the reaction of his wealthier patrons. They waved at him to shut up and chuckling he went back behind the bar” (21). The description of the band is continuous with the description of the poet who is talking to himself. However, in this case, the band on occasion tactically sheds the pretence of mutual indifference of poet to audience. Soyinka’s description of the pomp and rousing style of high-life betrays his preference for the local groups who do not own the stage but exploit “intervals and other silences”; a clearly self-reflexive moment in the novel. The novel could well have been titled *The Invaders*, as it carries with it an insurrectionist impulse that constantly informs, colors and motivates the narrative, except that the invasion enacted by *apala* is culturally from within and below. The irony associated with this band is that the wealthy patrons who welcome their intrusion did not even recognize the subversive undercurrents of their music.

An indication of discomfort is signaled through Sagoe, the most sensitive of the group. As the band plays, “Sagoe was moaning. ‘I must lie down flat on my belly. I know you won’t believe this, but that drum timbre makes my belly run’” (21). Still in the midst of the performance, along came a woman who takes “possession of the emptied floor.” “She had no partner, being wholly self-sufficient. She was immense. She would stand out anywhere, dominating. She filled the floor with her body, dismissing her surroundings with a natural air of superfluity. And she moved slowly, intensely, wrapped in the song and the rhythm of the rain. And she brought a change again in the band, who now began

to play to her to drape her in the lyric and the mood.” The “chain reaction,” if we are to use Soyinka’s phrase in defining the poet and the poetic process, is that of the “interpreters,” the audience:

They watched her slowly lose herself, her head thrown back the better to hold private communion with palm fronds, with banana rafters or with whatever leaves faked tropical freshness on the artifact of the floor’s centerpiece. The lead drummer moved on her, drawing, as it were, her skin on the crook of the drum. Rain ribbons in club greens and orange ringed her, falling off the edges of the open “state umbrella”, and her reflections were distorted on the four sides of the mirror stem. (22)

While this is going on, Kola and Sekoni have been drawing sketches of the woman as they have of almost any event of the evening. Egbo for his own part “turned to the dancer leaning back against the wall [...] losing himself immediately in her own self-immersion”, completing the implicit contract of Romanticism. The atmosphere of the club assumes a most enchanting dimension: “And on nights like this, to the clang of iron bells and the summons of shaved drums, even old women opened their wrinkled thighs to heaven” (23-4). In the rapture of the dance, with the world shut out completely, Egbo “looked again at her breasts, seeing them as huge moments and longing to seal himself in time” (25). From the start of this novel, Soyinka projects the image and embodiment of the lyrical. The dancer in *The Interpreters* is recognizable as J.P. Clark’s “Agbor Dancer.” The personality of the dancer is integral to the essence of the lyrical as much as the femininity of the dancer helps to release the fantasy of the lyric. The dancer is thus the incarnation of the *dramatis personae* of the dramatic monologue of lyrical poetry. The dancer’s solo performance mirrors the musical pretention of the band to be “speaking to each other not to their audience” at the same time as the rhythm of her body marches that of the drums. Oblivious of the spectators, she becomes a spectacle.

Other moments of intrusion in the novel are not as sensual as that of the *apala* band. After the party is over and Sagoe and his girlfriend leave for her house, they meet in the wee hours of the night her mother and aunt on an unannounced visit. Dehinwa's mother claims that "people have been telling me that you are going with a Northerner" (37). This "invasion" reveals the stubbornness of primordial loyalties that Achebe's Obi also confronts in *No Longer at Ease* but which Dehinwa considers "blood cruelty." The most telling is the ironic episode with Joe Golder, the African American character who says to Sagoe, "Look if there is one thing I cannot bear, it is some female voice singing in my flat. It is an insufferable intrusion. I am very jealous of my privacy, I cannot tolerate any fool invading it..." (187). To the reader, Golder is the one intruding, and it is clear that his homosexual advances to Noah, which frightens him to the point that he jumps to his death from Golder's apartment, are directly linked to the philosophy of Voidance that Sagoe enunciates in his Book of Enlightenment. According to this philosophy, "To shit is human, to voidate divine" (156). Indeed, contrary to all commentaries, it was Soyinka rather than Armah, who first used the image of shit to represent corruption in society. Not surprisingly, on his way to the burial of his Director, Sagoe encounters a sight whose significance, like that of water, conveys the degenerate character of the society. "It was hardly five, but already Sagoe had begun to encounter the night-soil men. Next to death, he decided, shit is the most vernacular atmosphere of our beloved country.... [He] encountered first the deserted night-cart and trailer; some distance behind, its contents were spread on the road. To reconstruct the accident—the enormous porthole had flown open and the driver had not stopped fast enough. Over twenty yards were spread huge pottage mounds, twenty yards of solid and running, plebeian and politician, indigenous

and foreign shit” (108). For Sagoe, interference masked as “midnight visitations of aunts and mothers bearing love” (39) is as repugnant as shit, just like the kickbacks and ethnic loyalties, and neo-colonialists, that threaten the country.

In all of these, the central question of the novel is the place of art or the artist in society, especially in the face of such moral and political crisis. Lasunwon, the only member of the group who is a lawyer, poses the question about Kola indignantly, as follows: “What is he anyway that he goes round giving himself some special status in the universe? And I don’t mean just him, it’s the whole tribe of them. Everyday somewhere in the papers they are shooting off their mouths about culture and art and imagination. And their attitude is so superior, as if they are talking to the common illiterate barbarians of society” (163). Soyinka’s response comes through Kola who is seen painting what he calls *The Pantheon*, through whose creation “he had felt this sense of power, the knowledge of power within his hands, of the will to transform; and he understood then that medium was of little importance, that the act, on canvas or human material was the process of living and brought him the intense fear of fulfillment” (218). The quest and the anguish of ever striving for fulfillment are thus represented in its humanistic and artistic dimensions.

In the exhibition that takes place at the end of the novel, Egbo sees himself represented on Kola’s canvas and he rejects it, saying, “I cannot accept this view of life. He has made the beginning itself a resurrection. This is an optimist’s delusion of continuity.” He goes on to argue that the whole painting was a distortion of reality: “it is an uninspiring distortion, that is what is wrong with it. He has taken one single myth, Ogun at his drunkenest, losing his sense of recognition and slaughtering his own men in



battle; and he has frozen him at the height of carnage” (233). To this he gets the response, “Well, surely you must concede him the right to select.” It is in this right to select that we find the new law for the living.

In publishing quintessential modernists like Soyinka and Okigbo, the publishers were validating the lyrical attempts to reinvent reality rather than to merely document it. This much we know from Sambrook’s letter about Okigbo’s poetry. It was the personal rather than the political dimension to Okigbo’s work that was to be the principle for both selection and the specific preference for authorial intention in the arrangement of the content of *Labyrinths*. In Sambrook’s letter to Aig Higo he sounds this preference thus: “Afterall, we want to make this a personal selection of a poet not a ‘memorial’. The path of thunder poems rather emphasise political events which were very important to Chris and ultimately destructive. But the poems he put together himself to make up labyrinths are quite outside these events and to marry them up with poems that spring directly from these events does jar” (4 July 68 Keith to Aig.). It could be argued that Okigbo saw his quest for fulfillment as a personal quest, but he certainly also sees a connection between that quest and the one for which he would ultimately give his life.

The sensibilities reflected in Soyinka, Okigbo, Armah, among others, whose works started to appear in the Series from 1970 onwards, derive from a similar trajectory to that of the history of the city and modernity that Raymond Williams has traced. From this perspective, the material conditions of urban life exert pressure on social dynamics and relations, mental health and dispositions so that they necessarily find their way into imaginative literature and eventually alter its nature. The important thing that has been noted about international modernism has been the identical material and political forces

that condition it, but more important is the real network of human connectivity at work in the making of the movement. As Damrosch has demonstrated in the case of Wodehouse (see chapter one), and as is evident in the case of Pound and Eliot mentioned in this chapter, the transatlantic character of Modernism was a result of writers traveling and discovering new ways of expressing shared realities. The coming of the likes of Ulli Beier and Suzanne Wenger to Nigeria in the 1950s and the going of Wole Soyinka and other African writers, artists, musicians etc to Europe and America during the same period ensured that the network of international modernism was extended.

Soyinka's *Ibadan* quite deliberately invokes, in the second chapter, the author's memory of London and Paris, of the same Theatres and Cafés that Symons, Pound etc., some decades earlier had frequented. He had made his debut on the English stage as an actor and playwright in the Royal Court Theatre, London, in 1959 and had thoroughly enjoyed the great literary experience of the time. "Best of all treats was to sneak quietly into the back stalls and watch George Devine rehearsing, consulting quietly with the playwright –N.F. Simpson, Samuel Beckett, Arthur Miller, Sean O'Casey... patiently coaxing the performance of a lifetime from an alcoholic actor..." (25). As a student in Leeds, he had been enamored by the vitality and creativity around him and "he cycled from the remote ends of London to these sessions, his guitar tied to his back, threw himself into the exchanges with as much ardour as any of the others. But constantly he located himself at the outer edge of their concerns, their themes, even their search for techniques and styles" (27). The feeling of alienation is one that he paradoxically felt everywhere he was, even in his home country of Nigeria. On one occasion, he had been invited to Paris by "Mr. Impresario" and abandoned there. He had to make a living for

months performing at the cafés. There he no doubt confronted the substance of the worldview that earlier modernist writers had experienced:

In that earlier visit he had done no more than take the measure of the Left Bank, amused by its pretensions but caught up nonetheless in its singular vitality, unmatched by the character of its nearest London equivalent, Soho, or Chelsea. Even the smells and the sounds were replicated in no other city of his knowledge. But one virtue above all stuck in his mind: students and pavement artists, wandering minstrels, café philosophers, refugees from real and imaginary tyrannies, black francophonies from the French “*departments*”... out-of-work actors and dancers, would-be-poets and struggling writers etc, all appeared to share one talent in common—the art of survival in the cafés and streets of Paris. (40)

Finally, we come to a describing of Paris that echoes everything we have outlined about Ibadan in this chapter. Soyinka learnt from this fascinating mix of individuals, the art of survival as a vagabond himself in the streets of Paris. Paradoxically, he would need that art in Ibadan more than in anywhere else. He would also help create with Ulli Beier, in Gbagi market, Ibadan, a most unique atmosphere of vitality unmatched by any city of its kind in Africa during the 1960s through Mbari Club. If according to Arthur Symons, “only Soho is Bohemia” (Brooke, 117), in Soyinka and the Ibadan writers, one is compelled to declare “only Ibadan is Bohemia!”

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Postcolonial Publishing: Editorial Practice, Authenticity and the Condition of Translation.

*The writer, as the producer of a text, does not manufacture the materials with which he works. Neither does he stumble across them as spontaneously available wandering fragments, useful in the building of any sort of edifice; they are not neutral transparent components which have the grace to vanish, to disappear into the totality they contribute to, giving it substance and adopting its forms. The causes that determine the existence of the work are not free implements, useful to elaborate any meaning... they have a sort of specific weight, a peculiar power, which means that even when they are used and blended into a totality, they retain a certain autonomy; and may, in some cases, resume their particular life. Not because there is some absolute and transcendental logic of aesthetic facts, but because their real inscription in a history of forms means that they cannot be defined exclusively by their immediate function in a specific work. (Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, 42)*

What is authenticity? What is authentic? In defining the emergence of the term “authentic” in the history of Art Criticism in the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin makes the following observation in his second footnote to the eminent essay “The Work of Art in An Age of Mechanical Production”: “To be sure, at the time of its origin a medieval picture of the Madonna could not yet be said to be ‘authentic.’ It became ‘authentic’ only during the succeeding centuries and perhaps most strikingly so during the last one” (243). Benjamin here suggests, among other things, that authenticity is a status that is acquired or conferred at a distance and only in the fullness of time; that it requires as with the Madonna’s picture a recontextualization within lost time, and a comparison between later and earlier stages of the lifecycle of an object. Most important, that authenticity is a judgment that is always looking backwards, implying distance and difference in the face of closeness and sameness. However, what is “most striking” about

the currency the term acquired in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Benjamin does not tell us, but it is safe to assume that he is referring to a whole range of things from the rise of modernism, anthropology, to the canonization of the image of Madonna itself, all of which are intricately interconnected cultural developments of the nineteenth century marked by the fascination with antiquities. Benjamin's theory of artistic production brackets off literary production and instead focuses on film production— because his interest was in how the technology of motion picture was instrumental to Fascism in the production of a public. He argues that “the enormous changes which printing, the mechanical reproduction of writing, has brought about in literature are a familiar story. However, within the phenomenon which we are here examining from the perspective of world history, print is merely a special, though particularly important, case (218-9). Nevertheless this provides useful framework for talking about notions of authenticity in relation to literary publications. His observation attests to the ways in which the belated evaluation in the pronouncement “this is authentic” positions itself in relation to its object.

If the concept of authenticity presupposes a difference between the time and space of the origin of an object and those of its evaluation, it also by the same token presupposes a difference in the “processor” and possessor of the object. Paradoxically, every successful authentication reveals nothing. When the presence that can be revealed is presented as a resurrection, an old matter receives a new life granted by that pronouncement, “this is authentic.” Conversely, the pronouncement can also be a form of an unrelenting banishment into the past. According to Benjamin, “The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity” (220). The original is so called

because it represents a beginning, which always will be, a-historically, continually present, defiant to change and transformations.

However, the claim of authenticity also carries with it, a question of proof. When we ask whether a text is authentic we demand the establishment of “Proof that a given manuscript of the Middle Ages stems from an archive of the fifteenth century” (Benjamin, 220). Similarly, we claim to have the proof that a text is written by an African or that the characters as they are reflected in fiction, their voices, lives and conflicts are typical of the real or original Africans. In this sense, one cannot apply the word authentic to a text without engaging in certain kinds of stereotypical generalization. We mean that the presence of a life, a situation, a reality, a problem, a worldview or vision that is uniquely and exceptionally African is felt or comes through to us very strongly through the medium of a text. In this notion of the authentic, it is the universal that is at stake. We also mean that the text is faithful to a particular essence, in fact, that it duplicates such essence and is a successful counterfeit or simulacrum. In this other notion, it is the question of proof that is foregrounded. Is there a proof possible that demonstrates that an experience is unique to a people in an absolute sense? Could a proof ever exist that a representation originates entirely from a singular form of experience and not several or is not conditioned and mediated by techniques of representation and reading making such proof a product or construction of extrinsic rather than intrinsic factors? Or could such proof not be the proof that such experience is in fact (also) a product of the narratives that claims to represent it? The sum of all this is succinctly put by Benjamin, “The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to

the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object” (221).

The African Writers’ Series emerged at the time when the fetishism of indigenous cultures concealed a latent but displaced desire. The valorization of the native, which began in the discourse of the noble savage, culminated in the ideology of respect for local customs. But respect was only to be earned if indeed an authority was established through radical display of nativism. As soon as an authentic native identity was certified, the veneer of respect exposed itself to be a mere fetish by reauthorizing the teleology of colonial intervention for the advancement or improvement of the native. The certification thus functions to indicate the skepticism, which is the root cause of the subjugation of the native in the first place.

The fetishism of all things indigenous has its corollary in the fetishism of African authorship. Ironically, the fetishism of African authorship tends to undercut the very object of its febrile celebration. The two centuries of controversy over Olaudah Equiano and his work demonstrate the several sides to the problem of authenticity in relation to African Writing. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself* has survived because it is a true and moving account of an African slave that as a consequence of being “true and moving” succeeds in its transmission of an argument against slavery. The iteration of his identity in the title, “the African” and “himself,” are not merely postures but the fulcrum upon which the text bases itself. They mediate the story of his own transformations and “substantive

duration” through the history and economy of slavery that the names “*Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa*” already project. But precisely because the narrative is thus authentic, that is, succeeds, Olaudah must either be American from South Carolina or have received significant editorial assistance. Something is authentic when it becomes authentic by being made authentic.

With the republication of Olaudah Equiano’s *Equiano’s Travels* in the African Writers Series, discussed in chapter 1, this spectral question of the authenticity of African authorship reemerges in Anglophone literary circles. Afro-skepticism, which has been an original element in the colonial foundations of the modern episteme, manifests itself in contemporary literature in the idea of a ghostwriter haunting African texts. This underlying presumption from the staples of academic discourse during the era of colonialism established its own positivist logic which continues to be reproduced in Africanist discourses. In his introduction to the AWS edition of *Equiano’s Travels*, Paul Edwards revisits the history of this problem in relation to the late eighteenth century and responds to it in the following manner:

It seems likely either that Cugoano did not write *Thoughts and Sentiments*, or that it was largely revised for him, for a letter exists in his own handwriting that reveals his style to lack the literary flourish displayed in his book. It has been suggested that Equiano’s autobiography, too, might have been “improved” by another hand, and there is some evidence for revision since there appear to be two quite distinct styles in the book, the one plain, the other rhetorical. This question will be discussed later; but though there is always the possibility that the rhetorical passages may be revisions by another hand, the main part of the book is certainly Equiano’s own, and in any case it is not the passages of the highest literary pretension which best display Equiano’s narrative skill. [Edwards: xvi]

The paradigm implicit in the above posits that the style of Cugoano’s one letter must match that of his book for him to be considered its legitimate author; that the two distinct



styles of Equiano's narrative presuppose two different hands; and that Equiano's narrative skills are best displayed in the plain rather than rhetorical style. This worldview is an offshoot from the *a priori* of colonial power relations. Quoting an earlier review of *Equiano's Travels*, Edwards states, "*The Monthly Review* of June 1789 praised the book, but felt 'it is not improbable that some English writer has assisted him in the compilement, or at least the correction of his book, for it is sufficiently well written'" (xxii). Edward's defense of Equiano ironically reinforces the presuppositions expressed in the review he critiques, as he himself implies that Equiano could not have needed help for the most part because the rhetorically distinct aspects are quite slim and thus negligible. Noting the naïveté of the narrative point of view in the plain style—"this hollow place' for the ship, 'cloth put upon the masts' for the sails, 'some spell or magic they put upon the water to stop the vessel' for the anchor"—he argues, "all these terms help to express the speaker's simplicity and puzzlement: Equiano does not merely describe his perplexity, his language becomes that of a perplexed boy[!]" (xxv)

Since Equiano's narrative, African writing has suffered under the cloud of this kind of skepticism. Presuppositions were made not only in the realm of literary studies, but in other fields as well. In the area of anthropology and philosophy, V. Y. Mudimbe uses the term "epistemological ethnocentrism" to describe similar preconceptions of African letters especially in the famous case of Dogon astronomy. Mudimbe contends that even in the face of elaborate documentation of Dogon astronomical knowledge predating Western scientific discoveries, Carl Sagan persisted in holding that Dogon knowledge was a "full-cycle return of a myth," that is, "when Marcel Griaule makes mythological inquiries in the 1930s and 1940s, he has his own European Sirius myth

played back to him” (cited in Mudimbe 14). According to Sagan, this certainly must be because a “Gallic visitor” had been in Dogon country before Griaule to share this knowledge with them. For Sagan and the rest of the anthropological knowledge establishment, “Dogons, as primitives, could not possibly conceive such a complex structuring of a knowledge which, through myths and rites, unites, orders, and explains astronomical systems, correspondences of worlds, calendrical tables, classifications of being and social transformations” (Mudimbe 142).

The influence of Afro-skepticism in the construction of tropes about African narratives presents itself most dramatically in Adele King’s recent *Rereading Camara Laye* (2002). At issue in this book is the authenticity of the authorship of at least one of the classic texts of modern African literature, the novel *The Radiance of the King*. In a fascinating self reversal, King repudiates her earlier position in *The Writings of Camara Laye* (King 1981) that Laye was the author of his novels. This turnabout she claims derives from evidence ranging from disparities in style to a series of anecdotes. Put concisely by Abiola Irele, “the assumption that underlies her re-interpretation of Laye [is] that the subjects of imaginative literature are either taken straight from immediate experience or derive from the writer’s reading” (Irele: 175). Another scholar, Ken Harrow, has characterized this phenomenon within broader disciplinary practices that is worth referencing in some detail:

The issue I am raising is the assumption about what Laye could have done, not what he actually did. King writes, apropos the surrealistic or mystical elements in the novel, “The African soul in *Le Regard du roi* would be a soul as described by European anthropology, not the soul of an African author” (57). Therein lies the nub of the problem. One has to wonder where we are to locate the soul of an African author, and whether we will be successful in locating it in the works of a Sony Labou Tansi, Ben Okri, Ken Bugul, Christopher Okigbo (the latter having been dismissed, along with Soyinka, by the boleka police), or any number of

African authors whose "Africanity," whose authenticity, is found to be lacking—or worse, whose authenticity is found to be present! This is the fallacy of strictly biographical or cultural readings: they depend upon a verisimilitude grounded in facts that validate both the authenticity of the text and of the reading of the text at the same time. The reading thus derived confirms the "facts" which are grounded in originary understandings of African identity. This has been by far the greatest weakness in Africanist critical thought for fifty years (2005:174-5).

As we shall soon begin to examine, the problem of authenticity has not only defined Africanist critical thought, it has also conditioned editorial theories. This is reflected in the processes of the publication of African literature. A reformulation of the problem identified by Harrow might ask: why, in the second half of the twentieth century, must African thought and critique undergo a test for the authentication of its discourse? To reverse Beckett's question: Why has it mattered who is speaking?

Michel Foucault famously traced a genealogical study of the rules of "authenticity and attribution" and the "system of the valorization" that produced the author function as a requirement of discursivity in western culture. If the author function mirrors the deed of title in an ownership society, then it is by that function both the instrument and measure of value, unity, individuality, and historicity. According to Foucault, "modern literary criticism, even when—as is now customary—it is not concerned with questions of authentication, still defines the author the same way: the author provides the basis for explaining not only the presence of certain events in a work, but also their transformation, distortions, and diverse modifications (through his biography, the determination of his individual perspective, the analysis of his social position, and the revelation of his basic design)" (111). From this exposition therefore, it becomes possible to locate, beyond African critical thought, the epistemological tradition based on the author function that has invariably generated the imperative of authenticating African authorship. This

practice however has a different effect within the relations of colonial power: in a colonial context, the process of authentication often devolves into or engenders Afro-skepticism. The variance of value, the absence of stylistic unity that would confirm the individuality of the writer and situate him within streams of historical currents are the basis for questioning the authorship of Equiano and Laye's works, but so also are their statuses as African slave and colonial subject, respectively. Indeed, stylistic variations in an oeuvre have not typically been a reason to posit a ghostwriter in the history of western narrative theory. The best formalist criticism and discourse analysis associate unitary language with exterior ideological interests that are "cultural, national and political" (273), interests which act upon the irreducible, living heteroglossia internal to language. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, the "classic and purest model of the novel as genre" (324) in the European tradition is Cervantes's *Don Quixote* precisely because it embodies "the primordial dialogism of discourse" (275). The question that then continues to persist in the practice of authentication of African texts is: why it does matter whose "hand" it is that marks the surface of the text? At what point does the hand of the editor become an obstructing rather than a helping hand? It is apparent that in all cases in which African authorship has been in question, it has been the role of the editor that has been found controversial. The question of how editorial function enhances or vitiates author function is the point succinctly elicited by Irele in the case of Camara Laye:

All that King's investigations indicate is that his French mentors intervened in his work, presumably to tidy up his texts and, in the case of *Le regard du roi*, in an endeavor to expand its scope; in this case, we are in fact entitled to the view that these interventions were not altogether beneficial. Here, one might cite the example of Ezra Pound's emendations to the original manuscript of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, as revealed in the facsimile edition published by Eliot's wife after his death, emendations that were so extensive as to have sparked doubts about the wisdom of Pound's interference. But this has not occasioned denial to

Eliot of the authorship of the poem; indeed, Eliot himself was so little troubled by this collaboration that he paid fulsome tribute to Pound whom he acknowledged as "il miglior fabbro." Nonetheless, the example raises the question of textual ownership, as to how much intervention is acceptable to justify ascription of a work to a particular or sole author. (Irele 175)

Irele foregrounds here the relationships essential to the production of literary texts, relations Foucault describes as the irreducible properties of discourse. These properties he argues reside in relational coordinates of texts outside the author function. The author function after all is that "mode of circulation, valorization, attribution, and appropriation" associated with the "system of property," through which "a system of ownership for texts," "rules concerning author's rights, author-publisher relations, [and] rights of reproduction... were enacted" (Foucault 108). The designation of texts by their authors does not occlude the textual operations of narratological "shifters" by which the author's plurality of self is elaborated. In unwitting agreement with Bakhtin, Foucault asserts, "there exist properties or relationships peculiar to discourse ..., and one must use these to distinguish the major categories of discourse. The relationships (or nonrelationship) with an author, and the different forms this relationship takes, constitute—in a quite visible manner—one of these discursive properties" (117). It thus appears that we get a sense of the necessity of understanding author function in connection with other systems upon which it is dependent. However, the author function in itself and the theory based on the author's individuality is as productive as those based on the text's peculiar production relationships. This much is acknowledged by Harrow even as he rejects the conclusions reached by King:

However, true or false, the exposition of the political world in which a Francis Soulie and Camara Laye moved, especially the period between the 1930s and 1950s in the case of the former, and the postwar years for the latter, provides us

with an inestimable portrait of the times. Fascist thinking and collaboration by the Belgian literary intelligentsia, French conniving and colonial manipulations of African intellectuals, the politics of esteemed publishing houses like Plon and De Noel, and most important of all, the neglected world of the small literary journals, the baseline for cultural work in those years (172 ).

The task of this chapter therefore is to determine how “visible” these relationships, these discursive properties are within African literary texts and what implications should they continue to have for criticism.

The question of the authenticity of African authorship itself is a paradox precisely because African writers were initially valued not for being writers as such, but for being writers from Africa. To be a writer from Africa meant that one had the authority to speak about Africa in a way that colonial writers such as Graham Greene, Joyce Cary, Joseph Conrad etc., could not. As this represented the changing attitudes at the time of independence, it became ideologically expedient for liberal politics to promote authentic African voices and African self representation, which at the same time must be kept distinct and pristine, in order to demonstrate a break from colonial domination. For this reason, it mattered above all else who it is that is speaking, whether the story is told by the man or the lion. Within this regime of authenticity therefore, relationships between writers and their compositors, editors etc. employed by publishers, which are mostly taken for granted in European literature, become suspect whether or not the publisher engaged in significant work to prepare the manuscript for publication. Similarly, the presence of middlemen in book production, who happen to frequently originate from the metropole, automatically transforms the text from being African, from being an expression of the “African soul.” Even though the conditions of writing in Africa are quite literally the same as those in Europe, in almost every facet, the relationships that

constitute publishing have always meant something different. This explains Irele's perplexity as to why so much has been made of the supposed editorial interventions on Camara Laye's work, while it seems to have been taken for granted that the interventions by Ezra Pound on Eliot's work have had no effect on the legitimacy of attributing the work to Eliot. It becomes increasingly clear that African writers overall were held to a different standard, were not allowed to be writers in the same way as European writers; constantly at stake in their professional relationships is the possibility of tainting or losing their appeal or credibility, that is, their authenticity and originality as writers. And though, the African writer understands that there is not one single way of realizing the ideas of the text, variations in his text are quite literally indicative of some form of assistance.

The conversation generated by Achebe's decision to produce a second edition of *Arrow of God* has done more than has ever been acknowledged to demonstrate the principle of the instability of the text, and to put into question the notion of the pure and original authoritative forms. P. Zirimu in a letter archived at the University of Reading, on the second edition of *Arrow of God* expressed delight that Achebe, if not the critics, recognized that the integrity of the text was not in any original and intrinsic form:

I rapidly combed through both versions of *Arrow of God*, side by side; noted some "minor" changes, extensions, cuts, emendations; one long story cut. I have yet to re-read the whole novel. But it doesn't look as if it's going to shatter any patterns of my earlier response to the novel. I can't be sure that the "cuts" were necessary. I have never, ever since I was in a position to have my own personal literary values, I have never believed that any creative expression was the one and only possible realisation of the creative impulse, effort or what-have-you. But, I am glad to know that Chinua feels that way ("Preface")-about the *Arrow of God*. For, for me it is the "greatest" of the four novels; the most "textured", the most complex and difficult (?). And I have been bothered by the fact that some of my friends, some of whom are writers in their own right, have even failed to finish reading the novel. (Achebe files)

The modes of authentication always cast editorial intervention either by the author, reader or publisher in opposition to author function. If Eliot was not bothered by Pound's interventions, why should the African writer be bothered by editorial emendations. But there is no doubt that colonial relations have altered the author function.

In the reviews that followed the publication of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* it became clear that authenticity became a mantra for the West in reference to works from Africa that were deemed promising. This was the case in *The Times Literary Supplement* review of *TFA*: "the great interest of this novel is that it genuinely succeeds in presenting tribal life from the inside" (quoted in Hill 121). Indeed, the *New York Herald Tribune* is more direct in its own review of the novel as "an authentic native document, guileless and unsophisticated" (121). The view of African literature as an "authentic native document" sums up the total essence of the epistemic system that acted upon, branded and possibly directed the course of literary development in Africa. The simultaneous operation of thought which brings together the concepts of "authenticity," "nativism," and "document" best illustrates the convergence in the modern episteme of anthropological and scientific processes. This is the moment that the word "document" came to refer in the widest possible way to autochthonous knowledge or forms of representation in Black Africa. In this hermeneutic structure of the neo-anthropological regime, it is not the individuality of the author as hitherto constituted in western literary criticism, but the exterior elements of culture, which qualify the document, that are significant. This moment marks the transvaluation of the process of authentication of the document from its basis in individualism to that of "the insider," and ultimately to nativism.



The horror story is still being told of how, even in 1973, Soyinka's lecture on literature and society had to be delivered at the department of social anthropology because the English department at Churchill College, Cambridge "did not believe in any such mythical beast as 'African literature'" (*Myth Literature and the African World*, vii). It must also be noted that the whole notion of the empire writing back, which presumes as Achebe has characterized it, a corrective mission, reinforces and reauthorizes the nativist paradigm. Applauding F. J. Pedler and quoting him, Achebe asserts a fundamental relationship between decolonization and self representation: decolonization requires, and is incomplete without, "the right of a people to take back their own narrative" (44). The authenticity of narrative becomes imperative especially against the background of "Europe's imposition of a derogatory narrative upon Africa" (45). Thus Pedler's comment in 1945 about the publication of two short stories in a magazine in Gold Coast, now Ghana, foreshadows the foundational appropriation of African literature in the service of authenticity:

Here is a dramatic treatment of a contemporary social phenomenon which leaves one with the hope that more west Africans may enter the field of authorship and give us authentic stories of the lives of their own people. (quoted in Achebe, 43)

In this manner, Africanist thought embodies a shift in the author function of modern literary criticism. However, neither Africanist thought nor modern literary criticism transcend the use of a singular criterion of authentication. The theoretical alternatives between individualism and nativism no longer capture the multiple relations of production that are responsible for the literary text. The idea that literature must be understood *in relation to* the history and imperatives of the relationships, cultural institutions and industries that produced it underscores a post-authenticity theory of

literary production in which the author becomes “a variable and complex function of discourse” (Foucault, 118).

The little that has been written on the African Writers Series takes for granted the belief that the Series was a commercial exploitation of African writers, a pseudo-literature imposed by cultural imperialism for the entertainment of a curious western audience plagued by the acedia of industrialization. This is why in *The Post-Colonial Exotic*, Graham Huggan would insist on a different category, the anthropological novel, to describe African novels, despite objections by writers like Elechi Amadi that “the European critic is apt to see anthropological data in an African novel, while the same sort of thing in a novel by Jane Austen is merely description of ordinary life” (Robert Wren 84). There is no doubt an anthroposcopic imaginary dominates western understandings of African literature that pre-classifies and pre-interprets the African novel. This anthroposcopic imaginary constitutes the basis for the pleasure of the publication, which publishers must instinctively know if they are to be successful in the business. Alan Hill surely recognized the growing need created by independence to see Africa from the *inside* when he started the series.

In a review of Kofi Awoonor’s novel *This Earth, My Brother*, Basil Busacaa expresses this pleasure of African writing thus: “What we encounter *first* is the *happy shock* of meeting with a writer who is textually exciting. Kofi Awoonor...can be his own man stylistically, yet summon at need any rhythm or resource of the language (Awoonor File. Emphasis not in original).” As James Currey, the general editor of the Series from 1966-85, stated, what gave the African Writers Series its initial breakthrough was the surprise, “happy shock” if you will, of picking up a novel only to see on the back cover,

the black face of its author. Quite revealing then is the manner in which the Series, thus packaged by the publisher, also packaged “blackness.” In a letter to Eddie Iroh, author of *Forty-Eight Guns for the General*, James asks the following questions:

I attach the suggested cover photography? How do you react? Do you think a black person should appear? Or is the fact that it is in the African Writers Series enough? Do you think it needs more action? Or do you think these things will draw people to the book? (AWS Files)

Eddie Iroh’s response addressed to the manager of Heinemann Nigeria is as follows:

What I wonder about is: in a world pleasantly prejudiced against the African and subtly skeptical about his abilities, is there not the possibility that the AS [African Writer] is dismissed simply by his tag, even before he is read and judged? (AWS Files)

Such were the nature of the arguments, and as Soyinka put it: it has become necessary and rightful, to ask whether the impresario role and marketing strategies of European publishing houses in bringing the African writer to a wider international readership has done more literary harm than good. It appears that every addition to the Series continued to extend and generate a narrative independent of the individual texts themselves. The tendency of orienting the Series toward a targeted market became pronounced as texts were increasingly deemed publishable and selected for how much they offer their readers insight into what was going on in Africa. This trend is best illustrated by the letter addressed to James Currey in 1980 by Richard M Moose, then the United State Assistant Secretary of State. “Again, let me thank you for the books and commend the African Writers Series. I frequently tell my colleagues and prospective travelers to Africa that there is no better way to know Africa today than to see it through the eyes of its contemporary authors.” It would seem that the ideology of authenticity has privileged the

African writer in much the same way that Achebe and most of the writers preferred, that is, to become mouthpieces of the continent. However, the triumph of authenticity as a major criteria for selection of texts, the development of expectations for African writing along those lines have their effect on the lingering perception of African literature today as applied art.

This phenomenon is not an isolated event but a direct consequence of a global transformation of knowledge and the role of narratives that Lyotard has expressly theorized. It could be argued as Lyotard has, and as Benjamin before him, that “the nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged within this context of general transformation”

(4). As already examined in the first chapter, technology here refers to a wide range of apparatuses responsible for material and social functionalities. The transformations of the postmodern/postindustrial society that he writes about have a definitive feature by which “We can predict that anything in the constituted body of knowledge that is not translatable in this way will be abandoned...” (4). The same can be said of the postcolonial society and might explain the fact that a number of African language literature writers like Ocot P’tec actually translate their own works into English as a way of ensuring their continued and wider dissemination. Another significant contribution of the African Writers Series is the translation of Francophone, Europhone, Arabic and African language literature and oral texts. The transactions between postcolonial writers and the postmodern culture industry across the geopolitical and historical axis of what Paul Gilroy calls the Black Atlantic are transactions that engender, and are only possible within, the condition of conversion and translation. Applied or translatable fiction therefore is one that provides information above all about the society it depicts. Authentic

literature is thus one that participates in “the ideology of communicational ‘transparency,’ which goes hand in hand with the commercialization of knowledge” (5). Authenticity becomes important in these transactions because it is the aim of every translation to reproduce the “intended effects” and “liberate the language imprisoned” in the original text (Benjamin: “The Task of the Translator”). However, as Damrosch has observed: “translation can never really succeed if a work’s meaning is taken to reside essentially in the local verbal texture of its original phrasing” (291). Thus, as we will examine in the later section of this chapter, the adaptability of literary language in translation serves as a foil to the notion of authenticity. In the overall scheme of things, the pressure to commodify the literary enterprise of narrative fiction, which as a part of the totality of knowledge systems Lyotard considers to be narrative knowledge, is driven by the fact that “Knowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power is already, and will continue to be, a major—perhaps *the* major—stake in the worldwide completion for power” (5). The information, the textual knowledge of Africa that the African Writers Series provides for the likes of Richard M. Moose is thus strikingly reminiscent of the whole project of “Orientalism.”

In what ways then did the editorial policies generate or promote the notion of authenticity as aesthetic criteria? Indeed, especially for minor authors whose works shall be examined in detail in this chapter in relation to editorial expectations and input, the editorial policies and techniques used in the selection and preparation of text for print reveals a significant effect. The criticisms and contributions of readers and compositors such as Richard Lister, whom Currey describes as “a novelist in his own rights and a careful guardian of authors’ individuality,” were not only substantial in some cases, they

also in a strange way, consciously or otherwise, provided the writers with a perception of their work that sooner or later became part of the writers' own way of describing their work and mission. This is due to the fact that the review process is sometimes an open one whereby writers and reviewers know each other. Writers get copies of reviews and reactions of editors and readers and do often respond to them. The identity of readers has mattered in cases. The more eminent they are, the more likely it is that the writer would be deferential to their opinion, if only in the hope of future relationships. T.M. Aluko for example was almost always referring to the editors as "experts." On one occasion, in a letter to Currey on March 7 1973, he wrote: "Presumably you in the trade are more qualified in this matter and so one must accept your judgment. I look forward to receiving my own copies of the finished product" (Aluko files Worshipful Majesty). However, through the course of time, one saw a transformation that led Aluko to the point of major disagreement with his editors and compositors. In a letter to Ingrid Crewdson on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December, 1981, Aluko challenges an editorial suggestion by arguing that "While I still concede to you that this is your field, the intuition of an author makes me think that I am right in this argument. I hope you will find the argument acceptable and concede the point to me. Please let me know if -you still feel otherwise." Even at this moment, eight years later, he still curiously makes a distinction between the role of the author and that of the editor. The preparation of manuscripts for publication was the editor's exclusive domain. The precise activity that Aluko expects to be carried out once he submits his manuscript, which is part of the common understanding between most African writers and the Heinemann publishers, over which he quibbles with James and Ingrid, is adduced in the letter by Keith Sambrook in his letter to Aluko as early as 1968:

I enjoyed it very much and, as usual, I found myself laughing outright in some places. There are some very funny incidents. At the same time it makes its main political point very well. I have started “tinkering” but in the most harmless way I assure you. There is nothing structural to alter: I am just doing some internal sub-editing, splitting up a few sentences, changing the odd word here and there. I hope this will be alright but in any case you will have a chance to change things back if you don’t like what I have done. (Keith to Sam 4 July 1968)

The basic work of “tinkering” is the field of the editor. But this is not even the preference of the publisher as writers are, for economic reasons, encouraged to edit their own works. James explained this to Aluko while preparing *Wrong Ones in the Dock* “We could put it in the hands of an editor and Spend £250 on having it worked on. But the evidence of your other books is that your own writing craftsmanship is all that is needed. Also another editor would not necessarily be a sympathetic influence” (James to Tim Jan 29, 1980). The complexity and complications of these transactions are well illustrated in a letter in which Sambrook discusses the prospects of Aluko’s *Chief the Honourable Minister* with his Nigerian counterpart.

Between ourselves, I could never become very enthusiastic, and I was slow on editing it. It is a pale imitation of *A Man of the People*. I like Tim’s earlier novels very much indeed – particularly the creation of a small town world. But I don’t think this big-town, political satire comes off and it is bound to be held up against *A Man of the People* – and it won’t look good then. At least, that’s my view .... I will write a letter to Tim explaining some of this – not exactly in these terms, of course – and I hope you will be spared any backlash (Chief the hon. Minister March 10, 1970).

Sambrook published *Chief the Honorable Minister* against his better judgment about the cultural and literary value of the novel because there was market for it.

It becomes obvious from years of editors and authors working together in the publishing of African novels that James regarded very highly the judgment of Richard Lister. His report countered the more positive note sounded by John Wyllie and may better explain James’s hesitation about the text:

The subject is one which naturally arouses compassion and there is much of interest here. Unfortunately it was marred for me by being almost unreadable; the author does not write badly, but he managed somehow to arouse at every stage of the book an almost insuperable reluctance to continue reading it. It's an uphill struggle the whole way, against some kind of Stodginess or lifelessness of style, and the effort for me simply wasn't worthwhile. (Richard Lister 5-6-79)

Even John Wyllie's report was double-edged and instructive of the hierarchies of taste that different audiences almost always imply. This differentiation and its implication were to be the tightrope walked by publishers of the African Writers Series. The challenge implicit in mapping out different markets was not so much dictated by cultural differences as it was by the inbuilt hierarchies of taste and judgment. Wyllie however was unperturbed by the different-audience, different-product-quality approach he was advocating at the same time that the parallels he constructed between the *Wrong Ones* and *Oliver Twist* suggested a historical diachronism, which in and of itself is suggestive of unequal social evolution:

'The *Wrong Ones in the Dock*' is, I think, a book which, as it stands, would be better appreciated by Africans, [...] other than those teaching at Universities ... than by white readers. ...I think that even for African readers the book could be much improved.... All that said. I would like to repeat that I admire what Aluko is trying to do with his book because I feel that his effort is timely and that the tale he has to tell is as vital to the history of Nigeria as, for instance, Zola's '*Germinal*' or Dicken's '*Oliver Twist*' were, to social conditions in France and Britain, when they were written.... For the rest let me repeat that I am very much in favour of the book being printed because it is a most humane and valid document and one that should be widely read in all Anglophone countries (John Wyllie Aluko Editorial File).

The question that must not escape scrutiny in Wyllie's report is what he means by a "valid document." However, it is interesting how his and C .C. Ihekaibeya's report helped Aluko frame his argument for the eventual publication of his novel. Adding to the ambivalence that other readers feel about *Wrong Ones*, Ihekaibeya writes, "Aluko is highly topical in this novel and there is no doubt that he may, solely on this strength,



appeal to a section of the popular readership. But this is a work I am unable to feel enthusiastic about, certainly not in its present form.” (Aluko Archival Files) Perhaps Currey became convinced that the topicality of the novel was the basis for its validity and justifies its publication; one may never know. But the blurb selected for the novel foregrounds the notion of the authenticity and credentials of the author to narrate the African experience, thus implying that the view of the novel as a document was not far removed from the original conception of the texts and constantly formed part of the criteria for selecting texts. The blurb reads thus: “T. M. ALUKO was one of the first wave of Nigerian writers who between them did so much to enable readers to see Africa as it is rather than as foreign novelists had seen it from outside.” However, Aluko’s argument is more direct about the value of the novel:

Needless to say that as the author, I feel I have told a story of great human and topical interest and I have faith in its success... the sense of loyalty I have come to feel that I have for Heinemann [is due to] my double capacity as an author and a shareholder.. I naturally want to see the book in print before the topicality of the case wears out completely.... (Aluko Editorial Files)

Aluko sounds the note of urgency about the ephemerality of the case upon which the novel is based; as if to say the document itself is an ephemeral document, thus undercutting the argument that the story is “of great human interest.” The language by which Aluko describes his own work and ascribes value to it cannot be divorced from the feedback he got from the publisher, as David Cook and other readers disputed between themselves the quality of the novel in precisely those terms. What is of the most significant interest in the case of Aluko is the suggestion that novels correspond to current affairs and thus constitute documents, the validity of which could be investigated by asking the questions about “what these documents meant, but also whether they were

telling the truth, and by what right they claim to be doing so, whether they were sincere or deliberately misleading, well informed or ignorant, authentic or tampered with” (Archeology of Knowledge 6). Harrow has argued that such questions, which have become baseline in Africanist thought, also constitute its very weakness.

Authenticity as a paradigm of literary creativity and criticism, as it relates to the publication of the Series, could be further illustrated by the example of another minor novelist, Akare. Currey remarked about his novel *The Slum* in a letter to the Managing Director of Heinemann in Nairobi thus: “Keith and I share your feeling about the fundamental genuineness of his work” (To Henry Chakava.1979 June 13). In a similar tone with the rave that accompanied the emergence of Marachera, Chakava’s report glowingly reads:

In Akare's THE SLUMS we have got a novel which, perhaps more by accident than design overcomes these major weaknesses and effortlessly succeeds in presenting a chunk of slum life to the reader. His tell-it-as-it-is raw realism of handling life in Majengo, the “mother town of Nairobi” will definitely strike a more realistic code to all those intimate with life in Nairobi.” In this way the novel effortlessly widens its social spectrum...

The critic looking for a well-made novel is bound to be disappointed. This work does not have a story-line, it does not have discernible or set themes. It seems to aimlessly and purposelessly roll on, This apparent weakness is to me its strength. This style is more in keeping with the people the author is depicting their lives are chaotic, aimless and purposeless [sic]. The novel does not have characters cut out in the conventional mould. They are simply shown living their lives. The script has numerous linguistic and typing errors, a number of bad passages and pointless episodes, but I feel that a careful and sensitive editorial effort could be extremely rewarding. If this is sensitively done what will unravel is a sparkling image of Nairobi slum life, easy to identify and real, an image which will remain implanted in the sensitivities of the Kenyan reading public for a long long time (Henry: Akare Editorial Files ).

It is the “tell-it-as-it-is” quality of Akare’s novel, which brings out the real slum life in all its sprawling, desperate, meaningless but intimately sparkling imagery that editorial work

is to salvage. Chakava's sense of the necessity of deploying the editorial function to salvage this text is echoed by another reader, Jaqueline Bardolph: "The plight described, the vision expressed is not about the Slums, but from the Slums which is an uncommon achievement. A frightening vision from a totally desperate world" (emphasis in original). What is being celebrated by these readers is the ability of Akare to capture the "soul of the slum," that moment in realism when narrative transcends description, reproducing it not as a simulacrum but in a metonymic relation. Akare is himself aware of the premium on his mode of realism and he writes the publisher about an interview he gave: "Anyway, it was a surprise to me because it was an interview which I never dreamed of [or] even expected. And all of it was taped for the radio Denmark. We moved to the slums where the book is based and a slummer too was asked some several questions which of course his answers were all in the book [sic]." The point here is to demonstrate how editorial comments and recommendations could be argued to have provided some African writers with the language with which they increasingly described their role as writers and the function of their works. The search for an authentic tamper-proof representation of the African experience by Africans themselves is the form anthropological knowledge takes after colonialism. It is important to note that the *anthroposcopia* implicated in the reception of the Series was not altogether lost on the publishers of the Series; it was anticipated as it was exploited for commercial gains.

It is the case that there were two major ideological divisions and poles within the directorate of the publishing house, around which the editorial decisions revolved: the more conservative educational publisher in the figure of Keith Sambrook on the one hand, and the more adventurous *laissez faire* general publisher in the figure of James

Currey on the other. Is the publisher the key? Should the publisher be concerned about what he publishes and decide what will become available to the public, or should the public be allowed to have unlimited range of texts from which to choose? And should the relationships of author and publisher be considered part of the irreducible property of discourse as Foucault argues? The question of commitment has always been raised in relation to the writer. The African Writers Series brings the question of a publisher's commitment to the forefront-- how that commitment impacts the work of art.

The question of the extent and limits of the productive power of a publisher in relation to textual products is one that has not been posed with the theoretical rigor it deserves; it is often assumed, taken for granted and merely asserted in mostly indirect ways. This same question, taken on by African writers as soon as the African Writers Series got underway, is most succinctly formulated by none other than Africa's first Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, who when asked to edit an anthology of poetry for Heinemann Educational Books makes the following prefatory remark:

Time alone will tell whether or not the second scramble for Africa has done more literary harm than good. This anthology has been made possible (and even necessary?), however, by the very fact of such a promiscuous affair. Its claims to difference is [sic] essentially the one of approach, an attempt to restore that willful entity called a poem to its self-validating existence, to rescue it from the asphyxiation to which it is increasingly condemned by the heavy-footed ogres of Eng. Lit., African poetry and even THE POET. The first is the monster creation of universities, schools and ministries of education, the second by pundits on their ubiquitous platforms of journals and conferences, the last by publishers and the automatic caste tendencies of the so-called emerging societies. Underneath it all the body of the poem is slowly ground to powder until it appears to have completed the sinister cycle back to what many claim it is – a mere figment of the imagination. (Emphasis in original Soyinka Archival files)

Although, this remark was by and large edited from the final version of the anthology, it nonetheless sits in the shadow of all debates on modern African literature. The question that has been “made possible and even necessary” by the convergence of the impresarios of modern culture in Africa, starting in the 1950s, is quite simply put thus: is THE POET, the writer, an invention of the publisher, of the culture and knowledge industry? Justice cannot be done to this question before the entire “sinister cycle,” the production line, the process of literary production as a whole or the social life of texts, is laid bare, and its implications and consequences fully analyzed. This forces us to examine that indefinite and indeterminable realm of the Social from which a text makes its course. A book, a successful publication, after all, is a representation of an alignment of forces, interests and judgments. For this reason, Theodor Adorno’s point that the real signature of the modern situation is the liquidation of the individual lays the groundwork for a sociological theory of aesthetics, one that takes into full consideration the fact that “The autonomy of works of art, which of course rarely ever predominated in an entirely pure form, and was always permeated by a constellation of effects, is tendentially eliminated by the culture industry, with or without the conscious will of those in control” (*The Culture Industry*: 99). The complex question of the publisher inventing the writer is thus the question of what aesthetic, editorial and political reasons accumulate to explain the emergence and eclipse of the African Writers Series.

However, Soyinka’s call for the autonomy of “the poem,” itself conservative, is belated because it attempts to obliterate the trace of all productive forces from literature and from discourse—in fact to ignore discourse itself—forces without which it could never exist. The multiple exigencies that characterize the practice of African literature

bear implications for our understanding of literature that cannot be simply ignored. These multiple exigencies relate to the construction and collections of African literary texts in such a way as to define the discourse of modern African literature as a discourse of contingency wherein the crisis of autonomy engendered by the writer's enunciative powers is recognized. Nevertheless, Soyinka's objection is symptomatic of a nervous elitism that, according to John Frow requires, "the professional claim to, and the professional mystique of, autonomy of judgment; [as] the basis both for the struggle over the organization of work and for individual self-respect (that is for the particular mode of subjectivity) grounded in this relation to work" (1995: 125).

In what follows, an attempt will be made to read Akare's *The Slum* and Achebe's *Arrow of God* for the possibility of traces left by the seduction of "authentic" narrative. I will attempt to examine the validity of Derrida's theory that "A trace is never present, fully present, by definition; it inscribes in itself the reference to the specter of something else. The remainder is not present either, any more than a trace as such" (*Paper Machine* 151). This analysis allows us to open up the generative possibility of the deconstructive moment in which textual elaboration and conditions of translation are shown to contradict both editorial and authorial claims to authenticity. It will be an attempt to enunciate a relational theory of literary production, one in which the African Writers Series is no longer understood on the basis of its authenticity and the dominant anthropological episteme.

The myth that first must be disposed is the notion that Akare was representing the soul of the slum *from* the inside. The narrator, who we must always insist, is never the same person as the author, throughout the text refers to dwellers of the slums as "they"

from which he recoils, in fact he engages in damaging and condescending criticisms of them that are paradoxically borne out of his knowledge of and proximity to the slums. His life in the slums, sleeping in an abandoned vehicle and working in a carwash, is an accident that he was never reconciled to and that forms the basis of his nihilistic, countercultural, cynical and defiant sensibilities. "If anybody had told me that one day I would come to live in this place and, worse, in these wrecks, I would have knifed him" (22). The novel begins with a moment in which the narrator expresses his iconoclasm as follows:

The bell tolled and its echo kept ringing into my ears for some time before fading away. I sat. Dong, dong, dong, it repeated again. I kept sitting under this statue of Queen Mary holding her young infant son, Jesus, in her arms. I watched them. The people. Disappearing into the church. I knew why. And what they were going to do. It was Sunday morning and yesterday was Saturday. They were going to pray in the Mass as they were Catholics... I mean Christians. I'm a Christian too, with a Christian name, but a funny thing: I couldn't go into the church, or I never went. I'm somehow ashamed or something, I don't know what. I think I know why. It made me swear: "On myself and the Satan of my arse, I will never attend church again." (1)

The semiology of the bell, which tolled in *Arrow of God* as well, shall be examined in a while. What we expect to happen when the bell tolls is not always the focus of these narratives. In *Akare* in particular, we are not to hear in the receding monotone of the church bell a strange terror of a macabre and incipient tragedy but the simulation of a comprehending attitude of familiarity, indifference and ridicule; of hearing, watching and disdain. Sitting under the image of Jesus and Mary, "love and tenderness" appear to him only as the experience of infancy just as the Christians, the people, the slummers "Disappearing into the church" are infantile because of their dream of ever escaping the troubles of the world. The slum is a big world; big because it contains the world itself as a function of the most powerful institutions of civilization. Neither the narrator nor the

slum is closed to the world. Both are of the world, in the world and never separate or separable from it. Above all, like the dregs of palm wine, the slum is presented as the distillation of the world. Indeed, the narrator does not speak to portray the slum but to confront the world with itself. Thus, the corruption and debauchery this enclave of the abject makes the church the source of both an embarrassing and scandalous knowledge and of the steeling resolve, the vow upon the obscene to forever abjure it and by so doing, any notion of redemption because “all people are devil” (46)!

However, the cynicism of the narrator is not an expression of the general vision of the slum. It is a direct expression of the narrator’s own frustration in being trapped in a place where he feels he does not belong. The narrator reveals of himself, “I came to Majengo when things fell apart.” He had a promise of education and good life and support from family until one day when everything changed forever: the members of his family were killed in an unfortunate accident. The bitterness from this colors his vision of life. There is no difference between the way he views the slum and the wider world. He stands in the slum as the center of his universe looking out to society and the world, all formed around him in concentric circles. The book cannot for this reason be considered an “authentic” story about the slum, but a story about the world seen from both standpoints of the slum and the outside world. The point of view is thus very complicated. The narrator does not identify with the slum because of his background. He considers his predicament a temporary setback and aspires to fully rejoin the work force and take his place in society; like some others, he after all has a high school certificate. His view does not simply represent the soul of the slum, even if he attempts to represent his subject position as such. In fact, the novel is really about popular consciousness. He is



knowledgeable enough about current affairs in the world and Africa. His take on the important issues of the time reflect a combination of intelligence and cynicism, but also class limitations, and fast and loose conjectures.

One of his friends, Massopo, actually displays an uncanny and perhaps tilted knowledge of world history. He writes names of world figures and important places and events on every wall and only needs a beer and “Bhang” to reel off with an endless flow of information. “Massopo was brainy, though he looked a failure in life because of too much daily drinking and the dope” (9). He tells the story from Vietnam to the Civil Rights Movement to the Soviet Union, IRA, Che Guevara, Castro to African and local politics:

Ku Klux Klan, that’s an American organization which is very tough down the US there. Always clad in black robes and masks. Even Nixon fears them. Black Panthers, these are our fellow blacks in US, and Black Power is their soul cry. *Fu Manchu*, *Black Sunday* and *Dracula*, these are Christopher Lee’s movies.... Harlem and Black Ghettos, these are like slums here. Just like the slums, Makaburini, Mathare Valley and those along the Nairobi river. In US they call them Harlem and Ghettos. *Cotton comes to Harlem* and *Shaft* are movies, and I tell you, man, the black soon gonna take over from the whites.... (9-10)

These individuals, and especially the narrator, form themselves into a class that looks down on the waSwahili and women. Those are the “real slummers”! Their misogyny and even homophobia are attempts to retain for themselves a sense of pride by demeaning others who are more vulnerable. “Those of the slum girls with no hope of getting married. Mothers of two, three or four bastards. Sons of different fathers. Mother girls who can walk till morning with no one to rape them. All the slummers were bored and fed up with them. Nearly all the boys had laid them. Too cheap” (18). The contempt is equally expressed toward homosexuality, which is considered the Arab’s game (157).

“On the way we met this Ali, a slummer who had turned into a homosexual and all because of the good things of life. We cursed him. Hussein spat. With him a Boer, perhaps. I hoped he would get pregnant on the back and give birth to a creole” (112). The truth of the proposition that common experience does not produce common interests or esprit de corps cannot be better illustrated in the actions of the narrator and his peers. The central irony of the novel is precisely the self image of this group that does not see themselves the way others see them, but does see and treat other people the very same objectionable way the group is being viewed and treated. They consider themselves fortunate not to be females: “I think soon we will be having forced marriages. Otherwise the women will start raping us. Men are not interested in marriage. They marry and wed for only a night. The next day the woman is gone, I said. We are lucky that we were born male, he sighed. Yes man, nobody to bullshit you, I said” (101). This sense of perverse pride, similar to the one we find in Alan Silintoe’s character Smith in *The Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner*, explains why the narrator turns out in the end, with the act of theft to be an unchanged character.

What informs this flatness is the conviction that the narrator possesses the superior view of reality and humanity. Humanity at its core is seen as corrupt. This corruption is illustrated through pages and pages of descriptions of sexual perversion. One such description follows after the police, who extorted money from a gang, then molested them,

We took the way behind the hall, the path between Sophia Hotel and the Pumwani African Bar. The path was dark, only supplied with a dim light from this public toilet. It was full of human shit which was left by both young and old, men and women. Very beautifully arranged in a row along the bamboo cane as a fence around the bar. The path was very private because at a time like this people didn’t pass here. We took it. Then reaching this stunted bush of a flower we came to a

stop. It was me who heard the noise. It was so faint that you mistake it with those made by the movement of cats. Cats are so many here at this time. At last I heard the voice. It was the female. I knew why.... I picked up a paper and this time I was more careful not to pick a shitty one. I lighted it and approached the stunted flower. I lifted it up. Bent to peep underneath. The light reached them. A man and a woman. (20-1)

Much as the narrator shows distaste for the corruption around him, he is himself a part of it. "I have eight bastards here in the Slums. Yes. Eight. Four buried. Buried because the mothers were lousy, careless and cheap" (84). But he is not alone. The high and mighty are implicated as well. The children that populate the slums are the product of powerful men's patronage of prostitutes. So too are the founders of the greatest religions depicted as "fallen". In the only apostrophe in the novel, the narrator addresses the universality of corruption,

Damn this place. May God burn it and all the people. Ministers, why don't you come for your children? Managers and directors, why leave them in suffering? Why are you afraid of being seen in daytime? Why come and park your cars at a distance in the dark? Why let them be forced out at a very early age, into prostitution, making them wear out quickly? Why let them be forced into abortion because they don't have enough support for the young ones? Who will marry mothers of two, three, four? Who will marry killers? Aborters? Who will marry Rehema, Nuru? Wangare, Abiba, Rash, Sophia, Hadija, Mariamu... [The narrator lists about a hundred more names]. Who will marry Miss Majengo? Who will marry them? These women of the world? The soldiers of Women's Liberation? Christ have mercy. But no. You are the worst. You didn't marry Maria Magdalena. You died without a wife. So why should we? Mohammed the Prophet didn't, so why should we? You satisfied your appetite on your apostles and when Judas refused you called him a traitor. You feared that he would tell the world. And so too you, Mohammed. You're all the same, Gods. Maria had the first degree adultery with God. To get Jesus. Joseph was impotent. He did not know who impregnated his wife. No. He knew. But he played the cool part. The part of an incapable. Yes, this is all shit. Bullshit. (86-7)

Before us is held up the image of the lost humanity of fallen man, and the slummers are no exceptions. "Perhaps this place should be demolished. It is a lost city. Losing the lives of so many. Me, included" (99). Christ, Mohamed, and the Members of

Parliament, everyone is implicated in the system of corruption and is lost as well. The central point of hypocrisy is being staged in the apostrophic statement above. It is precisely because the well to do, mainstream society itself confronts the spectacle of its hypocrisy in the Slums that it stigmatizes it. "... in the Slums there is never a secret. In the Slums everything is known. And that is why the politicians want it demolished because their secrets are known here" (105). The implication of the universality of corruption that the novel projects is that corruption cannot be made into a unique and intrinsic attribute of the slums. But this is what the narrator argues against. To describe the narrative as tell-it-as-it-is is to ignore the element of idiosyncrasy, irreverence and the narrator's propensity for sweeping generalizations and misconceptions.

Another argument that vitiates the notion that the narrative could be reliably depended upon to guide our understanding of the lives of those outside of mainstream society is the narrator's encounters with the specie of African he calls "Black Europeans." The mutual deceptions, the sexual exploitation of the narrator by these women reveal anything but a "guileless" slum dweller. These were "Daughters of ministers, directors and general managers who have only seen pictures of the slums and swear that such places were only found in China and America" (58). One of such women is Zakia who showed up in a Mercedes Benz for a carwash one afternoon and asked to be given a tour of the slum afterwards. "She reversed and we rolled off. She told me that she wanted to take a drive around the Slums. And that I was to be her guide" (63). This tour is important on several levels: it mirrors both tourists and readers. This moment in the text could be considered the moment the text turns against itself by enacting a relation with its object and readers that contradict the claims of its author, reviewers and

publishers. As they proceed through a tour of the slum, the narrator is truthful only about his lies. "I lied about that, saying it was a college for two-shilling tarts. Is it? She asked. Yeah. That is where they are taught all the business.... Then she asked me why I was not chewing miraa today. I lied, telling her I didn't have any cash..." (65). This relationship would lead to sexual encounters with Zakia, who introduced the narrator to a host of other women who want to take a tour of the Slums as well.

Then came the question which was like a bomb to me. And it was from Zakia. Do you know any waSwahilis who are *waganga*? That was it. Witchdoctors. In the Slums they are known as Shariffs. Most of them are cheats, liars. What they do is all shit. I wondered when people will realize the truth about them. They would read to you from a Koran type of book, tell you to bring a black chicken for the job, give you some irizi and all the funny things that you were to use. Everyday we see women coming to them, all beautiful. The trouble with them being men. (129)

The society depicted in this novel is apparently chauvinistic and misogynist. The "black European women" are oppressed at home much as the women in the slum. Their search in the slum for mystical powers to turn their domestic problems around strikes us as being more than ironic. Black magic or black power is the authentic blackness that is always elusive. Doubly ironic is the fact that the women are also being exploited by the narrator who leads them to the witchdoctor that would give him the most cut. It is not only the "very high-up women [who] are coming into the Slums to the Shariffs for black magic over their husbands... but top men too. Ministers and all" (154). All those who make the slums what it is are returning to it for an impossible quest for salvation, an act of irony that could only be their nemesis. Toward the end, Zakia and her friends return with complaints that the black magic did not work, but were not at all disillusioned. They request to try another witchdoctor! Thus, the search for the authentic witchdoctor

parallels and parodies the search for the soul of the slum or the soul of Africa. The narrator's idiosyncrasies and dissimulations, which are essential for his survival in the face of very harsh conditions of existence, represent concerns far removed from investments in bourgeois aesthetics and morality. The purposelessness of form, the limitations of language and the tensions of underworld survival, however powerfully intimated by the narrative, are not the exclusive elements of slum literature and do not particularly contribute to a successful rendering of the essential slum life in Akare's *The Slum*. The novel is therefore not authentic in itself but by the pronouncement of the editors, reviewers and publisher, and authenticity here as in the case of *Arrow of God* is only an expression and affirmation of stereotypes.

The argument that nothing is authentic in itself but in relation to its specific use value at a given point in time is an argument that echoes Walter Benjamin, whose formulation helped in initializing the discussion at the beginning of this chapter. If the search for the authentic in *The Slums* translates to the search for black magic, in *Arrow of God* it is the image of Africa as a child of nature, in the words of Karl Marx, the asylum of the gods or the place of tradition. In ascribing the term "authentic" to these texts, one is either asserting the "uniqueness and permanence" of the societies they represent or the "cult value"/"ritual function" of the texts themselves as aesthetic objects. Akare attempts the portrayal of a contemporary setting and problem. Achebe on the other hand in trying to decipher the root causes of a contemporary problem seeks its origins in tradition. It could be argued that if one challenges the application of "authenticity" to *The Slums*, it is not clear how easily Achebe could be untangled from the label. From a modern readers' perspective, the world of *Arrow of God* is unique precisely because "The uniqueness of a

work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition” (Benjamin: 223). As Emily Apter suggests, tradition as a unique aspect of African narratives is important within the calculus of what is marketable of African texts: “In the marketing of Third World difference, what sells? [...] A traditional African writer or an Afro-futurist?” (*Translation Zone*: 100)

It may well be that Achebe, looking back at tradition portrays it in terms with which we are now very familiar. On a CNN program, Anderson Cooper’s “360 Degrees” (September 29, 2006), a documentary aired titled “Where Have All the Parents Gone?” narrated by Christiane Amanpour. In talking about the problem of Aids and the success of the Riders for Health with its representative Barry Coleman, the CNN anchor, Amanpour raises the following question: “And if AIDS can be corralled in the Masai country where every day still passes much like it did centuries ago, why can’t it be controlled in all of Africa? (on camera): It’s almost like a simple solution that works. It’s not massively complex.” This remark is a reflection of the sense of uniqueness and permanence of the African condition against which the authenticity of representations are measured. That is, an authentic representation of African is measured against a particular discourse about Africa, with the image of Africa located as a place of tradition. Achebe reproduces similar lines in *Arrow of God* in describing life in Umuaro after Ezeulu returns from exile: “The heavy rains stopped as usual for a spell of dry weather without which yams could not produce big tubers despite luxuriant leaves. In short, life went on as though nothing had happened or was ever going to happen” (244). Achebe is more gracious and nuanced than Amanpour as to allow for an appearance of change in tradition. The rhythm of nature and the religio-cultural rituals that it gives rise to reserve

no sympathy for Ezeulu, the chief priest who has been abused by the British district officer, just as it would be impervious to the tragedy in the end when his son dies and he suffers a mental breakdown. Indifferent to the fact that the Ezeulu family was tethered to extinction and the deity and its priesthood had self-destructed, the rhythm and traditions that sustain the life of the community continues, regardless.

Achebe reflects Benjamin's sense of tradition, "This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable" (223): "In his extremity many a man sent his son with a yam or two to offer to the new religion [Christianity] and to bring back the promised immunity" (230). By restoring and re-inscribing the ritual of the new yam within the Christian notion of Harvest and First fruits—itsself a carryover of an ancient Jewish tradition—the Umuaro tradition changes but lives on. The novel might best be seen as amenable to a ritual function of art:

Originally the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult. We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual—first the magical, then the religious kind, it is significant that the experience of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the "authentic" work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value." (223-4)

Benjamin further provides for us a way of understanding the ritual function of art in its equivalence in aesthetic ideologies and modes of representation that assert their use value only within a limited and restricted world of experience.

Achebe's Trilogy *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease* were clearly written in the same spirit that W.E.B. Du Bois wrote *Souls of Black Folks*, which was to find a way of rearticulating a subject or tradition to which little significance had accrued because of a problem of the "veil". In a response to Conrad, Achebe attempts what Du Bois had done before him in articulating "the strange meaning of being black":



“In my original conception of this essay I had thought to conclude it nicely on an appropriately positive note in which I suggest from my privileged position in African and Western cultures some advantages the West might derive from Africa once it rid its mind of old prejudices and began to look at Africa not through a haze of distortions and cheap mystifications but quite simply as a continent of people..., often highly gifted people and often strikingly successful in their enterprise with life and society” (261). The feeling of being privileged in two cultures that most of the writers harbor, and the implication of this for the literature, will be the subject of discussion presently. There is no doubt however, that the unconscious of the literature presumes that the writing is an act directed against the sensibilities of a skeptical or conflicted audience. But the communities of Umuaro and Umuofia are communities within the veil of tradition as much as they are within the veil of an implacable world. The classic plot of *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* derives from the absolute unwillingness and inability of the white invaders to understand the traditions of the people they are colonizing and the inability of the people to comprehend the change that is brought upon them. Both construct parallel and ironic understandings of one another and of the same events. Gestures of goodwill turn very quickly into provocations. The paradoxes are not limited to this. In *Arrow of God* the District Officer and his team construct narratives about the traditions of the local people that attempt to offer a positive description of that tradition from the standpoint of its original context and use-value: this only succeeds in pointing to its contemporary presence as a disruptive, archaic and atavistic residual, thus validating in reverse, the anthropological discourse of modernity.

The end to which the ritual function of art is deployed is the perpetuation of community. Ritual is the mechanism for the normalization of community. The relationship between myth, literature and community has been explored in details by Jean Luc Nancy. Here ritual is the acknowledgement of the precarious equilibrium of “life in common,” a fragile equilibrium which must constantly be restored. As always the necessity of ritual derives from the precipitation of a terminal crisis of community. In *Arrow of God*, the symbolic order goes out of sync with the natural order when the District Officer detains the Chief Priest for two moons thereby preventing him from observing the lunar calendar, which he takes stock of by eating every moon one of the thirteen sacred yams.

This conflict is similar to the crisis in Wole Soyinka’s magnum opus, *Death and the King’s Horseman* when Mr. Pilkings orders the termination of a ritual by which Eleshin Oba is to offer himself for the continuity of his community. Winterbottom, in his own case, out of admiration selects the chief priest for the position of paramount chief, a position which had hitherto not been a part of Igbo political system but which is required by the British administration for the success of Indirect Rule. Ezeulu rejects the attempt to incorporate him into the state system and incurs the wrath of the colonial administration because of his sense of personal integrity that is tantamount to acts of native insubordination and insolence. A detention of Ezeulu is effected; and for this he misses two months of ritual. By the time the yams were ready for harvest, he is two months behind in ritual observations. He cannot skip the rituals and the yams could not be harvested without the rituals being fulfilled. This has implications not only for the current harvest: unless the planting season were changed, which would be possible only if

the natural order were changed, the crisis would continue year after year. The community thus faces a serious threat of extinction. But the option for Ezeulu does not and could not include changing the ritual itself because the ritual is the essence of the community, without which it could not hope to survive. The centrality of the ritual of the new yam festival in the novel is obvious from the very beginning and prominent at the end. The ritual is described in the following manner:

This feast was the end of the old year and the beginning of the new. Before it a man might dig up a few yams around his house to ward off hunger in his family but no one would begin the harvesting of the big farms. And, in any case, no man of title would taste new yam from whatever source before the festival. It reminded the six villages of their coming together in ancient times and of their continuing debt to Ulu who saved them from the ravages of the Abam. At every New Yam feast the coming together of the villages was re-enacted and every grown man in Umuaro took a good-sized seed-yam to the shrine of Ulu and placed it in the heap from his village after circling it round his head; then he took the lump of chalk lying beside the heap and marked his face. It was from these heaps that the elders knew the number of men in each village. If there was an increase over the previous year a sacrifice of gratitude was made to Ulu; but if the number had declined the reason was sought from diviners and a sacrifice of appeasement was ordered. It was also from these yams that Ezeulu selected thirteen with which to reckon the new year. (253)

With the exile and imprisonment of the chief priest by the British colonial administration comes a discontinuity never before experienced by the community, one for which there exists no clear solution within its metaphysical structure. This impasse, while having no reference point in the historical reality of the Igbo, being a fictional account, is by no means beyond the realm of comparable reality. One only needs to make the connection with the historical account of the Aztecs by Tzvetan Todorov in his Book, *The Conquest of the Americas*. Todorov claims that the coming of Europeans was something that was inconceivable within the symbolic order of the Aztecs. Because there was nothing that prepared them for the possibility of any other existence outside their

own, their entire apparatus for making sense and acting in the world broke down completely, becomes inoperative, thereby ensuring their defeat in the hands of Hernándo Cortés. Achebe invents a conflict that simulates this moment in the “contact zones” of cross-cultural encounters that test the limits of interpretive systems. The impasse to which Umuaro elders offer their solution is as stated:

We all know the custom and no one can say that Ezeulu has offended against it. But the yams are ripe in the soil and must be harvested now or they will be eaten by the sun and the weavils. At the same time Ezeulu has just told us that he still has three sacred yams to eat. What then do we do? How do you carry a man with a broken waist? We know why the sacred yams are still not finished; it was the work of the white man. But he is not here now to breathe with us the air he has fouled. We cannot go to Okperi and ask him to come and eat the yams that now stand between us and the harvest. Shall we then sit down and watch our harvest ruined and our children and wives die of hunger? No! Although I am not the priest of Ulu I can say that the deity does not want Umuaro to perish. We call him the saver. Therefore you must find a way out, Ezeulu. If I could I would go now and eat the remaining yams. But I am not the priest of Ulu. It is for you, Ezeulu, to save our harvest.'(Page 260)

The solution the elders propose invokes a very pragmatic and even materialist view, one that concerns itself with the conservation of the physical existence of the community. It is one that has a universal resonance: that above all, to use Foucault's formulation, “Society must be defended”; that the voice of the people is not the voice of god; it must become the voice of god.

These are not the times we used to know and we must meet them as they come or be rolled in the dust. I want you to look round this room and tell me what you see. Do you think there is another Umuaro outside this hut now?'

No, you are Umuaro,' said Ezeulu.

'Yes, we are Umuaro. Therefore listen to what I am going to say. Umuaro is now asking you to go and eat those remaining yams today and name the day of the next harvest. Do you hear me well? I said go and eat those yams today, not tomorrow; and if Ulu says we have committed an abomination let it be on the heads of the ten of us here. You will be free because we have set you to it, and the person who sets a child to catch a shrew should also find him water to wash the odour from his hand. We shall find you the water. (260)

Ezeulu consults with his god to find a remedy to this situation. It is unheard of that any problem could arise to which the gods do not have an answer. But the divination produced no conclusive answer due in part to the interruption of the process by the sound of the church bell robbing the reader of the only moment of hierophantic encounter in the novel. It is highly significant that Achebe does not allow the gods to speak directly in the novel. This is particularly striking as the agency of the god Ulu is denied by the failure to break through the veil of the supernatural into the realm of human reality. What we have is the description of a process of divination that ever approaches but is never able to reach the divine.

From the rafters right round the room the skulls of all past chief priests looked down on the mound and on their descendant and successor. Even in the hottest day a damp chill always possessed the shrine because of the giant trees outside which put their heads together to cut off the sun, but more especially because of the great, cold, underground river flowing under the earth mound. Even the approaches to the shrine were cold and, all year round, there was always some *ntu-nanya-mili* dropping tears from the top of the ancient trees.

As Ezeulu cast his string of cowries the bell of Oduche's people [Christians] began to ring. For one brief moment Ezeulu was distracted by its sad, measured monotone and he thought how strange it was that it should sound so near---much nearer than it did in his compound. (Page 263)

It becomes clear therefore that Achebe wrote about the supernatural from the point of view of man and not from the point of view of the gods. This approach is precisely what distinguishes a realist narrative from a nonrealist one. The distraction of the priest by the “sad, measured monotone” of the church bell highlights his corporeal gravitation that the world is too much with him. More than this, it also underscores a moment that Soyinka has written much about, which is ironically the only possible discovery to be made in *Arrow of God*: that the docking of the ship of modernity on

African shores coincided with the twilight of the gods. A moment in which the only possible story is the human story and the only possible medium is realism. The gods cannot speak in *Arrow of God* because they have already deserted. At the end, Ezeulu contemplates this act of betrayal thusly: "Think of a man who, unlike lesser men, always goes to battle without a shield because he knows that bullets and machet strokes will glance off his medicine-boiled skin; think of him discovering in the thick of battle that the power has suddenly, without warning, deserted him"(285)." It is understandable then, that Achebe's third novel *No Longer at Ease* breaks with the discourse of tradition that has exhausted itself. The collapse of the symbolic order of tradition is therefore what *Arrow of God* represents. It is not a justification or nostalgia for tradition. The spectacle of its rituals, the coherence of its world and the inability to reenact the ultimate gestures of restoration as is the function of all rituals herald the apocalyptic dawn. "What could it point to but the collapse and ruin of all things? Then a god, finding himself powerless, might take to his heels and in one final, backward glance at his abandoned worshippers cry: If the rat cannot flee fast enough Let him make way for the tortoise!" (286). In fact, one could take it a step forward. The representation of the failure of ritual to restore order is in itself, a parody of tradition. The elders of Umuaro were therefore wrong to feel vindicated by the destruction of Ezeulu that "no man however great was greater than his people; that no one ever won judgement against his clan." With the collapse of tradition comes not the validation but the dispersal of community, "inciting people to take liberties; and Umuaro was just ripe to do so." The subordination and subjection of the people that follows in *No Longer at Ease* point to the notion of conservative emancipation of the colonial regime.

How then do we make sense of the novel if it is not as critics have unanimously expressed the validation of the rituals of community? What is a post authenticity reading of *Arrow of God* to yield? According to Benjamin, “the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics” (224). Clearly, Achebe offers his Nigerian readers a story that warns about the dangers of centralization, that political authority must not be based on culture or religion, just like Soyinka’s *A Dance of the Forests*. All these things have proven to be the boulders upon which the country, and indeed most of African and postcolonial nations, continually stumbles. “The narrative’s reference may seem to belong to the past, but in reality it is always contemporaneous with the act of recitation” (Lyotard: 22).

Achebe’s depiction of what is now widely regarded in modernist discourse as the moment of the twilight of the gods, gained the status of a trope that could easily be identified in the language of modern Africa literature. But the philosophical implications of the concept of the twilight of the gods as was enunciated by Frederick Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* marks the moment of ascendancy of the scientific worldview and the decline of mythopoeic worldview that is being projected through Ezeulu and the Igbo villages. According to Foucault, the “death of god” is the condition for the emergence of anthropology (*Order of Things*). The underlying story in all the classical theories of realism from Barthes to Lukacs is the commitment to the agency of man. This story of the agency of man first told through the genre of the novel, according to Jack Goody, constitutes “an anthropological breakthrough in storytelling” (2007:3). In a way, critics like Graham Huggan are right for labeling the African novel an anthropological novel,

but they are wrong for the reasons by which they came to that conclusion. Achebe's novel is as anthropological as any novel to the extent that it demonstrates the emergence of a new pragmatic framework for the survival of the Umuofia community that is no longer based on the supernatural or theological injunctions.

It is this desire of the realist writer to capture a truly heroic human story as opposed to the story of the interventions of the gods, and present us with a portrait of Africa's "successful enterprise" with life and society that informs the production of the second edition of *Arrow of God*, contrary to claims by Achebe as to the structural defects of the first edition. Indeed, Keith Sambrook has described the editorial suggestions he made regarding the text as an attempt to remove roadblocks in the path of readers like him who do not share the cultural orientation of Achebe (personal interview). However, a close look at the most significant section that was cut out reveals what Lyotard already alerted us to, namely: the abandonment of everything that does not translate. The long episode which has now been published separately as children's literature is folkloric material that extols the virtue of contentment (see appendix). This demand for "unity, simplicity, communicability" etc. in the name of realism speaks to the condition of translation and to the notion of authenticity as a condition of translation, which could be argued to have the most enduring impact on the style and rhetorical repertoire that informed the overall character of the African Writers Series. Indeed, it is arguable that the Series constitutes the very canon of African literature as a discursive formation; and that it is demonstrable that this body of African literary texts exists primarily in the mode of translations without originals, a formulation that registers the fact that African writers are



necessarily translators in a linguistic situation in which the distinctions between “source” and “target” are constantly interlocked and interchanging.

The notion that narratives always already exist in a condition of translation has been expounded by Bakhtin. According to this theory, “All forms involving a narrator or a posited author signify to one degree or another by their presence the author’s freedom from a unitary and singular language, a freedom connected with the relativity of literary and language systems; such forms open up the possibility of never having to define oneself in language, the possibility of translating one’s own intentions from one linguistic system to another, of fusing ‘the language of truth’ with ‘the language of the everyday,’ of saying ‘I am me’ in someone else’s language, and in my own language, ‘I am other’ (Bakhtin 314-15). More recently, Emily Apter in *The Translation Zone* (2006) revisits the set of geopolitical encounters and narrative relations that in Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes* (1992) constitute “contact zones.” Apter sees in translation, “a significant medium of subject re-formation and political change” that “highlights that ‘eureka’ spot where consciousness crosses over to a rough zone of equivalency or crystallizes around an idea that belongs to no one language or nation in particular” (6). It seems quite obvious that the African writer as a maker of representations is not just a translator of the world or self into language. Famed for being a citizen of many worlds, s/he is much more responsible for maintaining the modular through which the dynamics of interaction between the systems of value and apparatuses of perception of those radically different iterations of self and “world scattered in meaning [are collected, reconstituted and condensed] into a finished and self-contained image” (Hitchcock 179). The African Writers Series as a literature-in-translation emanates from a peculiar surface of

emergence that doubly inscribes the discursive possibilities, variations, and functions. The manifestations of this condition of translation are most profoundly signified at the level of the hermeneutic possibilities that it lends itself to or resists. This condition underscores the refracted essence of the literature and the necessity of a post-authenticity hermeneutics that compels us to “accept the reality that texts come to us mediated by existing frameworks of reception and interpretation” (Damrosch: 295).

Although Obiajunwa Wali would very early in the history of the formation of the African canon challenge the very Africanness of its discursivity, his criticism of the replication of “Western” aesthetic, cultural, and thought patterns, which tend to reinforce alienation, has not resulted in any major shift in the terms and practices of African literature. The claims of literatures written by Africans but in “someone else’s language” to be a legitimate representation of the African self have never been successfully challenged, not even by the fierce indictment of the *Bolekajas* that African writers in their adoption of Eurocentric poetics are complicit with colonialism. For several critics, prominent among whom is Ngugi, this debate about Eurocentric impulses is a fundamental problem, because they believe it is crucial that African writers express themselves in a medium that does not needlessly constrain or distort the freedom of their creativity, the relationship with their African audience, and the possibility of promoting the urgent social transformations and re/formation of autonomous identities in Africa. The debate crystallized in the binary of authenticity and inauthenticity, which, however, has since become outmoded in contemporary critical language. The point being reiterated here is that the frustration arising from this theoretical containment in the poetics of

realism is itself a product of a complete misapprehension of the destiny of modern African literature that the Series inaugurated.

The author-audience organic relation is clearly the measure of authenticity that Achebe prescribes. This prescription becomes necessary precisely because of the disjuncture created by the transatlantic nature of production and consumption. He argues, “Because of our largely European education our writers may be pardoned if they begin by thinking that the relationship between European writers and their audience will automatically reproduce itself in Africa” (*Hopes* 40). The relationship Achebe conceives between African writers and their audience is determinate of the spirit of African literature, one defined by a very different kind of function from those that have defined European literature. In “The Novelist as Teacher,” Achebe presents a letter written to him by a reader of his works to show that the society expects the writer to play the role of a teacher. In this letter, the reader says, “your novels serve as advice to us young” (41-2). He uses this to affirm the convergence of his society’s ostensible desire for a teacher with his ultimate aim as a writer. This attitude is not considered praiseworthy in contemporary European understandings of literature. As Benjamin succinctly makes the point, “Not only is any reference to a certain public or its representatives misleading, but even the concept of an ideal receiver is detrimental in the theoretical consideration of art” (69). This general sentiment is also echoed in a letter by the British novelist Frank Yerby to his publisher A. Dwyer Evans: “To a writer the reader is at best an irrelevancy; when you’re writing, he doesn’t even exist, nor should he” (quoted by John St. John, 354). It is indeed this condition and articulation of strategic difference, one in which language, audience and aesthetics are inextricably and mutually implicated, demonstrated by works

published in the Series that has remained, by and large, inadequately theorized. It is thus worth examining the structural and historical circumstances that dictate this functional differentiation within the relation of a writer's social space and the implications of such relations for the foundation and overall formation of African Writers Series as a discursive order. Furthermore, an examination of the ways in which the transatlantic nature of the transactions influenced living and writing across cultural, linguistic, and political positions that condition a discursive tradition is long overdue.

Achebe, like most other African writers, is indeed aligned with the project of conversion to modernity, which requires the work of translation. This is made more explicit in his statement about how he intended his works to function:

Literature, whether handed down by word of mouth or in print, gives us a second handle on reality; enabling us to encounter in the safe, manageable dimensions of make-believe the very same threats to integrity that may assail the psyche in real life; and at the same time providing through the self-discovery which it imparts a veritable weapon for coping with these threats whether they are found within problematic and incoherent selves or in the world around us. *What better preparation can a people desire as they begin their journey into the strange, revolutionary world of modernization?* (emphasis added, *Hopes* 170).

Achebe's view converges with that of Frow who takes the position that "the work of intellectuals [read knowledge class] is the implementation of modernity" (89). Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* says it all when he relates, "My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man will be saying *had we known* tomorrow" (55). So inexorable was this commitment to conversion to modernity that it became the generative principle of a series of imperatives which included a critique of ethnic identification and cultural nationalism. Such critique is exemplified in the strong rebuttal of negritude by emerging African writers in the sixties whose works featured prominently in the African Writers Series.

The project of conversion to modernity, coupled with the transatlantic circulation of the literature, bear their effect on the very rhetorical mode of the texts, which “is always a process of translation and transference of meaning” (Bhabha: 26). This process has its equivalence in what Stephen Owen has described in contemporary European literature. Owen presents us with an interesting problematic of what it means to produce national literature in a global world. He argues that for the work of a Greek poet to get to Rumania, it must first pass through the lines of distribution in New York, Paris, or Berlin, and “if the Greek poet’s work is judged valuable for the world market in those centers, it may be translated and only then exported to Bucharest” (121). What Owen describes here is the globalization of knowledge production and the transformation of knowledge production in a globalized world market, which he later shows has its colonial side.

The outcome of the history of asymmetrical power relations is reflected in the privileging of “translatable” procedures and mechanisms for the authorization of statements. A text always in a process of translation and transference of meaning automatically enables multiple matrices of meaning. In the conversion to modernity, with the West wielding the power to superimpose its own matrix of meaning because of its monopoly over the means of knowledge production, the exclusionary process of “canon” formation in postcolonial literatures is thus already preestablished. This Soyinka perceived at the very beginning, but without paying deeper attention to the ways in which the nature of African literature engenders a double matrix. He laments, “apart from his own discovery the African writer has experienced rediscovery by the external eye. It is doubtful if the effect of this has any parallel in European literature” (“And After The Narcissist?” 56).

It is evident that the multiple matrices are directly tied to the “surface of emergence” or relations of production that have imposed certain fundamental constraints on African literature. On the one hand, the institutions that are responsible for the production of African literature are predominantly situated in specific geo-political and economic domains outside the continent. This has a dramatic effect on the publishing processes, and thereby preconditions the kinds of texts that are eventually selected for production. Clearly, African writers themselves may have agendas that are different from those of the publishing industrial complex or the politics of publication and promotion, which can foreclose the possibility of a text’s emergence. Accommodations are thus inherent in the very act of writing African literature just as the texts themselves are products of difficult negotiations between fine boundaries.

The condition and poetics of translation can be better understood if one examines the character of Okeke in *Things Fall Apart* as the very archetypal figure of Achebe and the African writer. Okeke is himself the modern hybrid character in whom elements of the trickster figure have survived. Achebe’s preoccupation with trickster figures can be seen in Nanga (*A Man of the People*) and the Oldman (*Anthills of the Savannah*). Okeke’s appearance represents a highly significant moment in the novel. This is where Achebe constructs the “privileged position” of the translator as author, a phrase Irele and Achebe repeatedly remind us applies only to these middlemen who, by their embrace of modernity, become the unique agents of progress and transformation. The conflation and valorization of the role of the translator and spokesperson in the text mirrors the very position of the African writer, The African Writers Series and the “canon” of African literature. In a very fascinating passage in *Things Fall Apart*, the white man says to his

interpreter, "Tell them to go away from here. This is the house of God and I will not live to see it desecrated." But Okeke, the interpreter, in a more politically careful manner, says to the angry and rampaging "spirits and leaders of Umuofia," "The white man says he is happy you have come to him with your grievances, like friends. He will be happy if you leave the matter in his hands" (170). This is the kind of pressure and talk that characterizes not only *Things Fall Apart* but also the discursivity of the Series, the canon, built on and/or around it. It demonstrates the precise power of an individual writer in the terms that Lyotard has expressed. "A *Self* does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. Young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at "nodal points" of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be. Of better; one is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass. No one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee or referent." (15)

To theorize the condition of translation is to claim it engenders the mutability and indeterminacy of the subject constituted at the very point s/he engages in a discursive practice. Foucault's genealogical method that "entertains the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges" (*Power/Knowledge*: 83) helps in situating literature and experience in Africa. One of the precautions of the genealogical method is not reading texts from the point of view of the "knowing subject," as a "synthetic activity of the subject." Once the sovereignty of the subject is disrupted, the notion that texts are allocated a set of values, which is found in the intention of the author, then becomes difficult to sustain. Foucault argues that discourses themselves, by

the very “rules of their formation” and “surfaces of emergence,” “form the objects of which they speak” (*Archeology*: 49). By this logic we can deduce a more important principle that texts generate the context of their discursivity. It seems therefore that the argument that there can be no subjectivity before the act of enunciation enables us to understand the mode of speaking in African literature as a whole. The act of enunciation, according to Foucault, defines “the various statuses, the various sites, the positions that [the subject] can occupy or be given when making a discourse” (54). In African literature, the notion of the “transcendental subject” can no longer account for the narrative because it is in that very narrative that the “dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself can be determined” (55).

“The function of translation and the role of the translator,” Peter Hitchcock argues, “go to the heart of the dialogics of the oppressed” (170). The translator’s subjectivity at the moment of enunciation can be described as being marked by “a politics of disguise and anonymity that takes place in public view but is designed to have double meaning or to shield the identity of the actor” (Scot: 19). This is why the role of Okeke is so important in theorizing the condition of translation. Okeke as a trickster figure has an antecedent in folklore, and Amos Tutuola has masterfully translated this figure into contemporary discourse. Could one argue that the hidden pattern in *Things Fall Apart* is similar then to *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*? I think there are strong reasons for such a position. Achebe makes two important observations about the nature of fiction: first, “the sheer prodigality of man’s inventiveness in creating aetiological fictions; second, not all fictions are equally useful or desirable” (*Hopes* 142). For Achebe, Tutuola presents the



paradigm of what aetiological fiction is, which he goes on to endorse because its “truth is not like the canons of an orthodoxy” (153). He asks and suggests:

Why does Amos Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* offer us a better, stronger and more memorable insight into the problem of excess than all the sermons and editorials [...]? The reason is that Tutuola performs the miracle of transforming us into active participants in the powerful drama of the imagination in which excess in all its guises takes on flesh and blood [...]. [T]he novel is made unforgettable for us because of Tutuola’s inventiveness not only in revealing the variety of human faces that excess may wear, but also in his deft explorations of the moral and philosophical consequences of breaching, through greed, the law of reciprocity which informs like a gravitational force the seemingly aberratic motions of his bizarre, fictive universe. (143-44)

The question then is what does Achebe have in common with Tutuola, or Okonkwo with the Drinkard? Once it becomes clear to us that they both come “from a common backcloth” (Soyinka, *Art, Dialogue and Outrage* 11), the understanding that the restoration of social order is possible through the spectacle of the negation of its breach will become available to us. It becomes clear, therefore, that the image/experience of Africa is not like Mudimbe’s gnosis that resists representation in the language and epistemological forms of the West. Given all the imperatives at work in the production of these images, the essential ambivalence that renders them readily susceptible of being interpreted against their own grain vitiate efforts to co-opt them into the supreme unidimensional canonical obligation of legitimation. As a matter of fact the literature undermines both imperial discourse as well as the nationalist discourse in Africa. It cannot then recruit subjects for the nation-state with which it is also at war. Ngugi’s chapter: “Art War with the State” in *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams* elaborates some of these issues. The discourse of African literature is not the “rhapsodist of the eternal” or of manifest destiny, but that of the strategic struggle and matter-of-life negotiation that

Okeke represents, one that the elders of Umuaro put into practice in asking Ezeulu to eat the sacred yams. I use “struggle” advisedly as opposed to resistance or opposition.

The dialogized discursive condition of production, I would argue, is also the condition of a translation relation, which carries the possibility of manipulation and therefore agency by the person of the Janus-faced translator. It is in this translation relation that one would find the African writer in Achebe. Not only does the writer serve as a medium of linguistic and cultural translation of Africa, s/he also serves to filter and translate the incoming “threat” to Africa.

Achebe has been cast as a classicist, who is interested in ethnography and the representation of the true order of things. It is ironic that Achebe, like Foucault, in applying himself to the relations of things, the orders by which they are mutually established and interconnected, raises problems for the very notions of realism and representability that permit us to read African literature as having a link within itself to “tribal life” or African historical reality. Realism and representation promoted in the Western “canons of orthodoxy” stressed the capacity of language to capture the structures of existence. It is in this regard that African literature serves “as a sustained project of demythologization of [...] the myths of legitimation and delegitimation” (Jeyifo 52). And, I believe, it inevitably forces us to rethink the notion of “writing back” as being marginal or inapplicable in African discourse as exhibited in the African Writers Series. To write in a colonial context or about the colonial effect in a one-way shape or form is not the same thing as to have dialectical relations with the colonial discourse.

The distinctiveness of the conditions of translation lies in the imperatives of its production, but also in the distinctiveness and intersubjectivity of worldviews and

epistemologies that are implied in it as an art and practice of translation. This marks my point of criticism of Bhabha's notion of ambivalence. It seems to me that Bhabha's central concern with the problem of ambivalence is, "can the colonial moment ever not be contingent [...]" (194). I agree completely with his argument to the extent that my paper is also an attempt to delineate the complexion and complexity of contingency in the context of colonization and the production of African literature. That said, Bhabha's move toward generalizations beyond the context of colonization, the very idea that the nation anywhere is "split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its populations" (148), requires nuance. It is the very heterogeneity of the nation's populations that constitutes the ground and necessity for the nationalist discourse of centroverson to which the canon of European literature corresponds. The modes and patterns of ambivalence therefore manifest in disparate contexts in differing configurations according to the variations in degree of autonomy and subordination in colonial moments.

The immanence and mutations of the colonial situation confine the African writer to the position of the translator and middleman in the Publishing Industrial Complex and the pedagogical apparatuses of the dominant world order. By that position, can he really simultaneously claim to have the "autonomy of judgment" and "organization of work" which Frow reminds us are the basis for the formation of discursivity? "The formation of the knowledge class," Frow reiterates, "characteristically takes place around the professional claim to, and the professional mystique of, autonomy of judgment; this forms the basis both for the struggle over the organization of work and for individual

self-respect (that is for the particular mode of subjectivity) grounded in this relation to work” (125).

It was G. G. Darah at the University of Ife who coined the phrase “agbero bourgeoisie” to refer to Nigerian capitalists. The image of “agbero” is that of the bus conductors who are paid daily for finding passengers for buses. They do not own the buses. Irele presents the picture of the African knowledge class as what we might begin to view within the “agbero” paradigm: “Because we have not yet been able to establish on anything like a firm footing the institutions and material conditions for the production of knowledge, we are not in a position to command authority even in areas of scholarship pertaining to our continent. We do not control the means of production and transmission of our own discourse.” (“African Scholar” 64)

The formation of the Series as literary capital cannot be any different or disentangled from the process of the formation of economic and cultural capital. It is the institutions and political economy that generate all these pressures and imperatives, that determine what knowledge counts, what we should first tackle. As Apple says, we must not “ignore the complex relations between cultural capital and economic capital” (106). However, the African bourgeoisie and the knowledge class have both failed to secure the autonomy of the means of production necessary for the formation of both forms of capital and/or their relocation. Heinemann's African Writers Series with all its contributions and successes remain fundamentally an international/multinational enterprise which took on from local initiatives such as *Mbari* Publications, the East Africa Publishing House etc. We must therefore begin to assess the far-reaching implications of these situations for the constitution of the African Writers Series as well as its commanding force and promise.

What I have explored in this Chapter is the “multiple exigencies” of the conditions of translation that characterize the production and practice of African literature. I conclude that Achebe has given us a good illustration of these exigencies and the ecstasy of self-apprehension in a tragic colonial encounter through the figure of Okeke as a representation of the modern African writer. I have classified the discourse of modern African literature as a discourse of contingency precisely because of the crisis of legitimation that the shifting and transversal conditions of Okeke’s enunciative power engender. These multiple constraints on Okeke’s enunciative power serve as indicators of the problems and dilemmas of African literary production. Thus, Okeke allows us to raise a fundamental question concerning the ground or groundlessness upon which the story of Africa’s coming of age is told. This fundamental question exposes the disjunction between the translation relation and pedagogical function of the story. As the theory of this contingency and disjunction has yet to be institutionalized into a canon of criticism, one can understand why it has taken this long for “Okeke” to emerge as a problem. No longer does authenticity apply to him.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### International Literature: Marketing Sensibilities and The Crisis of Writing.

[Nigerian] novels published in Britain are far more likely to use village settings than novels published in Nigeria, and this preference is holding steady [...] In fact, however, Nigerian novels are far more likely to feature traffic jams in Lagos, a boss's assaults on his secretary's virtue, or how urban youth confront temptations to easy money through crime. Political novels, on the other hand, are disproportionately more likely to be published in Nigeria than in Britain. (Wendy Griswold: 528-9)

David Damrosch argues in *What is World Literature?* (2003) that the term:

“world literature,” coined by Goethe, was one that “crystallized both a literary perspective and a new cultural awareness, a sense of an arising global modernity” (1).

The rise of metropolitan and postcolonial cities and the constellation of the modernist movement discussed in the preceding chapters attest to the essential relation of material and literary cultures. Indeed, it appears impossible to speak of literary culture outside of the political economy of a mode of existence and production. Taken to its conclusion, this logic implies that whenever one speaks of “world literature” one is necessarily speaking about an aspect of globalization. This at least was the view of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in “The Communist Manifesto” cited by Damrosch: “The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. [...] national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature” (in Damrosch: 4). According to Marx, World literature is

coextensive with a world market precisely as a consequence of the cosmopolitan character of production and existence that the world market engenders. Also in the preceding chapters, attempts were made to identify the specific characteristics that the various markets in which the African Writers Series was circulated engendered in the texts. That is, how writing for an educational market, or general market, or even trade market for that matter in which Vicky Unwin, James Currey's successor at Heinemann tried vigorously after 1985 to promote the Series, affected the consciousness of the writers, and the dynamics and function of textual production. As we shall see, this view differs from Goethe's conception of world literature. It is thus necessary that an attempt be made to distinguish between Marx's and Goethe's conceptions of world literature; and in order to make this distinction even clearer, we propose the term international literature as a postcolonial re-appropriation of the Marxian appropriation of the term "world literature."

The eminent broadcaster, editor and reviewer, Edward Blishen, was first to announce the emergence of the African Writers Series as the emergence of a new world literature: "I shall tell my grandchildren that I owe most of what education I have to Penguins and that through the African Writers Series I saw a whole new, potentially great world literature come into being" (Quoted in Hill, 123). Blishen's prognostication is apt as a significant number of the texts published in the Series now appear prominent in World Literature curriculums. It is legitimate to ask whether this is not the natural destiny of these texts in the first place. The default assumption between writers and publishers was that the texts were not meant primarily for local distribution but for international

distribution. It was ultimately desirable that it be actively distributed to the very extent of Heinemann's reach. Currey makes this explicit in his solicitation of *Songs of Lawino*:

I do feel very strongly that easier access to the text [Okot P'Bitek's *Songs of Lawino*] through the A.W.S. would ensure that it was even more widely studied not only in Africa but also in Scandinavia, Britain, Australia, the Caribbean, Malaya, the Philippines and wherever there is an excited new audience for writing from Africa. As you will realize the Nigerian market is on its own very substantial and local stocking is crucial for supply. (James Currey to Leonard Okola East African Publishing House 5<sup>th</sup> May 1978)

The international channels of distribution that HEB makes accessible to African writers are part of what Currey is convinced contributed to the canonical status of some of the texts such as *Things Fall Apart* and *The Interpreters* (personal interview June 2005). Asked what made *Things Fall Apart* the great novel that it has been for 50 years, Currey automatically responds: apart from the fact that it is such a very interesting and well written novel, its inclusion in the African Writers Series explains its staying power. This assertion he supports by the fact that *Things Fall Apart* and *The Interpreters* were already out of print before they were reproduced in the paperback Series but have been in print ever since. The same is true about Ngugi's novel first published in hardback by William Heinemann, *The River Between*, as reflected in a correspondence between Sambrook and Janheinz Jahn. "Dear Mr. Jahn, 9 December 1965. The River Between is now unfortunately out of stock. The paperback is to be published early in January and we will send you a review copy of this as soon as it is available-- Keith Sambrook."

The entrepreneurial mode of operation in Heinemann Educational Books allowed for strategic innovations that were directed towards a transnational promotion of books and caused two of the major revolutions in postcolonial publishing which were the publication of the African Writers Series as a paperback series, and the stocking of the



texts in bookstores as a series rather than as individual publications (an approach that has now further encouraged ProQuest/Chadwyck-Healey to archive the entire Series, regardless of the relative popularity or obscurity, success or otherwise of individual titles, as a Literature Collection). This meant the texts were not only available but were relatively affordable, mostly below £1, with significant margins of discount for African booksellers. The big sales in one location allowed for flexibility to absorb losses elsewhere. It thus became possible to market the Series as a collection and promote it world over to the point it very quickly developed the reputation for being stolen the most of those books lost to libraries across Africa!

The success of the Series had an exponential effect on the company's stature. As James Currey put it: "[The African Writers Series] became, partly accidentally, an exploitative part of Heinemann's strategy in Africa. Again and again it gave Heinemann a presence which seemed far greater than the real size and strength of the firm. It was a key factor in enabling Heinemann to seize educational contracts from under the noses of established companies with a far longer presence than upstart Heinemann" (cited in Caroline Davis 234). The power of Heinemann Educational grew because of the Series as it was able to edge out its competitors like Macmillan, Evans etc. On a particular occasion, Macmillan, in partnership with a Tanzanian publishing house, had demanded the right to publish a title by Palanyo. Alan Hill makes the following remarks about this attempt: "Had Peter agreed, he would have denied himself access to the world market — which was what the AWS could uniquely provide" (235). One cannot overemphasize the role of the African Writers Series in giving different expressions and faces to the indescribable admixture of passions, of the animated suspense of expectations and the

tremulous conviviality of yesterday's adversaries. At the same time, the network brought about by the coterie of publishers travelling across old frontiers, such as Alan Hill, eager to harvest the first fruits of independence, provided publishing service for African authors. A writer writes from the freedom of his soul, but it has yet to be shown what direct connection there is between the time of independence of African countries, of decolonization and the unprecedented outpourings of literary creativity. Alan Hill was instinctively right in seeing in the overseas expansion of the Heinemann Educational Books the overall simultaneous social and political transformation of Africa.

Speaking of this transnational reach of Heinemann and the international impact of the production and distribution of the African Writers Series, Alan Hill remarks: "In 1958 a remarkable episode changed the direction of my publishing life and added a new dimension to the firm's list. It was also a turning point in the history of English literature in the twentieth century and a momentous event in the cultural development of black Africa" (120). Hill is referring to the chain of events that were prompted by the publication of *Things Fall Apart* and the Series that it gave rise to; that is, how these amount to a seismic shift in transnational cultural relations, and how as part of the cultural transformations enabled by the exchange, they have changed the way the world thinks. In Hill's story, he describes his return to England after a long period of the pursuit of publishing in the postcolonial world: "To visit HEB Inc. in its early years was to experience a journey in time. It was like travelling back 30 years to those far-off days after the war, when Edward Thompson and I shared a room, a typewriter and very little else. Since then, we had conquered the world" (290). An interesting part of his tale involves how going back to England is some sort of retrogression. The work of the

publisher had involved an act of active engagement with the world-- all things exciting were now happening out there on the global stage and the intensity of these activities and the role of African Writers Series in generating world-wide excitement, were what Edward Blishen had testified to, summing up the mood during the great period of African literature.

The sense that “the world is too much with us” echoes through the correspondences from African writers to Heinemann publishers. When Nurudin Farah first informed his publisher about the manuscript that was later to be published under the title *A Naked Needle*, he first conceived it in terms of world citizenship. He wrote, “I’ve just have begun a novel --provisional title is *A Native of The World*” (Farah to Currey, 7<sup>th</sup> oct 1969). As this conceptualization mirrored Farah’s own living situation, Currey would later invoke it in jest “We have greater difficulty keeping in contact with many people who stay in the same place. Obviously you are a practiced nomad!” (Currey to Farah (18<sup>th</sup> may 1970). Nomadism is a less fancy way of saying cosmopolitanism, but it is a condition of postcolonial writing first articulated by Edward Said (*Orientalism*). An acute sense of “worldliness” that Carole Boyce Davies argues in her book *Black Women, Writing and Identity* (1994) is a unique consequence of the “migrations of the subject.” The worldliness of African literature as a product of dispersion and dissemination through international travel and marketing is obviously quite different from the notion of world literature that Goethe espoused.

Goethe’s view of world literature could be argued to be a form of “imperial self-projection,” to see itself reflected in the mirror of the landscape beyond, one in which a

global perspective of Imperium ascertains what constitutes literature from place to place and ascribes values as to what is a useful contribution and “of great value to us” (Damrosch: 9). In Goethe’s actual formulation however, a less critical conclusion could be reached that defines world literature as literary texts that serve as “windows to foreign worlds.” In this case, the literariness and value of these texts would still be based on the needs of the receiving culture which would then require texts from abroad to be authentic representations of foreign cultural processes. The origins of world literature and global literature as we know it today could be traced to these formulations that derive from Goethe. Among several attempts to reconceptualize world literature has been “The World Literature and Cultural Studies Program” by Kristin Ross. Ross argues that it is important to establish “a global comparative field” in order to “present both dominant and emergent cultures as dynamically related” (1993: 667). From this perspective, the “world” in world literature would mean “merely a relational way of thinking about global literature and culture” that does not isolate Europe and the U.S. This in a sense would allow for comparison not based on a First or Third world oppositionality but a realization that “the conditions that prevail for the vast majority of people in the so-called underdeveloped world are now those of, becoming the lived experience of, the people inhabiting the world centers of capitalism” (675). Ross’s attempt is to contravene the hierarchy implicit in the configurations of world literature courses in the West. However, her intervention relates to world literature within a pedagogical framework.

David Damrosch among others has developed a more elaborate concept of world literature: “I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language [...]. In its most

expansive sense, world literature could include any work that has ever reached beyond its home base [...]. [A] work only has an *effective* life as world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture”

(4). In giving world literature a non-pedagogical general theoretical orientation, Damrosch reproduces or replaces the first world-third world binary with original culture-foreign culture binary. Some of the important questions that arise from this are the following: what is the notion of an original culture? Would original culture refer to the culture portrayed in the text or the cultural perspective from which the texts looks on to the world? Would the original culture be the culture of the novel as a genre or the author? What would be the original culture of a multicultural text? The notion of “original culture” is a backdoor way of reaffirming the origin of literature in national culture.

Damrosch’s further attempt to clarify his concept of world literature does fall short and in fact complicates the cultural marker already laid down by introducing yet another marker, the linguistic: “a work enters into world literature by a double process: first by being read *as* literature; second, by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin. A given work can enter into world literature and then fall out of it again if it shifts beyond a threshold point along either axis, the literary and the worldly” (6). This theory assumes a given threshold above or below which a text might be considered world literature. It also assumes that the boundaries of language and culture are coextensive and coterminous; that literatures could not cross linguistics boundaries without also crossing cultural boundaries and vice versa. The condition of the production of African literature, as has been discussed in this dissertation, stem from that unusual experience that does not fit into the established modes of thinking either about

notions of world literature or about literature as such. This is probably why of all the texts of world literature examined by Damrosch not a single one of them is by an African author. In fact, the chapter “English in the World” that could have opened up the whole question of postcolonial literature focused instead exclusively on Anglo-American and immigrant writers in England and the United States. Postcolonial and African literatures today, constituted by texts that are written in international languages and from a sense of a shared transnational, if not global, cultural experience, were given a passing glance in only one paragraph:

Intimately linked to translation as it is, world literature can also be found when a work circulates across cultural divides separating speakers of a single widespread language like Arabic, Spanish, or French. A Senegalese novel written in French can enter world literature in an effective sense when it is read in Paris, Quebec, and Martinique; translation is only a further stage in its worldly circulation. (212)

There is a preference, from the focus or lack thereof, for world literature in translation over postcolonial world literature. The former specie of world literature as Emily Apter’s *Translation Zone* very transparently presents it, is the old comparative literature with a focus beyond European languages and literatures and with less of an emphasis on studying literature in its original language. One of the consequences of this recalibration is the tendency to compare and to cluster Minority literatures and “Third World” literatures together, especially along the lines of Diaspora literatures. This territory has been effectively conceded by theorists of world literature despite the obvious fact that “The age of colonialism was characterized in large part by a process of linguistic and cultural unification” (Casanova: 116), a fact which automatically eliminates the linguistic and cultural otherness that Damrosch seems to put down as marking the threshold of world literature. It is the elimination of the mirror of difference in

postcolonial literature that makes it difficult for conventional concepts of world literature to accommodate it and why theorists like Damrosch are not able to expand their theoretical base to include African literatures in English.

The concept of world literature has yet another problematic association and this is its being constituted by classics of world's great civilizations or canonical non-western literatures in English or translation. The problematic relationship between the notions of literature and civilization, especially written civilization, explains at times the reluctance in meddling with "Third World" literatures. Invoking Senghor's "civilization of the universal," Achebe encourages postcolonial writers to join in the "preliminary conversations" that are essential in the progression of universal civilization: "to any writer who is working in the remote provinces of the world and may now be contemplating giving up his room or selling his house and packing his baggage for London or New York I will say: Don't trouble to bring your message in person. Write it where you are, take it down to that little dusty road to the village post office and send it!" (*Home and Exile*: 2000: 94). This enjoinder derives from an understanding and rebuttal of the notion that western literature is a vehicle of universal civilization. Based upon the metaphor of "the vast network of postal services that knit the British Empire together" (76), Achebe argues for a world civilization and literature that basically allows postcolonial writers to write in! Such calls only further legitimize the hierarchical classification of literature based on notions of civilization.

The time has come to salvage that aspect of World literature which Damrosch describes as "a mode of circulation and of reading" (5) from other dominant forms of world literature by emphasizing its basis in international languages and markets. This is

to effectively enter a post-authenticity moment of African and Postcolonial literature that moves away from a culture-based to a market-based theory of literature. There are several bases for which one could classify and theorize international literature. One such proposition is by Michael Denning:

Like “world music,” the “world novel” is a category to be distrusted; if it genuinely points to the transformed geography of the novel, it is also a marketing device that flattens distinct regional and linguistic traditions into a single cosmopolitan “world beat,” with magical realism serving as the aesthetic of globalization, often as empty and contrived signifier as the modernism and socialist realism it supplanted. There is, however, a historical truth to the sense that there are links between writers as unlike as Garcia Marquez, Naguib Mahfouz, Nadine Gordimer, Jose Saramago, Paule Marshall and Pramoedya Ananta Toer, for the work of each has roots in the remarkable international literary movement that emerged in the middle decades of the twentieth century under slogans of “proletarian literature,” “neorealism,” and “progressive,” “engaged,” or “committed” writing.” (“The Novelist’s International”: 703)

The validity of Denning’s argument has been demonstrated through the discussion on international modernism in chapter three and the connection between writers in different political and literary capitals. International literature is thus defined among other criteria, by international literary movements. The other criterion that is being spotlighted here is the market: the totality of that mechanism constituted by “the literary chit-chat which makes the reputations of poets boom and crash in an imaginary stock exchange” (quoted in Berube, 2002: 96). There is no telling the impact that marketing has on the contingencies of the reception of literature, but there is no doubt that that category of what we hereby call international literature is arguably more dependent on the “market” and susceptible to market manipulations. Texts could appeal to readers based on cultural and national affinities and intellectual and entertainment values, but faced with an inward looking detached audience an additional layer of challenge presents itself to the impresario of international literature to highlight or create yet some other value for the



texts. This is not because the texts lack an intrinsic value in themselves, but that the conditions of production and distribution invest them with their fair share of “the crisis of evaluation” in literary and cultural studies. As Michael Berube has noted on the subject of the crisis of evaluation, “And because we are uncertain [...] about what counts as good literary, critical, and theoretical work, it sometimes appears that the only criteria of evaluation we have are mercantile criteria: what’s hot, what’s selling, what’s the newest latest” (97). Nowhere is the evaluation of literary texts based on “currency” and “market value” than in the editorial theory and practice of (International) Publishers. The relationship between market value and literary value is a complex one that matters to different actors, but has a very lasting effect on the destiny of a text, and indeed, the definition of a whole culture and its literary enterprise. Berube’s description is correct about the workings of the culture and knowledge industries, in their totality, and even with regards to the promotion of literary texts: this is reflected in the publisher’s letter to Ngugi on the publication of his novel *Weep Not Child* (1964): “It always happens with a novel that sales come within the first few months of publication, though with a novel like yours one expects a small but steady hard-cover sale to libraries, etc., for some time. We want the person who cannot afford the hard-cover, however, to be able to buy the paperback whilst the novel is still ‘news’” (27 April 1964).

The mode of evaluation of texts presented to the publishers of the African Writers Series reflects the mercantile criteria. The moment of decision is always based on one common denominator of how texts would play or perform in the market. One example that also allows us to account for the eclipse of the Series is the production of T.M.

Aluko's *Wrong Ones in the Dock*. James Currey writes what is perhaps the most direct assessment of the publishing situation:

Unfortunately, in the deepening depression we have had to look at our publishing budgets for 1981 and decided to postpone quite a lot of work, including I am afraid, *Wrong Ones in the Dock*.

We have had to consider every book in terms of how quickly we can expect to get our money back. We have had Joe Osadolor over from Ibadan and he feels that they can only commit themselves to an initial order of 1.000 copies. While this is realistic, we do depend on Nigeria in particular to sell your books [...] But an order for 1.000 does not give us a sufficient contribution to build a big enough print run to be able to keep the book at a price the market can afford. As it is of substantial length, it is estimated that the paperback price would be close to £3 [...] The worrying situation leads us to be cautious. It is particularly frustrating for you in that after some years of writing silence, you have produced a new novel when the market has turned against us. Naturally, if you can find other publishers who take a more optimistic view, either in Nigeria or Britain, then you should tell us. (James Currey 1<sup>st</sup> Dec 1980)

In Currey's response, we get the view of the language of publishing, how the "market" represents the absolute measure of value, the aggregate of all socio-cultural judgments. Indeed, in question is the literary and cultural value of *Wrong Ones*, and it is expected that the author would understand this point if communicated in the pragmatic terms of the market prospects for the text, rather than the evaluative. The fact that the novel was eventually published indicates that the market was not as dead set against *Wrong Ones* as Currey suggested. Aluko's response to Currey's tactical rejection of the novel has everything to do with the decision to publish the text after all, as much as the reader's reports may have had their impact. The publisher clearly has a more important role than "tinkering." This is his role as an entrepreneur. His genius, like that of a sailor, must manifest in his aptitude for predicting the currents and the tides of the market place and of the culture that could either propel or turn against a particular publication. This is the

moment of decision that the publisher is always to encounter. It is the moment that determines the career of a publisher.

Indeed, a most defining feature of international literature is its relationship to international trade; predicated upon a far less stable system of market dynamics because the imperative of investments in foreign literatures might not be as crucial or enduring. Lawrence Hill of the Three Continents Press made the observation in 1979 that points to the early signs of the turning of tide against the Series: "I still don't understand why sales of African authors should decrease as successive books are published. Shouldn't it work the other way around?" (Lawrence Hill 1979 Bebey's file). Also in 1981, we begin to see correspondences explaining to writers like the one to Aluko why their manuscripts may be on hold:

By the standards of British publishing the sales of *The Land's Lord* have been good. It is now hard to sell a first novel at all. However, I'm afraid that sales of *The Land's Lord* have so far been, by the standards of the African Writers Series, a little modest. It is frankly slow work getting attention for new writers in Africa. There is a tendency to go back to the earlier writers partly because people are lazy and there is now a substantial amount of critical material about the established writers. (Currey to Echewa)

The process of canon formation is the process of closure which Currey by sheer observation of the culture instinctively recognized. This process of canon formation occurs simultaneously with the collapse of the Nigerian foreign exchange market in 1982 and the African debt crisis--all of which are themselves linked to the crisis of state systems on the continent. The story of the Series to a great extent mirrors the biography of the continent itself: from the moment of independence in the 1960s to the period the IMF and World Bank came actively on stage in the 1980s.

In another letter by the publisher of the Series to Echewa, Currey writes: "In the present world depression we are being encouraged to delay publication on books. I wrote to your agent before the pressure was really on about delaying the book but I did hope against hope that we would be able to fit it in during 1981" (Currey to Echewa: 1981). By the time of the publication of *The Crippled Dancer* in 1985, James Currey, sensing that the time of the great period of African literature was over, had retired, leaving Vicky Unwin to manage the Series. In three different letters to the publisher, the feeling of frustration on the part of Echewa, which is representative of the other writers, becomes palpable, but so is the increasing sad awareness of the inextricable connection between literature and the marketplace:

In the event that you haven't already scheduled publication, let me note once again that the situation in Nigeria is likely to continue as is for some time. Consequently we must find a way to get around it rather than just sit it out passively. Are you publishing any books at all now for the Nigerian market? If so, how are you handling them? (*The Crippled Dancer* file 1985)

Please let me know what is going on and what your time table is for the book's publication. While realizing that Nigeria represents a sizeable portion of the book's potential market, I find it difficult to accept the proposition that the book's publication should [be] tied to economic conditions in Nigeria. Those conditions may not improve significantly for the rest of the decade—who knows? (*The Crippled Dancer* file 1985)

I would like to know when exactly they plan to publish the book. If its publication is tied to an index of economic conditions in Nigeria, the book may not be published till end of this decade. (*The Crippled Dancer* file 1985)

Although it was not until 2003 that the Series was discontinued after a long moratorium, it was around this time, in 1985, that a bad swing in the economic condition of Africa dealt a permanent blow to the life of the Series. Unwin was no longer looking for sales for new titles in Africa, but in the trade market in the West: "I think it will help us a great

deal to have the US rights as the USA is one of the key markets these days. The Nigerian market is only important to us in general backlist terms as it is the initial print runs that we are worried about. The main market for the first printing of any AWS now lies in the west” (Vicky Unwin to Echewa 1985:54). What remains a puzzle for most observers of the development of the Series is why despite the rise of the Black Studies programs and the establishment of African Studies Centers in the United States, a viable market could not be found to sustain it. The promise of the 1970s that “The African Writers Series is being raided by academics not just in the literature departments but also in all the other social science faculties: history, anthropology, sociology, politics, religious studies” (Currey to Nurudin Farah *Sardines* 1982), had shown itself without foundations. A whole study of the travails of Africana publishing in the US and the reasons for the dissipation of the great enthusiasm expressed in Hans Zell’s letter in 1969 has become overdue and even urgent:

It really is rather amazing how several major U.S. publishers –not previously having published any Africana material at all or very little –are now suddenly trying to join the “gravy train”. As far as I can gather, no less than 6 major U.S. publishers are about to announce their own African Studies or African Literature series. In any event, publishers like Heinemann and Deutsch are now reaping their well deserved benefits for their pioneering efforts in the African writing field. (Hans Zell 1969.)

The insurmountable nature of the dependence of international literature on international trade underscores the place of the Publishing Industrial Complex. This industry operates as an Althusserian apparatus, or in the words of Adorno and Horkheimer as a “Culture Industry.” The Western publishing technology and network, which enabled African literature in the first place, pose problems for it. Horkheimer and

Adorno, like Althusser and Edward Said, have argued that the “technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself” (121). The technology of domination, as Glissant has posited, “provides, on its own, models of resistance to the stranglehold it has imposed, thus short-circuiting resistance” (15). The question for the African writer then was how to “move the center,” how to produce “national” literatures in a global world and retain their “ontological sovereignty” in the midst of the multiplicity of imperatives and complex apparatuses that mediate, transform, subvert, invert, and pre-situate the reception of those texts. The whole notion of “moving the center” of cultural production has been an obsession of Ngugi. But this obsession belies a crisis, which has been with him throughout his writing career:

AM: Do you have plans for any other books?

JN: No plans at present... You see, *I have reached a point of crisis*—I don’t know whether it is worth any longer writing in the English language.

MG: Would this not be playing up to the narrow nationalism of which you said earlier you do not approve – would you not be limiting your audience?

JN: It is very difficult to say. I am very suspicious about writing about universal values. If there are universal values, they are always contained in the framework of social realities. And one important social reality in Africa is that 90 per cent of the people cannot read or speak English... the problem is this--*I know whom I write about, but whom do I write for?*

(My emphasis. Interview by Alan Marcuson, Mike Gonzalez, Sue Drake, Dave Williams “Union News” Friday November 18th 1966).

The African writer like Ngugi is no longer concerned about writing for that generic generous and free spirit for whom Sartre says a writer writes. His literature is essentially an international literature. International literature is writing in an international language and to an international audience, that is, to no one in particular. International literature is produced in a place outside the author’s home country. International literature is distributed through and depends upon the networks of international trade. International

literature engenders a crisis of writing. This crisis is not the Du Bois paralytic crisis of double consciousness, but crisis that is the very source and *raison d'être* of creativity.

Ngugi's expression of a crisis of consciousness, which has been thoroughly examined by Omafume Onoge in his piece "Crisis of Consciousness in African Literature", is characteristic not only of modern African literature but also of contemporary literature and thought. Although, the link between poststructuralism and postcolonialism has been examined by Simon Gikandi, Anthony Appiah and in African Cinema by Ken Harrow among others, there has yet to be any compelling study of the correlation between the politics of decolonization and the critical practice of deconstruction. Quite ironically, deconstruction has often been viewed instead as oppositional to the politics of decolonization, which is seen as been premised upon the untenable claim to autonomous subjectivity. Hence, Africanist suspicion toward deconstruction and poststructuralist skepticism or even contempt toward postcolonialism. However, the arguments for addressing this misunderstanding are already implicit in the works of Homi Bhabha and, especially, Gayatri Spivak.

In *Death of a Discipline*, Spivak addresses an important question that is relevant to understanding the ways in which the crisis of writing and thinking from a standpoint of the former colonies fit into and effects a pluralization that demands inclusivity, which necessarily decenters and "overwrites" (72) dominant and exceptionalist ideas of the globe: "Let us repeat Derrida's question: Can democracy function without a logofratrocentric notion of collectivity?" (47, 32). An iteration of this question is repeated throughout the book: "Who are we?" "How many are we?" "Who are they?" The presentation of this question as undecidable constitutes an apology for humanistic

disciplines in the face of an increasing support for the social sciences at the expense of humanities, and is laced with uncharacteristic subtlety, by another important concern about the place and relevance of “postcolonial literature.” Literature supplements the Social Sciences just as Area Studies ought to supplement Comparative Literature. On the one hand, “Let literature teach us that there are no certainties, that the process is open, and that it may be altogether salutary that it is so” (26). On the other hand, “one hopes [...] we [...] are opening up toward [that] [...] mysterious thicket of the languages, dialect, and idioms [...] rather than reining them in” (39).

Part of Spivak’s concern is the fear of “U.S.-style world literature becoming the staple of Comparative Literature in the global South” (39). Hegemonic Comparative Literature as she calls it, arises out of “inter-European hospitality” (8) It highlights the distinction and hierarchy between “Areas” and “Nations”, the exceptionalism of European nations and the perpetual appropriation of emergent peripheral cultural forms. Much as Spivak’s arguments challenge the arrogance implicit in categories such as world literature, her sense of the specificity and place of postcolonial literature appear at best confused. Although, at the beginning of the book she states “For now I want to repeat my concern for the literary specificity of the autochthone, which, lost in the shuffle between Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature, could not appear at all in *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*” (15), her analysis of selected postcolonial writers undermines that concern. If the ultimate aim of the New Comparative Literature or Planetary Literature is to touch Africa, Asia etc. in its move beyond European borders, and if such comparativity would produce the analysis that “A careful reading of literature coming out of ‘the third world,’ with attention to language and idiom and respect for their



grafting, will show that the inevitable themes of tradition and modernity, collectivity and individualism may be in play in many different ways” (66) then, it has achieved very little indeed. For Spivak, what was wrong about her “sense of the inclusiveness of Comparative Literature” was that it was untimely! (35)

It is clear that while Ngugi shares in the general crisis of consciousness that the expansion of the field of African literature caused in collision when community and collectivities could no longer be determined *a priori*, he would altogether reject the gesture of inclusion in comparative or world literature. However, Spivak’s reversal of Du Bois’s concept of two souls in one body into an Aristotelian formulation of one soul in two bodies most succinctly captures the new manifestation of the crisis that Ngugi expressed. The crisis is no longer one of the individual but one of the collective. It is thus instructive that Spivak ends by invoking the question of the diaspora: “It is such collectives that must be opened up with the question ‘how many are we?’ when cultural origin is detranscendentalized into fiction—the toughest task in the diaspora” (102).

Brent Hayes Edwards’s book *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* tracks how the metropolis uniquely enabled a certain kind of mobility, convergence and collaboration of black peoples across different regions of the world that gave rise to black radicalism. The history he traces is similar to the one Paul Gilroy has elaborated upon in *The Black Atlantic*. All of which stakes out the indissociable nature of any theory of African literature from the broader diasporic context. The institutional apparatuses that have enabled black thought and creativity as we have seen in the case of the African writers Series have never really been State oriented, thus making the reliance on international or transnational alliances and

structures almost unavoidable. According to Edwards, “it is precisely the discourse of the Communist International that opens the possibility of a Black International” (264). A comparable argument has been made in this dissertation about the origins of the Series in the Commonwealth. It is not just at the discursive level that the eclectic nature of black radicalism in early 1900s was manifest, “it should be underlined that the ‘means towards’ a Black International is primarily a trio of periodical publications: the *Negro Worker*, *La Race negre*, and *Le Cri des Negres*” (265). An important question would be to see how the African Writers Series extends the tradition of black radicalism and collaboration. However, it is the nature of the support and dissemination networks of these publications, the production relations and their political economies, and the crisis they generate which must be accounted for in any material theory of African writing and literature.

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