

INDIGENOUS TRADITION AND THE COLONIAL LEGACY:
A STUDY IN THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF
ANGLOPHONE AFRICAN LITERARY CRITICISM

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation attempts to examine the social meanings of anglophone African literary criticism as an ideological discourse. It begins by engaging with Marxist critical traditions, with particular reference to two areas of debate: the question of the epistemological relationship between literature and criticism, and the question of criticism's being a discourse which, in its articulation with a given social context, relies on the resources of a particular critical heritage.

The basis of the second and central chapter is the interrelationship between the context and heritage of anglophone African criticism. The dominant themes of this discourse are seen as being shaped by ideological affiliations with the modern nation-state, and by the legacy of the empirical and organic traditions of metropolitan criticism. It is argued that in the situation of neo-colonial social stratification, anglophone African criticism faces a crisis of legitimacy.

In the third to fifth chapters I attempt to illustrate and refine the central argument in relation to a selection of critical texts. The chapter on two works by Eldred Jones examines his reliance on orthodox British critical assumptions and its consequences in his treatment of the writing of Wole Soyinka. The chapter on West African traditions examines a range of critical operations which are used in the construction of organic traditions based on oral or traditional cultures. These operations rely on mythopoesis, formalism and the sociology of literature. The final chapter on East African political readings investigates the internal, discursive tensions in the work of two critics who, in attempting to politicize their reading of literature, have not been able to achieve a conceptual break from the legacies of idealism.

We have seen . . . that nationalism, that magnificent song that made the people rise against their oppressors stops short, falters and dies away on the day that independence is proclaimed If you really wish your country to avoid regression, or at best halts and uncertainties, a rapid step must be taken from national consciousness to political and social consciousness.

Franz Fanon

The Wretched of the Earth

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FOREWORD

I have not compiled an Introduction to this dissertation, for reasons which I hope will become clear from my first and second chapters. One of the implicit guiding principles of the enquiry is that the opening up of any field for empirical investigation in literary analysis is first and foremost an act of theory. To put this in general terms, the ways in which cultural phenomena become accessible are determined largely by the kinds of questions that are put to them.

My first chapter is an attempt to prepare the theoretical framework for the remainder of the study. It engages with Marxist critical traditions, with particular reference to two areas of debate: firstly, the question of the epistemological relationship between literary texts and literary criticism; and secondly, the question of criticism's being an ideological discourse which, in its articulation with a given social context, relies on the resources of a particular critical heritage. My second and central chapter explores the inter-relationship between the social context and the critical heritage of anglophone African literary criticism. This criticism is primarily a nationalist discourse whose dominant themes are shaped by affiliations with the modern nation-state, and by the legacy of the empirical and organic traditions inherited from metropolitan criticism. It is argued that in the context of neo-colonial social stratification, anglophone African criticism faces a crisis of ideological legitimacy.

At this point it is necessary to touch on matters not raised in the study. Firstly, the selection of critical texts for analysis in the third to fifth chapters. There are fewer works examined than I had at first intended. The reduction is due in part to my wishing to keep the dissertation to manageable proportions, but the final choice of texts was not based purely on expedience. My intention was to select texts which were either significantly illustrative of the arguments of the second chapter, or which enabled me to extend and refine those arguments in relation to particular critical projects. As criteria for selection I finally decided on influence (hence the chapter on two works by Eldred Jones) and range of applicability (hence the two contrasting chapters on examples of West and East African criticism). I also decided to restrict the enquiry to full-length studies consisting of extended criticism of a range of literature, as this enabled a more detailed examination of critical assumptions and procedures than would have been the case were I to have examined numerous essays in journals, anthologies and proceedings of conferences. From my situation in South Africa, furthermore, it would have been impossible to establish an adequate sense of the context of scholarship of a great number of shorter, occasional and more ephemeral critical articles. I should like, of course, to see the arguments presented here being taken up, applied and tested in relation to a greater volume of criticism than I have been able to cover.

There may be some doubt as to the wisdom of my leaving out of account the critical writings of Achebe and Ngugi. While I hope

that I have registered sufficiently how influential their critical publications are, I decided both that these writings consisted primarily of occasional articles and addresses rather than extended commentary on literary texts, and that these statements would be more adequately dealt with in terms of intellectual biography, which is not the kind of study I have attempted here. I have also left out of account two critics of considerable stature whose works deserve close study, namely Sunday Anozie and Abiola Irele. I have done so, in fact, because their links with francophone traditions exempt them in important ways from some of the problems of anglophone criticism with which I have been concerned, especially the problem of anti-theoreticism. In this regard it is disappointing that the appearance of Gates, H.L. (ed.) Black Literature and Literary Theory (New York and London: Methuen, 1984) has not substantially affected the situation of theory in anglophone African criticism, for apart from an essay by Soyinka, and essays by Anozie and Anthony Appiah in the structuralist tradition, the emphasis of the volume is on Afro-American literature. One still looks forward to a strong theoretical intervention into anglophone African criticism.

Finally, a word on the genesis of this enquiry. It is the consequence, as I am now able to see it, of my encounter as a post-graduate student with two major areas of growth in South African literary studies. The first is critical theory, specifically where this has enabled us to define our interests in terms of cultural production and ideology. The second is indigenous (in this case, African) literature. The effect of my encountering these

two developments simultaneously was to highlight the refusal to engage fully with history typical of so much of the anglophone criticism of African literature. Suspecting that this phenomenon was not purely innocent, I began to enquire into the forms of its conditioning, and to examine the social meanings of the criticism as an ideological discourse.

* * *

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1. THEORY AND THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF AFRICAN CRITICISM

I

The literary politics of the present era, and the loose, decentred practice which is our field of study, are such that there are few empirical givens which this enquiry may take for granted. Not only has contemporary literary theory problematised the most entrenched of assumptions, but also, in the field of African criticism, we find a discipline without an institutional or professional centre, whose history over the last two decades has never been extensively or systematically written.¹

An account of the development of African criticism ought to be quite possible, given the growing number of books and essays about African literature published since the 1950's. While it is not the intention of this study to attempt such a comprehensive task, the growth of the field deserves to be illustrated, although in order to do this limits will have to be imposed which will appear arbitrary at this stage. In his introductory note to Black African Literature in English: A Guide to Information Sources Bernth Lindfors writes, 'When Barbara Abrash published her useful bibliography Black African Literature in English Since 1952: Works and Criticism in 1967, she could list only 250 critical books and essays; this book lists more than 3,300.'² Lindfors's bibliography (published in 1979, and the most comprehensive reference work available thus far) represents in itself a significant moment in

the development of the discipline.

On closer inspection, however, Lindfors's volume presents a disturbing picture of the field. Over 500 periodicals are listed; of these, only 38% were published in Africa. The remainder were published in North America (33%), the United Kingdom (12%), Western Europe (10%), and the rest as far afield as the Caribbean, Asia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Australia and New Zealand. Over half the number of conferences listed took place outside Africa, with the USA being the most hospitable of the host countries. This cartography³ is distressing, not only because it makes research very difficult, but more significantly because it undermines the notion, which is implicit in a collective bibliography, of a unified discipline. From his experience as editor and bibliographer Lindfors would no doubt be painfully aware of the diffusion of the field, but the following remarks suggest that he has not taken the problem as seriously as he may have done: before the field could acquire widespread recognition as 'an established academic discipline', 'its critics and scholars will have to demonstrate greater responsibility in research and fuller awareness of the opinions of others. Too many books and essays are still being written on this literature as if nothing had been published on it before.'⁴ The problem lies, however, not as much in the irresponsibility of the critics and scholars, as in the pattern of decentralised scholarship in which they work. Apart from the fact that the decentralisation explains 'irresponsibility' simply as a function of the various degrees of academic and publishing power at work in the field (for some scholars Lindfors's remark

would appear to be made ex cathedra), the further fact that there is so much repetitive commentary on African literature is to a large extent an inevitable, even necessary feature of this de-centred situation.

The problem as I see it is as follows: the bibliographic and introductory material on African literature and criticism tends to associate under a single heading a variety of literary practices, presenting them as a reasonably unified discipline which engages the collective efforts of an international 'community' of scholars. However, as Lindfors's remark implies, and the extraordinary amount of regionalisation evident in his bibliography shows, there is a lack of common ground, despite the nominal unity designated by the terms 'African literature and criticism'. If a study of African criticism is to have any coherence or direction, then its first task is to distinguish between the different practices, or kinds of practice, which are at work in African literature. Without these prior distinctions being made, it would be impossible to advance any general observations, because one could not assume that an observation was binding on each of these practices, or on the whole field.

There is, however, a theoretical and conceptual dimension to this problem too. I shall explore this dimension because it is important for the particular approach which this study will adopt. I suggested in my opening paragraph that the question of the status of theory (or the ever-present fact in contemporary literary studies of theoretical self-consciousness), and the question of African

criticism being a discipline without a centre, are related problems, presenting themselves simultaneously. One good reason for this is precisely the consequence of the theoretical self-consciousness of current literary studies: theory has made us aware of how problematic it is even to delineate one's field; in the act of 'constituting the object' one makes choices that carry various kinds of implication, phenomenological and ideological. Another reason, however, which is more important here, is that theory enables us to see the conceptually faulty basis on which so much of the bibliography and commentary in African criticism construct the notion (though usually it is apparent as a tacit but pervasive assumption) of a unified discipline. The logic that is used is positivistic, empirical or immanent, as if the term 'African literature' had an immediate referential value. The relation between Africa's literatures and the practice of criticism is seen as fundamentally unproblematic. (The perhaps prior question, of the epistemological relation between literature and 'life', is not at issue at the moment.) This I argue is far from the truth, on two counts: firstly, the assumptions of an empirical approach in any literary discipline have been shown to be severely questionable, most notably by the post-Saussurian perspectives,⁵ and secondly, the regional variety and internationalism of African criticism have produced a number of different 'criticisms', with characteristically different themes and emphases. This will shortly be illustrated.

But if we are able to make any generalised and preliminary observation of the collective state of African criticism, then it would be, I suggest (although this would apply more to anglophone than

to francophone criticism) exactly that the discipline has been remarkably unreceptive to non-empirical, non-immanent debates. Theory has been slow to arrive in (anglophone) African criticism, if it can be said to have arrived at all.⁶ Since the effects of theoretical self-consciousness are often felt to be political, it is remarkable that African criticism, whose debates have tended to foreground a certain 'politics', should for so long have resisted theory. (Indeed, the commonsense assumption that all critics of African literature are, despite their differences, engaged in the same practice, is symptomatic of this condition.) African criticism has most typically been preoccupied with a different agenda altogether, a point which Izevbaye makes as follows:

... the call for African critical 'concepts', 'standards' or 'criteria' is not a rejection of established modes of literary study like structuralism, neo-Aristotelianism and the like, but a rejection of certain entrenched modes of thinking which perpetuate the stock attitude to Africa.⁷

This observation is cogent, although the phrase 'established modes of literary study' is indicative of the closed-door to theory to which I refer. There is a certain irony in the fact that when, in the 1960's and early 1970's African critics were conducting an assault on the presumed 'universalist' and 'art-for-art's-sake' prejudices of the West, even though the assault was motivated by disparaging and patronising commentary by some Western critics, the literary culture of the West itself was experiencing a deep crisis from within, a crisis whose impetus has been sustained largely through theory.

It will be necessary in the next chapter to find an explanation for the generally positivistic character of much African criticism. In the remainder of this chapter, however, I wish to make my points of departure as clear as possible without anticipating too severely the argument which follows. I shall look briefly at the relation between literature and criticism from a particular perspective; with the help of conceptual tools made available by this exercise I shall offer grounds for distinguishing between the different practices of African criticism, isolating the specific criticism which is the object of this enquiry. I shall then explore some basic terms by which we can begin to understand the relation between this particular criticism and its socio-historical context.

II

In Formalism and Marxism Tony Bennett draws on the post-Saussurian tradition in linguistics to argue that literary criticism is a 'signifying' discourse. As is the case with language in general, as seen by this tradition, where the relation between a linguistic sign and its referent is either an arbitrary one, or a matter of convention, so, Bennett argues, in criticism the meanings of a literary text, the traditions to which it is made to belong, the forms and genres which have helped to shape it, its qualities of 'literariness', are constructed in the signifying operations of the critical discourse. This does not mean that literature has no existence prior to the operations which criticism works upon it. Bennett makes the point as follows:

When we speak of 'literature' in this way, we are

not speaking of some objective and fixed body of written texts to which the word 'literature' is applied as a descriptive label. We are rather speaking of a concept — the concept of a circumscribed set of texts felt to be of special value — which exists and has meaning solely within the discourses of literary criticism. This is not to say that the actual texts to which this concept is applied — the commonly received 'great tradition', say — exist only within such discourses. What is in dispute is not the material existence of such texts but the contention that, in any part of their objective and material presence, they declare themselves to be 'literature'. Written texts do not organize themselves into the 'literary' and the 'non-literary'. They are so organized only by the operations of criticism upon them. Far from reflecting a somehow natural or spontaneous system of relationships between written texts, literary criticism organizes those texts into a system of relationships which is the product of its own discourse and of the distinctions between the 'literary' and the 'non-literary' which it operates.⁸

Bennett is denying neither that literature exists prior to criticism, nor even that there exists a certain reciprocity between literature and criticism. Rather, his point is that the operative terms on which such reciprocity works derive from the ways in which criticism 'sees' the literary object. It thus becomes possible for Bennett to regard criticism as a discourse which performs more or less conscious cultural acts. Criticism builds systems of meaning — in and around the literature which serves it — thereby making claims on one's perceptions and values. I shall illustrate as economically as possible the background to and

implications of Bennett's position.

Although Bennett is not a theoretician in his own right, he has put together a critical argument which makes an effective and enriching intervention into British literary Marxism. He does so mainly by engaging with two different critical traditions. The one is the 'historical poetics' of the later Russian formalists, in particular, Medvedev and Bakhtin, and the other is Althusserianism, as represented in England by (to exclude for the moment translations from the work of Pierre Macherey) Terry Eagleton. Bennett argues that under an Althusserian influence British Marxism became preoccupied with inhibiting debates about epistemology and aesthetics, and in so doing removed the political implications of criticism from centre-stage. Questions about the relationships between aesthetic form and ideology, or between ideology and Marxist theory or the 'science' of historical materialism (two of the main concerns of Eagleton's Criticism and Ideology) are misplaced. Aesthetic and epistemological categories, Bennett argues, do not reflect self-evident or a priori dimensions of art or consciousness; on the contrary, they are constructs in the discourse of bourgeois traditions and ought not to be taken on trust. If criticism is regarded as a signifying discourse, then literary Marxism ought to be able, by foregrounding politics, to establish the debate with its opponents on its own terms. (I believe that there is more in Althusserianism than this does justice to, but I shall hold the issue in abeyance for the moment.) The foregrounding of politics has, broadly, two main aspects, and it is in this connection that Bennett introduces the later formalists.⁹ Bakhtin's poetics

involves a re-working of the classical formalists' understanding of literariness, so that the aesthetic properties of literature, such as its rhetorical forms and genres, are treated as historically bound to particular social contexts, i.e. literary forms come into existence under determinate conditions of social relationship and exchange. (With respect to Rabelais, for example, Bakhtin argues that medieval folk humour reverses the priorities of official Christian ideology, subjecting them to 'carnivalization' and 'dis-crowning'.¹⁰) A political criticism then, will undertake to historicize literary forms. But a further and more crucial undertaking of such criticism will be to enquire into the consumption of literary texts, the ways in which they have successively been appropriated into the traditions of (usually the dominant) literary cultures, as Bakhtin does in a survey of Rabelais criticism which notes a progressive de-politicization in the successive readings of Gargantua and Pantagruel.¹¹ It is this latter point with which we are immediately concerned, the emphasis that Bennett places on the historically variable conditions of reception of literary texts. It is an emphasis which begins with the recognition of criticism being a signifying discourse.

Let us apply Bennett's model to the criticism of Black African Literature in English. From Lindfors's bibliography we derive a picture of a discipline lacking a centre: most of the work in the field is done outside Africa, with the USA, the United Kingdom and Western Europe featuring prominently, although Africa's contribution is greater than any other single region's. (A result of this situation, I argue, is that the various critical undertakings

of the different regions cannot really be said to be competing with one another for recognition or supremacy over the whole field. Such activity is only possible where academic exchange is at least to some extent centralised, where some form of hegemony is available.) What we have in African criticism is a number of different discourses whose particular interests and themes are determined largely by the institutional and ideological characteristics of the various regions involved in the whole field. Within these discourses both 'African' and 'literature' have variable meanings.

A telling illustration of the necessarily limited, partial quality of the prevailing concepts in some of the discourses is to be found in the characteristic selections that are made from the available literature. It is commonly recognised (though the recognition does not alter the fact) that the amount of attention given to written literature in the colonial languages, as against oral literatures in the vernaculars, is disproportionately high. (There are other anomalies associated with the bias towards the colonial languages: research on oral vernacular literatures is published predominantly in the colonial languages, and there seems to be no literary criticism written in the vernaculars at all.)

But the distinctions between the discourses of African criticism emerge most clearly when one considers their typical ideological themes. To use ready examples: Commonwealth Literature concerns itself generally with the literary consequences of imperial history, the spread of English, inter-cultural contact under colonialism, the growth of new national literatures.¹² Comparative and World

Literatures (those varieties that are engaged with African literature) are concerned with comparable literary histories, and connections are made across linguistic and national boundaries. In Afro-American or Black Studies the dominant categories have to do with racial identity. Caribbean commentary establishes links with the black diaspora, or alternatively with literature of the Third World. African literature serves each of these discourses.

It may be possible to invoke Stanley Fish's concept of 'interpretive communities' in order to explain the appropriation of African literature by different critical practices. Like Bennett, Fish rejects a naively empirical view of the relation between literature and criticism, or between a text and its reader. What prevents criticism from collapsing into random interpretive anarchy or relativism, in Fish's view, is the consolidation of different acts of reading by collective readerships with shared assumptions. While for Fish the interpretive community consists of informed literary critics who share certain reading strategies, what we require is to extend this concept to the description of different interpretive communities whose consolidation depends on a variety of local ideological and societal factors. Frank Lentricchia makes the point as follows:

Fish's reader is purely literary: his readership in a community of literary critics somehow cancels out the forces that shape his political, social, or ethnic status. But any theory that is based on the idea that the reader is a constituted and constituting entity yet refuses to assess the consequences of our memberships in nonliterary communities is by definition

drastically incomplete. A literary community walled off from larger enclosures of social structure and historical process is a repetition of aestheticist isolationism. At the very least Fish might have pointed out that the consolidated interpretive community he is talking about is situated on the northeastern seaboard of the United States, and that most of its members are 'at home' in the English departments of Yale and Johns Hopkins.¹³

It is important to note both that interpretive communities are structurally differentiated, and that they are by definition larger than the individuals who belong to them. This means that while the individual critic may achieve a certain mobility within and between interpretive communities, he is constrained, in the production of criticism, to speak the language of a particular community. In other words, and to bring this back to the African scene, from the point of view of the individual critic it is quite possible to move between Ibadan and London, or Nairobi and Texas, sensing that one belongs to the loose international 'community' of Africanists. And in a trivial sense, one does. But any act of criticism requires a particular discursive context, one with a coherence of ideological leanings, a pattern of expectations belonging to a putative readership. No doubt too, the interpretive communities of African criticism overlap, and even develop through their interrelationship. (International conferences, systems of academic exchange, joint research and publication - as is reflected in Research in African Literatures¹⁴ - all serve to promote this collaboration.) But the borrowings between discourses, in order to be coherent, will have to be to some extent selective, or one

may say overdetermined, by the requirements of fairly discrete discursive contexts.

When in the 1960's 'African' and 'Western' critics sustained a lengthy and at times acrimonious debate over who had the right credentials to engage in African criticism, the problem can be said to have been that critics from different interpretive communities were laying claim to one another's territory. David Rand Bishop is right when he argues that the query 'By what standards should African literature be judged?' is flawed. Instead he proposes that there are three questions to ask: '(1) By what standards do Africans judge African literature? (2) By what standards do Westerners judge African literature? and (3) How do these sets of standards agree and how do they differ?'¹⁵ While I would argue that the terms 'Africans' and 'Westerners' do not accurately describe the interpretive communities which were involved in this debate, the tendency of Bishop's argument is correct.

The particular histories of each of the criticisms of African literature would comprise an interesting sphere of speculation. What are the institutional and ideological factors, for example, which give Commonwealth Literature its proper degree of autonomy from World Literature, or Afro-American Literature? What immediately concerns us here, however, is the situation of that African criticism whose concerns are produced in Africa itself. This criticism is distinguished from those 'international' discourses that have been mentioned, by its concern with the ideological self-definition of the literary culture in Africa. In other words, we are concerned

here with a discourse which, in its engagement with African literature, seeks to build systems of meaning which are ideologically rooted in indigenous circumstances.

We must recognize at the outset that for practical reasons we shall be concentrating on only a portion of this specific African criticism, i.e. that which is written in English. Where it is necessary to refer to French African criticism we shall do so, but our concern will be mainly with anglophone criticism. Specifically, this criticism is produced in concentrations of academic and literary culture in anglophone, sub-saharan Africa, mainly in universities in Nigeria and Kenya. We should also recognize that whereas anglophone African criticism may define itself loosely in pan-African terms, and define the literature it engages with in such terms as well, its precise sphere of activity is limited, characteristically, to literature (written and mainly in English) which also originates in anglophone, sub-saharan Africa (usually West and East Africa, occasionally Southern Africa). Exceptions to this pattern will of course arise. It is important simply to note at this stage that we are not dealing with literary phenomena on a continental scale. For the moment we shall use the terms by which the criticism defines itself, acknowledging their limitations. Later, the social context of the criticism and the ideological implications of its gestures towards pan-Africanism will be explored in greater detail.

III

The theoretical departures which have been taken thus far have enabled us to envisage a particular relation between criticism as a discourse and the literature which serves it. We have also been able to see African criticism as a configuration of such discourses, and, on the basis of this model, we have isolated the anglophone African criticism of Africa itself as the object of enquiry. What is still required from a theoretical point of view, is a point of departure which opens for investigation the nature of the relations between a literary criticism, ideology, and their particular socio-historical context. I have described anglophone African criticism as being distinguished from the 'international' criticisms of African literature, through its being 'rooted' in indigenous circumstances. What can this mean?

Here we must turn again to the debate between Bennett and the Althusserians. Terry Eagleton's Criticism and Ideology advances an argument which is similar in part to what has been established thus far:

Criticism is not an innocent discipline, and never has been. It is a branch of Marxist criticism to enquire into the history of criticism itself: to pose the question of under what conditions, and for what ends, a literary criticism comes about. For criticism has a history, which is more than a random collocation of critical acts. If literature is its object, it is not its sole point of genesis; criticism does not arise as a spontaneous riposte to the existential fact of the text, organically coupled with the object it illuminates. It has its own relatively autonomous life,

its own laws and structures: it forms an internally complex system articulated with the literary system rather than merely reflexive of it. It emerges into existence, and passes out of it again, on the basis of certain determinate conditions.¹⁶

✓ / Eagleton, however, is working within a tradition which, as was noted earlier, became embroiled in an inhibiting debate over the relations between aesthetic experience and ideology, and ideology and theory, a debate which Bennett set out to displace by arguing for the primacy of a political critical practice as opposed to epistemological theory. It can be argued, however, that Bennett and Eagleton are thinking quite different aspects of the social totality. Bennett's argument leads to the view that the 'politics of literature . . . are inseparable from the politics of criticism.' And he continues:

Marxist criticism has hitherto proceeded on the assumption that every literary text has its politics inscribed within it and that the role of Marxist criticism is to enunciate this politics, to give it voice by making it explicit. This political essentialism must be broken with. The text does not have a politics which is separable from the determinations which work upon it or the position it occupies within the disposition of the field of cultural relations. The task which faces Marxist criticism is not that of reflecting or of bringing to light the politics which is already there, as a latent presence within the text which has but to be made manifest. It is that of actively politicizing the text, of making its politics for it, by producing a new position for it within the field of cultural relations and, thereby, new forms of use and effectivity within the broader social process.¹⁷

Insofar as Bennett is proposing that we regard criticism as a political act, a reworking or way of appropriating literary texts, thus shifting some of our attention away from the historical conditions of a text's production to those of its consumption, he has redefined certain issues which were crippling on the Althusserian agenda. But if we set Bennett's argument alongside Eagleton's, we see that Eagleton's is a more ambitious and comprehensive project, whose scope Bennett appears not to have fully acknowledged. In response to Bennett's argument we may ask, if the politics of literature are 'inseparable' from (i.e. largely determined by) the politics of criticism, then what determines the politics of criticism? Bennett speaks of 'the disposition of the field of cultural relations', but what can this felicitous term mean, other than that the politics of the field of cultural relations are inseparable from those of the whole social formation? Bennett does not provide us with the concepts whereby we are able to connect 'discourses' with 'ideology', or still less, with the political and economic relations between social groups, in fact with the broader social process to which he gestures. Bennett's argument is therefore to a certain extent trapped within its informing principles. Those principles are language-based, and the argument remains largely language-bound. Which is not to say that the whole argument is to be discarded: a theory of criticism ought to have a theory of language, and one which is strategically useful to the practice in which it is developed. But we may conclude that Bennett's argument is insufficient. That is, we need to see the interdependency between the concept of discourse, and that of social practice, and in order to do so

we must distinguish the two.

We may summarize this by saying that with his emphasis on criticism as a form of discourse, Bennett does not produce a descriptive account of the social function of literary criticism as an institutional practice, which takes its place in conjunction with the broader ideological, political and economic forces of the whole social formation. While Althusserianism's theorization of epistemological questions was its particular weakness, its particular strength lay in its delimitation of the inter-locking forces at work in society at large. (On this score it produced some significant revisions of Marxist orthodoxy). By conceiving of societies as social formations incorporating a number of articulated practices (a 'practice' being the 'transformation' of a given 'raw material', by 'determinate means', into a given 'product') it revised the more conventional Marxist metaphor of economic 'base' and politico-cultural 'superstructure'.¹⁸ By conceiving of ideology as a practice (along with the two other main practices of the economy and the political system) it revised the notion that ideology was a form of insubstantial ideation or 'false consciousness', and proposed instead that it takes substantial forms from the social institutions or apparatuses which reproduce it. Ideology has a relative autonomy from the other practices, but at the same time becomes overdetermined by them in fulfilling its role in the whole social formation. These terms have useful descriptive value, even though one can see how easy a step it is to move from this somewhat coded, mechanical vocabulary into the conception of this discourse as a 'science'.)

If we are circumspect in borrowing from Eagleton, we may retain that kernel of his argument which applies the Althusserian conceptual system to the relation between criticism and ideology, and in the process we may find a helpful description of the kind of historical moment represented by the rise of a particular literary criticism:

Criticism belongs to the aesthetic region of ideology, a region with its proper degree of autonomy of the whole. But the emergence of a criticism (Renaissance humanist, neo-classicist, Romantic, liberal humanist) signifies a certain conjuncture between that region and others -- a conjecture [sic] in which the aesthetic region assumes an unusual degree of dominance within the whole ideological formation. It is not that the aesthetic becomes the dominant region of the ideology; it is rather that it is 'foregrounded' as a privileged bearer of the themes over which that formation broods. It is not, naturally, as though the aesthetic is stripped at such moments of its proper trappings to become 'raw ideology': there is no such phenomenon. On the contrary, even though literary aesthetics begin at such times to speak of more than themselves, to form frequently overt alliances with the political, ethical and religious spheres, they do so in terms of their own internal debates, demands and traditions. Their ideological efficacy remains an aesthetic one, and in this, indeed, lies their power.¹⁹

This conjuncture between the aesthetic region of ideology and the whole ideological formation must, of course, become visible to have this power, which in Althusserian terms means that it must have a firm institutional base in the social infrastructure. If publishing houses, bookshops and libraries, or the production

of literary magazines, or the establishment of clubs and societies, are not enough to produce this visibility — and in the case of the African literary culture these resources are thinly spread — then, as Eagleton points out,²⁰ criticism's articulation within the educational system will provide it. We may accept these insights, I suggest, without endorsing Eagleton's rather grandiose summarization:

The 'history of criticism', then, is an aspect of a set of specific ideological formations, each of which is so internally articulated as to privilege certain critical practices as a peculiarly overdetermined instance of its other levels. The science of the history of criticism is the science of the historical determinants of this overdetermination of the literary-aesthetic.²¹

This rather parenthetical (and un-selfcritical) attempt to elevate his own discourse to the stature of a science (a latent idealism?) is both an unfortunate aspect of the Althusserian legacy, and a consequence of Eagleton's pioneering enthusiasm in forging a local British literary Marxism based on an imported French model. But, as with Bennett, we need not abolish the entire conceptual system because of a merely local deficiency.

We may summarize Eagleton's description of the typical historical moment of a literary criticism as that point at which the relation between the aesthetic region of ideology and the whole ideological formation becomes visible. This quality of visibility will come both from the manner of its institutionalization in the social infrastructure, and from the themes of the criticism's discourse. Eagleton's argument, we ought to emphasize, does not preclude his

acknowledging the 'internal debates, demands and traditions' of the 'literary aesthetics'. It is obvious that criticism cannot simply fashion a discourse out of the uniqueness of the specific historical moment or set of ideological relations in which it finds itself. It must possess a discursive heritage, out of which it makes its responses to the requirements of its time. One can imagine a criticism being either strengthened or disabled in its efforts to meet the demands of the moment, depending on the capacities of its heritage.

I shall illustrate this last point with specific reference to the situation of African criticism, as a way of leading us into the concerns of the next chapter.

In the only full-length study of African criticism which has come to my attention, Bishop conducts an empirical survey of the climate of literary opinion amongst English and French-speaking African scholars between the years 1947 and 1966. As a comparatist responding to the debate of the later 1960's which was mentioned earlier, Bishop sets out to answer the question, 'By what standards do Africans [as opposed to Westerners] judge African literature?' Having researched as many critical statements by African critics as could be gathered (a task which is scarcely possible now, given the growth of the field) Bishop arrives at definitions of six of the major 'critical standards' of the criticism of the period, standards which he presents as the expression of 'the African cultural milieu'. They are the following:

(1) That, ideally, African writers would employ African

languages as their literary media; failing this, for various practical reasons, it is both acceptable and desirable that they 'do violence' to the standard forms of European languages as they are spoken in their mother-lands, in order to reflect the African world more accurately.

- (2) That African literature, while performing an important function in projecting an African presence heretofore lacking, or distorted in the world, must nevertheless be written primarily for an African audience; and must not appear to be written primarily for a non-African audience.
- (3) That African writers should show discretion in their borrowings from Western literary traditions, while reflecting, where possible, the form and content of the — primarily oral — African traditions.
- (4) That African literature must not falsify African reality, whether the writers choose realism or surrealism or some other technique to portray these reality; but that the 'information' provided by these reality must be transformed into art, and not be presented entirely for their own sake.
- (5) That African literature be engagee, meaning that it address itself to the various and serious problems currently facing Africa, and that it eschew the principle of 'art for art's sake'.
- (6) That African literature be, somehow, African, whether one labels this africanness as 'Negritude' or in some other way, and without becoming African at the expense of being at the same time literature.²²

The comprehensive thoroughness of Bishop's research leaves no room to doubt the extent to which these orthodoxies are represent-

ative of an era in African criticism; as is clear from their formulation, furthermore, Bishop was concerned as much with anglophone criticism as with negritude or its direct heirs. What is less convincing about Bishop's work is his account of the cultural circumstances and interests which these standards may be said to reflect. What comprises the 'African cultural milieu' is left an open question, only peripheral to the more empirical aspect of the work as a survey. To validate this approach Bishop argues that 'the Africanness, Negritude or whatever, of a critic is existential rather than essential . . . it creates the African tradition at least as fast as the tradition is being defined.'²³ But on the other hand, running through his argument is an easy familiarity with undisguised essentialist concepts: African taste, African culture and aesthetics, African standards, Africanness. Such idealism appears to be the result of his particular form of comparatism which sustains a theory (though Bishop disclaims having a theory at all) of essential cultural differences.

This contradiction would be unimportant if it were simply a matter of philosophical correctness. There are, however, several features of the standards which the reference to the 'African cultural milieu' cannot explain. Firstly, and most fundamentally, what explains this overwhelming concern, which is not of Bishop's own making, with 'standards' for the practice of literary evaluation? One deduces a nervousness expressing itself here as the need for a hierarchical scale. Secondly, the standards concern themselves less with an autonomous African culture than with the perceived

menace of (1) the linguistic and literary hegemony of the European languages, (2) a large foreign readership, (3) Western literary traditions, (4) the European fascination with Africa as exotic, (5) a narrow aestheticism (seen as European) which undervalues the social utility of art, and (6) cultural Eurocentrism. What explains this rhetorical emphasis? Finally, why is there a peculiar equivocation in two of these standards: '(4). . . the "information" provided by these realia must be transformed into art, and not be presented entirely for their own sake', and '(6). . . without becoming African at the expense of being at the same time literature'? Bluntly put, these questions do not take us to the seemingly ideal realm of the 'African cultural milieu', but to the difficult situation of modern African literary scholarship as the unwilling beneficiary of a European heritage, struggling to come to terms with indigenous circumstances. The prevailing constructs of this heritage — not the least powerful of which are those which preserve the sanctity of 'art' and 'literature' — do not settle in comfortably with the more overtly ideological imperatives — anti-colonial ones — of the time. The struggle going on in these standards is that of a criticism which, in attempting to be the spokesman of a particular ideological moment, is unable to effect a conceptual break from certain categories which constrain it.

I shall attempt now to define the specific nature of this struggle, bearing in mind that it has a practical, social dimension, and an internal, discursive one.

NOTES

1. Theory and the social context of African criticism

1. The following essay-length references are useful: Izevbaye, D.S. 'The State of Criticism in African Literature' in Jones, E.D. (ed.) African Literature Today No. 7: Focus on Criticism (London: Heinemann, 1975); and Killam, G.D. 'Contexts of African Criticism' in Lindfors, B. and Schild, U. (eds.) Neo-African Literature and Culture: Essays in memory of Janheinz Jahn (Mainzer Afrika-Studien 1) (Wiesbaden: B. Heymann, 1976).
2. Lindfors, B. (ed.) Black African Literature in English: A Guide to Information Sources, (Vol. 23 of American Literature, English Literature, and World Literatures in English, An Information Guide Series.) (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1979).
3. A similar pattern emerges from the list of major publishers of African literature in Donald Herdeck's African Authors: A Companion to Black African Writing Vol 1: 1300-1973 (Washington, D.C.: Black Orpheus, 1973), where only 21% are African, a figure which is swollen by the inclusion of Afrikaans-language publishers.
4. op. cit., p. xi.
5. These perspectives share the theoretical premise of the arbitrary or conventional relation between the signifier and the signified in the composition of the linguistic sign, a premise which leads to an emphasis on the non-referentiality of language.
6. An exception to this is reflected in the work of Sunday Anozie and in The Conch, although even here the prevailing structuralist paradigm is French-based.
7. op. cit., p. 3.

8. Bennett, T. Formalism and Marxism (Methuen New Accents Series, London, 1979) p. 7.
9. Bennett refers mainly to Bakhtin's Rabelais and His World (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1968); see also Medvedev, P.N. and Bakhtin, M.M. The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics, translated by A.J. Wehrle (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968).
10. from Bennett, op. cit. pp. 82-83.
11. op. cit., p. 91.
12. A case for the autonomy of Commonwealth Literature is made out by Robertson, R.T. 'Interpreters All: The Commonwealth Context of African Literature', Research in African Literatures (Austin, Texas), 5, (1974), pp. 52-59.
13. Lentricchia, F. After the New Criticism (London: The Athlone Press, 1980) p. 147.
14. The journal actively sought from its inception to intervene in a situation which its first editorial describes as follows: '... the whole field is expanding so quickly that those who work assiduously in one corner of it can easily lose touch with what is going on elsewhere. Communication between specialists in different disciplines tends to be infrequent and collaboration between scholars in different countries extremely rare. There is no single professional publication that unites the varied but overlapping interests of this scattered intellectual community.' Research in African Literatures (Austin, Texas), 1, 1, (1970).
15. Bishop, D.R. African Critics and African Literature: A Study of Critical Standards, 1947-1966. Unpublished dissertation, Michigan State University, 1970. (University Microfilms International) p. 402.

16. Eagleton, T. Criticism and Ideology (London: Verso, 1978) p. 17.
17. op. cit., pp. 167-8.
18. I do not intend to enter into the rich and complex debate within Althusserianism on the nature of ideology. I refer here only to certain first principles in Althusser's For Marx (London: NLB, 1977) and Lenin and Philosophy (London: NLB, 1971).
19. op. cit., p. 20.
20. op. cit., p. 56.
21. op. cit., pp. 20-21.
22. op. cit., 'Conclusion'.
23. op. cit., p. 13.

2. INDIGENOUS TRADITION AND THE COLONIAL LEGACY

I

At the end of the last chapter we noted on the basis of Bishop's survey of prevailing critical 'standards', the difficult situation of modern African literary scholarship as the unwilling beneficiary of a European heritage, struggling to come to terms with indigenous circumstances. To argue directly, we noted that in the efforts of African criticism to become the spokesman of a certain ideological moment, it was unable to achieve a conceptual break from certain 'European' categories which constrained it. In this chapter I wish to explore the determinative factors in the development of this impasse.¹

Before embarking on this project, it would be useful to illustrate the peculiar relationship between African criticism and European orthodoxy which I am claiming, and to begin to flesh out its implications. In his conclusion Bishop speculates tentatively about the general character of African criticism and its socio-historical determinants:

[An] overriding concern with extra-aesthetic considerations is perhaps, for the Westerner, the singly most disturbing aspect of African literary criticism. It is the point at which the mainstreams of African and Western criticism diverge most sharply. The divergence results, it would seem, from two important factors prevalent not only in the thinking of Africa's literary critics, but in many aspects and levels of African life: (1) the need for self-definition, stemming from the attempted obliteration of African culture and from

the advent of self-determination, and (2) the imminence of political questions prior to Independence, coupled with the residual questions of Western economic and cultural dominance following Independence. The divergence may stem also from a third factor: that is, the fact that traditional African culture has been inherently engagee in a way Western culture has not. It is communal and essentially social; while it is very appreciative of artistic beauty, it does not tend to create beauty for its own sake.²

These observations are pertinent both in themselves, and because they prompt further questions. One of the dominant concerns of African criticism is certainly the question of how it is to engage with the social reference of African literature. With the literature being, by common consent, largely 'sociological' in orientation, what are the appropriate positions which criticism is to adopt, with regard to approach and methodology? Yet this preoccupation comes into direct conflict with another, one which is perhaps less obtrusive than the first, but which exercises nevertheless a powerful hold on the criticism's attention. This is the question of how the aesthetic quality of African works is to be validated, and what criteria are involved. It should perhaps be noted that this second question is not purely a formalist or aestheticist concern: It also involves the affirmation of African aesthetic achievements in relation to those that are perceived as pertaining to the West. It is therefore also a concern born of historical factors. Thus one finds in Bishop's survey a set of 'standards' which, by implication, serve the purpose of evaluating literary quality, but which, Bishop tells us, are predominantly 'non-aesthetic'.

That these two opposing pulls — one to the social reference of literature, one to the literary quality of the work — are felt as a deep and abiding contradiction is best proved by the attempts which have been made to map out a 'middle ground' and thereby to reconcile them. Most notable here are the hybrid concepts advanced by Abiola Irele ('sociological imagination'³) and Solomon Iyasere ('cultural formalism'⁴). It could perhaps be argued that because these attempts at reconciling the two opposites are still implicitly antithetical, they do not really advance beyond the initial problem. What interests us here, however, is not to enter into this debate but to understand how it arose.

It is instructive to note just how dependent on the European heritage is the initial construction of the problem. The first of the tendencies, involving the social reference of African literature, is closely bound up with a general emphasis on the documentary function of literature, or 'realism'. An uncomplicated version of mimesis is involved. Bishop clarifies this point by saying that ' . . . [critics] have tended to apply mimesis to their statements on African literature far more often than they have concerned themselves with Mimetic critical theory — metacriticism is perhaps the proper term — in its own right.'⁵ If African criticism has not relied on a 'metacriticism' to establish and affirm the mimetic principle, then this has been accomplished through the inheritance, not purely of the notion of mimesis, but more significantly of a generally empirical outlook, which has been the dominant characteristic of British cultural life since the 19th century.⁶ The British mainstream can be described as empiricist: positivist in philos-

ophy, realist in aesthetics (at least since the bourgeoisie novel). It is this inheritance, I argue, that defines the character of African criticism's prevailing conception of literature's social referentiality. That this is so can be gathered from the predominant way the debate has been formulated. The problem has been posed most often as one of how much 'background' the critic needs to know in order to evaluate a text. This has also tied in with the question of whether African or Western critics are most qualified to make these evaluations.⁷ The assumption behind these debates is an empiricist one, namely that the nature of social life is immediately accessible to personal experience. There is no question here of experience or consciousness being deeply informed by conflicting social relations.

The second of the contradictory pulls — to the aesthetic quality of the work — is more immediately recognisable as the effect of the British legacy. The idea that art forms an ideal realm, or what Raymond Williams calls a 'superior reality'⁸ is specifically post-Romantic. The African attachment to the idea, furthermore, that aesthetic achievements are somehow to be associated with a nation's total cultural 'endowment' is also a feature of the British legacy, since it was at the turn of the century that the British national culture came to be defined in terms of literature.⁹

We shall have to return to these questions, but let me illustrate the basic argument by means of an example which I take to be symptomatic. In his concluding remarks on 'Criticism and Literature in Africa' Izevbaye intimates that the preoccupation in the

modern African literary culture with social questions is merely a sign of an early developmental phase, an immaturity which will gradually disappear:

With this new emphasis in criticism, that is the suppression of the social reference of literature as a significant influence in criticism, it may be easier for critics to pay greater attention to the literary work itself. But the influence of the referential element in African criticism has not really been an intrusion. The social factor was important only because the literature itself was largely sociological. As the literature becomes less preoccupied with social or national problems and more concerned with the problems of men as individuals in an African society, the critical reference will be human beings rather than society, and the considerations which influence critical judgement will be human and literary rather than social ones.¹⁰

Izevbaye does not provide much evidence for the 'suppression of the social reference of literature' really being a 'new emphasis' in criticism, but what is interesting about his remarks is their unabashed aspiration towards the values of conventional liberal humanism. The marriage between literary criticism and the ideological imperatives of liberal humanism has been of long standing in the West. To use Izevbaye's terms, the notion that men are most 'human' when they are judged to be 'men as individuals' involves when transposed into literary critical terms, the severing of literature from its socio-historical base, one of the primary acts of the more established of Anglo-American criticisms.

Our argument, then, is that anglophone African criticism is deeply

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 bound up with its European heritage, in ways which are often obscured by an anti-colonial rhetorical thrust." We must now begin to explore the socio-historical determinants and effects of this situation.

In the passage quoted earlier Bishop suggests three possible causes of African criticism's preoccupation with what he calls 'extra-aesthetic considerations'. These are: '(1) the need for self-definition, stemming from the attempted obliteration of African culture and from the advent of self-determination, and (2) the imminence of political questions prior to Independence, coupled with the residual questions of Western economic and cultural dominance following Independence.' As the possible third factor Bishop suggests the social utility of art in traditional societies. From our point of view this third factor is part of the circumstances to be explained, and cannot therefore be offered as a cause: how does the social utility of art in traditional societies permeate the modern literary culture if it is not consciously invoked by writers and critics?¹¹ The first two suggested factors are more helpful, although the problem here is that they lack social precision: we need to know who or what were the actors or agents of the processes being described. Who felt 'the need for self-definition', and for whom were the political questions before independence, and the residual questions after independence, important or imminent?

It is possible to answer the question reductively. For example, we could use Goldmann's proposition that there are 'strict homo-

logies' between the structure of a particular ideological configuration, the 'world view' of a certain social group, and the historical position occupied by that group at a certain point in history.¹² In the case of our argument we would then propose that anglophone African criticism developed this close, antagonistic intimacy with the prevailing orthodoxies of the British heritage precisely because the intelligentsia who were involved shared their historical position with that of the 'national bourgeoisie' of the independent states, who led these countries to independence on an anti-colonial and nationalist platform, and who then inherited the colonial infrastructure and continued to live out the socio-cultural consequences of their privileged position. We could also argue, as does Kelwyn Sole, that the impasse I have described simply 'reflects something of the ideological training many African intellectuals receive even today at universities in Africa and overseas.'¹³ While these arguments have elements of truth in them, they would appear over-hasty in the present context. I shall therefore attempt, firstly, to identify the broad ideological and institutional framework with which the development of African criticism has been articulated (this will necessarily involve a recognition of the pressures brought about by political independence); secondly, I shall attempt to describe the role played by the British legacy in the development of anglophone African criticism.

II

An institutional base of some security and permanence was provided

for African criticism by the Africanization of the syllabus in the humanities of higher education from the period of the early 1960's. We have already seen from Eagleton's point of view the significance of the formal link between criticism and education. As criticism becomes rationalized in the social infrastructure, it acquires a certain degree of ideological power. The point does not only involve a theoretical assertion, however, such as Eagleton's. There are practical considerations involved as well: teachers of literature make their way professionally through their critical activities, and the call for a certain literature on the syllabus demands the formalization of a corresponding critical debate. Hence some of the debates which were to occupy African criticism's attention throughout the 1960's and early 1970's (the definition of what 'African' literature might be, criteria for evaluation, etc.) were inaugurated as matters of professional concern at the conferences called in 1963 at Dakar and Freetown to discuss the introduction of African literature to the syllabus. (These debates were recorded and published in Gerald Moore's African Literature and the Universities.¹⁴) Hence too, we find Izevbaye saying that 'the responsibility for shaping an African tradition of criticism has passed from its Negritude home to the academy',¹⁵ and Killam arguing that '. . . when we speak of the criticism of the literature of English speaking Africa . . . we are speaking of what the universities, which have been central in the creation and criticism of literature, have done.'¹⁶

The Africanization of the syllabus, however, was itself part of a larger process which was brought on by political independence.

In the 1960's, the decade of 'nation-building', one of the great national tasks was the development of higher education, even to an extent which exceeded expectations: in 1962 it was estimated by the Association of African Universities that 32 universities would serve sub-saharan Africa's needs to 1980, but already by 1970 there were over 50 universities.¹⁷

Within this broad pattern of development African criticism received its commission, acquiring a formal base. The core ideology of this development, that which provided the terms of criticism's coherence with the public institutions, was cultural nationalism. Cultural nationalism had of course played an important part in the struggle against colonialism prior to independence. In 1937 Nnamdi Azikiwe told the architects of higher education to

Educate the renascent African to be a man. Tell him that he has made definite contributions to history. Educate him to appreciate the fact that iron was discovered by Africans, that the conception of God was initiated by Africans, that Africans ruled the world from 765 to 713 BC, that while Europe slumbered during the 'dark ages', a great civilization flourished on the banks of the Niger, extending from the salt mines of Therghazza in Morocco to lake Tchad . . . narrate to him the lore of Ethiopia, of Ghana, Melle, Mellestine, Songhay.¹⁸

This is a fine example of myth-making, if only because it is elaborate and unsubtle. The myth is the reverse of the colonial myth of Africa as a tabula rasa, dark continent, or repository of Europe's own unconscious or childhood state. It is what Knipp has recently called 'the counter-myth of Africa'.¹⁹ The task of the humanities

in higher education, one which was carried through into the 1960's, was to elaborate, refine and teach it.²⁰ Izevbaye writes about the relationship between nationalism and criticism in the following terms:

. . . the Africanization of African literature and criticism has become a significant literary event, and the intrusion of nationalist motives into literary theory and criticism has had a wholesome effect on the development of literary tradition because it rested on the sound principle that a virile tradition can be created only by a return to indigenous sources.²¹

Elsewhere Izevbaye says that the most important task of African criticism is 'the search for an African aesthetic'.²² Both the building of an indigenous tradition and the search for an African aesthetic reflect the extent to which criticism became, to use Eagleton's phrase, 'the privileged bearer of the themes' of cultural nationalism. In Knipp's formulation of the 'counter-myth', one can immediately see the variety of roles that it could play in a literary culture. He presents it in narrative or chronological form, consisting of five 'tenses':

- (1) The rich black past — sometimes warm, sometimes glorious — in which a secure black identity was and can again be rooted. This rich past exists in a double sense: first as history, as the record of the past glories of Mali and Ghana, of Benin, and Ife; and second, as the culture, more or less intact and accessible in the villages, of the people from which the poet was torn by the process of westernization (an ugly word).
- (2) The cynical conquest of the continent and its culture by greedy and rapacious Europeans.

- (3) The period of bondage during which whites exploited Africa and exported the enormous riches that were there and during which the black personality was further purified by redemptive suffering.
- (4) The rebellion and triumph of resurgent blacks against often decadent, always exploitative white domination.
- (5) The productive and creative future in which African glory returns and African leadership enriches the quality of life not only for Africans but for all the human family.²³

The first of these tenses, in which the rich past exists 'as culture, more or less intact and accessible in the villages', leads in criticism to the celebration of the oral tradition and its continuing influence on modern literature. The second, third and fourth tenses lead in criticism to the repudiation of 'Western' literary values (such as 'art-for-art's-sake') and the definition of a transcendent African or Black aesthetic.

The fifth tense is of course the most problematic. It is the point at which history and myth appear most clearly to diverge. In a 'pure' form, the anticipation of a future in which 'African leadership enriches the quality of life not only for Africans but for all the human family', could perhaps be said to exist only in classical Senghorian negritude, where the black 'soul' is said to have a universal, civilizing role.²⁴ In a more oblique form the fifth tense could perhaps be found in, say, Soyinka's arguing in the mid-1960's that writers had entered the 'stage of disillusionment', or in the suggestion that post-independence literature has

come to associate Africa with a 'fallen world'.²⁵ In these latter cases, of course, we would understand the myth to be defining the nature of loss.

✓ There can be little doubt that in the pre-independence period (especially from the second world war until 1960) the ideological effect of cultural nationalism was progressive. It would have provided the basis for what Gramsci would call an 'organic culture',²⁶ which was able to cement the alliances that had been formed between the nationalist leadership and the broader, popular movements in their struggle to achieve independence.²⁷ If a corps of literary-critical litterati had been at all formally constituted in this period, it is likely that they would have produced a confident, strident form of criticism, in close contact with the perceived popular will. Events, however, did not turn out quite this way. Criticism became consolidated only after independence, through its relationship with the rapid development of higher education. The Africanization of the syllabus was a feature of the 1960's and after, a re-organization of priorities which depended largely on the prior re-organization of control.²⁸

✓ In the shifts of political alignment that followed independence the ideological effects of cultural nationalism became more ambiguous. Instead of providing the basis for an 'organic culture' in which the educated élite, the traditional leadership and the urbanized working class could create some form of 'common cause', it became associated with the newly hegemonic principle of nationhood. African criticism, then, was launched institutionally into a crisis of ideological legitimacy. While its conditions

of emergence were linked with the development of a 'populist' cultural nationalism, its popular legitimation began to recede in the very period when it began to enjoy formalization.)

The effects of the change in the power-relations of post-independence states on literature, as opposed to criticism, are well known. Writers turned to satire to castigate the abuses of neo-colonialism (e.g. Achebe), or to socialist realism (reflected in Ngugi's changing career), or, as in the case of Soyinka, to myth, as a means whereby internal conflict could be ideologically mellorized.²⁹ At least some of the strength and diversity of the writers' responses to neo-colonialism could be said to reflect their somewhat peripheral position with regard to the power-relations of the states concerned. Mutiso argues that 'those involved in . . . literary work have been outside the formal institutions of power, are despised by the bulk of the power-holders, and have no formal basis in traditional societies.'³⁰ Brenda Cooper, on the other hand, argues that 'the writer-intellectual can be located within the interstices of the social formation.'³¹ The vocabulary of both writers shows how difficult it is to 'place' the literati in class-terms. The question of the African writer's class-position or his or her relationship with the ruling élites, and the extent to which this acts as an important determinant on the form of social consciousness which his or her work displays, are complex questions which cannot be given the attention they deserve here.³²

The point I wish to make is a contrastive one: that while writers may stand in an oblique relationship to the central structures of power in these states, the situation of the critic is less obscure.

✓ (As a professional in an educational system his relation to the structures of power is not one of simple identity, but it is certainly more direct. While higher education (especially in the universities) has a certain degree of autonomy, making a critical form of scholarship possible, there are limits to this autonomy in circumstances where higher education has been newly developed through the executive function of the state. Under such circumstances (and with the social life of literary intellectualism being 'thin' outside of the universities) criticism would feel itself drawn into the statutory symbolism of national modernity.)³³

Given these structural circumstances one would expect that certain 'national' themes, such as cultural integration and self-affirmation, would be high on the criticism's agenda. Although this became increasingly the case, as will shortly be illustrated, we ought to note that there appeared initially to be a good deal of apprehension in the development and articulation of these themes. This is apparent from a survey conducted by Arthur Ravenscroft in 1964 of the syllabuses of 14 English Departments. While Ravenscroft mentions that a number of syllabuses reflect revisions made as a result of the 1963 Freetown conference on the introduction of African literature to the university curriculum, he also notes that the assumptions behind the inclusion of African works were quite diverse. Works by African writers were used in four different ways: (1) 10 universities appended a limited number of African texts 'to ordinary B.A. courses on 20th or 19th-and-20th-century English Literature' (the proportions of African to British literature varying from 'about one-sixth . . . to about two-fifths'). (2) The

second use of African writing was an extension of the first. Here course-options, not merely selected texts, are added to the curriculum but as in (1), 'African writing in English is seen as a particular phenomenon within the broadly inclusive subject of English Literature.' It is interesting to note that some of the universities which have become strongly associated with African literature and criticism are included in the first two categories: Ibadan, Ife, and Makerere. (3) Three universities include in lists of texts for B.A. English studies not only selected African works written in English but also works translated from the French: 'the presence of Laye's books suggests not simply the idea of an African "regional" variety of English writing, but a distinctive "African-ness" that is common to all African writers' (4) Two universities, where the degree structure is similar to the American 'credit' system, include self-contained courses in which the idea of 'African-ness' was the informing principle, one of these being a course at the University of Nigeria at Nsukka which included '31 titles including translations from vernacular folk literature and from French African writers.'³⁴

From Ravenscroft's survey it emerges that, broadly speaking, two fundamental choices were available in the process of Africanizing the teaching and criticism of literature. One could choose to continue to work within the received tradition inherited from the colonial or metropolitan literary system (to caricature this choice somewhat, one's courses would then include literature from Chaucer to Achebe), or one could choose to take 'Africa' as the central organizing principle, and attempt to develop an indigenous tradition

which spanned internal linguistic and other historical boundaries.

Given the circumstances of the time, with cultural nationalism inscribed in the public value-system, the choice was largely determined for the second of these alternatives. It was the task of developing an indigenous tradition which appeared most likely to provide a dynamic, bold response to the needs of the time. This choice was also in keeping with the spirit of some of the writers' statements concerning their aspirations for African literature. Achebe's famous essays in which he denounces colonial criticism ('Where Angels Fear to Tread', 1962³⁵) and associates literature with national cultural upliftment ('The Novelist as Teacher', 1965³⁶) are good examples.

And yet, while this choice was ideologically the appropriate one to make, it seems that it was generally made without there being a wholesale rejection of the British literary system as well. Ravenscroft's survey shows that most departments continued to teach 'English Literature'. (When, at Nairobi, the predominantly British literary heritage was discarded, the event caused enough stir for the debate to be sustained in the national press.³⁷) In order to resolve this dilemma, it appears as if a distinction was made between the imperatives of designing a course, and producing criticism. While 'English Literature' was maintained (the Nairobi option being something of an exception) in the construction of a syllabus, a preference emerged in criticism for placing African works written in English outside of the British tradition, in a line of continuity with indigenous, vernacular, or oral literature.

Thus while courses continued to reflect a British heritage, criticism attempted to establish continuity with indigenous literary sources.³⁸

Abiola Irele provides the following illustration of the critical labour that was involved:

. . . If much of the modern literature of Africa is being written in the European languages, it is nonetheless a reflection of an authentic African world as it is being lived. The best of this literature is African not only in its content and references, but also in its feeling. Efforts have been made of late to relate the English speaking writers to Commonwealth literature, and the French speaking writers to the idea of 'Franco-phonie'. The criterion of language which commands these efforts appears to be tenuous, however, when considered against the real affinities which exist in the works of African writers despite language barriers. Thus Achebe's novels are more closely related to Oyono's than to those of an English or Commonwealth writer; similarly, the closest parallel to the poetry of Senghor, who writes in French, is that provided by the poetry of Okigbo, whose language is English. Even more significant is the connection of literature in the European languages with the traditional literature, which is best demonstrated by the line of inspiration which links the Yoruba oral tradition with the writings of D.O. Fagunwa, and also connects them with the work of Amos Tutuola and Wole Soyinka. Here we have proof of the same imaginative tradition, an irresistible expression of continuity.

So we might say that although much of modern African literature is related to the literatures of the former colonial masters, through language and other factors, it should begin to be seen, not as forming regional schools to the metropolitan tradition, but, as an independent literary area.³⁹

It should be noted at this point that the relation between criticism and cultural nationalism in the period of nation-building was not one which was entirely unspoken. One could not really claim that the criticism's politics was 'repressed', when one finds on occasion that the political function of criticism has been quite explicitly formulated. One of the clearest of such statements was made as late as 1975, in the statutes of the Association of African Literary Critics. The political role of criticism was one in which

the African critic would be led to discover within written works the values capable of consolidating the cultural cohesion of the people in order to ensure their full participation in the task of nation-building.⁴⁰

The participants in the founding conference of the Association were mainly French speaking, and as a result their definition of the aesthetic corollary to the political role of criticism does have a certain specifically post-negritude ring to it: the aesthetic task of criticism was one which 'would allow the African critic to discover artistic values proper to Negro-African civilization

. . . .⁴¹ But the anglophone equivalent, although rather more pragmatic, was not dissimilar if we take Kola Ogungbesan's remarks as being at all representative:

Literary studies in Nigeria must be directed towards producing students who will help the development of an indigenous culture. Our literary studies should help us become pioneers of a national literature The only way by which we can preserve a firm sense of spiritual values is to love and treasure our own heritage.⁴²

These remarks are made not long after Ogungbesan has commented

ruefully on the 'utilitarian' preoccupations of colleagues in scientific disciplines with 'national development'.

In the building of an indigenous tradition the difficulties that African criticism had to confront can be described as deriving from one central problem: how to create continuity and cohesion out of diversity, rapid change and stratification. Criticism had to find ways of dealing with the many languages, vernacular and European, in which the indigenous literature had been produced; it had to trace the continuities between 'traditional' and 'modern' literatures despite large-scale changes in the social practices associated with their different forms; it had to cut across ethnic and class differences to forge 'national' literatures, and regional differences to construct an 'African' corporate tradition.⁴³ It was a collectivising, totalistic project, largely in keeping with the peculiar nature of the ideological determinants at work: in its antagonism to the West cultural nationalism affirmed the completeness and coherence of 'African' cultural systems, and in the phase of nation-building its themes involved the creation of national and pan-African allegiances.

✓ / The type of integrated cultural world which African criticism was attempting to foster could be described as 'organic'. I have used this term already in a Gramscian sense, to denote the process of ideological 'cementing' that takes place when different social groups form alliances to rid themselves of a former repressive hegemony. Here I have a different meaning in mind, one which ✓ / denotes a certain view of society or of the past. It is defined

by Raymond Williams as 'a contemporary specialization of natural: an organic society was one that has "grown" rather than been "made".'⁴⁴ An organic view of society therefore disguises the way forms of social organization are constructed through the activity of particular interest groups, and proposes instead a view of society as harmonious, integrated and internally secure. In this sense, an organic view of society is a conservative one. As Williams puts it, 'If there is anything certain about the "organic community", it is that it is always gone.'⁴⁵ We should be careful, however, to pin-point the particular form of conservatism which is implied by the organicism of African criticism. Kelwyn Sole makes the point rather too simply when he says, in a similar context, that 'notions of "organic culture" are essentially depoliticized.'⁴⁶ The point is rather that in the politics of this criticism, which has been characterized by nationalism and anti-colonialism, an opposition to the West has tended to foreground an organicist view of the internal circumstances of African culture and society. While being rhetorically political in its relationship with the European literary heritage, African criticism has been markedly unpolitical in its engagement with indigenous literature, particularly in respect of the oral tradition.⁴⁷ Bearing in mind this qualification, the remainder of Kelwyn Sole's argument concerning organicism in African criticism holds good, namely that notions of 'organic culture'

. . . deny elements of power and struggle within social groupings. Furthermore, cultures are not seen as emerging through a process of contestation between classes and groups within the defined social context, but as a simple and unproblematic accretion of values and

traditions by a type of 'group mind'.⁴⁸

But although the initiatives in tradition-building which were taken had in general this common element, that is, a view of the past as harmonious or integrated, they were also noticeably influenced by the particular characteristics of different contemporary indigenous contexts. In this regard criticism in West Africa can be interestingly contrasted with criticism in East Africa. In West Africa a sense of tradition founded on vernacular/oral/traditional culture is pronounced. The writers which Irele uses to illustrate the continuities within African literature are all West African, and in the specific instance of the continuity between vernacular literature and that of modern English, he uses the well-known line of descent from Fagunwa to Tutuola and Soyinka. In this way a Yoruba heritage is nationalized. A similar tendency is to be found in certain historical accounts of the development of indigenous drama, where local and specific performance styles, such as Yoruba Operatic Theatre, are seen as forming the basis of a modern national theatre.⁴⁹ In the case of Soyinka's criticism, this kind of project becomes expansive, extending beyond the confines of a particular literary genre. Soyinka's criticism is perhaps the critical equivalent of what Achebe sets out to achieve in his fiction, the construction of a past. In Soyinka a variety of cultural forms (rituals, festivals, oral performances) and indigenous archetypes are written up as elements of an autonomous cultural history. The levels of abstraction (or idealism, in the philosophical sense of the word) which Soyinka's criticism attains are necessitated by the need for tradition-building to reflect a

which?
and

shared national or pan-African past, what Soyinka calls 'the African world', rather than to be too culturally-specific to the Yoruba context. Such idealism is also the consequence, of course, of the need for cultural continuity to be demonstrated in the face of the apparent discontinuities of forms and genres, modes of literary production and reception, in all the social practices of literature in written as opposed to oral contexts.

In east Africa tradition-building appears to have had to confront structural cleavages running deeper and more obviously than is the case in West Africa. If the task of tracing connections between the vernacular/oral/traditional and modern literary cultures was to be fairly easily accomplished in West Africa, in the East the vernacular culture and that of what Mazrui calls the 'Afro-Saxons' were more clearly polarized.⁵⁰ No doubt the fact that colonialism in West Africa (more strictly, Nigeria) was more 'benign' (involving commercial interest rather than the appropriation of land) than it was in the East (Kenya) has much to do with this. The result of this degree of polarization was that East Africa's initiatives in tradition-building were more radical and antagonistic to the West than is the case with criticism in West Africa. It is interesting that Kole Omotoso, writing from a West African perspective in Afriscopes, should note with particular emphasis the 'commitment' of East African criticism.⁵¹

It is no accident then, that perhaps the most decisive initiative in tradition-building that has been mentioned thus far, the 'abolition' of an English Department, should have been taken at Nairobi.

Part of this initiative was a critique of the sort of compromise that is highlighted by Ravenscroft's survey. The writers of the Nairobi proposal were critical of a 'basic assumption', that

the English tradition and the emergence of the modern west is the central root of our consciousness and cultural heritage. Africa becomes an extension of the west, an attitude which, until a radical reassessment, used to dictate the teaching and organization of History in our university. Hence, in fact, the assumed centrality of an English Department, into which other cultures can be admitted from time to time, as fit subjects for study, or from which other satellite departments can spring as time and money allow. A small example is the current, rather apologetic attempt to smuggle African writing into an English syllabus in our three colleges.

. . . Here then, is our main question: If there is a need for a 'study of the historic continuity of a single culture', why can't this be African? Why can't African literature be at the centre so that we can view other cultures in relation to it?⁵²

Less determined that this was the attempt at tradition-building based on racial identity, the development of a 'black aesthetics'. It was in Nairobi that the colloquium was held on this subject, with affinities being recorded with Afro-American scholarship. This initiative seems in general to have suffered from an extreme tentativeness and a lack of consensus. The apprehension is clear in Gurr and Zirimu's Introduction to the papers collected at the Nairobi colloquium:

What is (or are) Black Aesthetics? The simplest and definition would describe it (or them) as the cultural

concerns of the black world. More narrowly . . . it can be taken to mean the cultural concerns of Black Africa. More narrowly still, it means the cultural problems facing the black writer in Africa as a practitioner of his art, and the black critic in the practice of his craft which appertains to literature, be it black or other. 'Culture' here, the inescapable blanket term, covers everything from the sense of identity, pan-African, national or artistic, to the political postures which that identity calls for.⁵³

It is not clear from this whether the distinguishing factor in a black aesthetics is a form of cultural continuity encompassing the entire 'black world' (a kind of 'racial populism'), or whether it is an involvement in cultural terms with the national politics of post-independent states (nationalism and pan-Africanism). One of the clearer definitions of a black aesthetics was provided by the Afro-American critic David Dorsey, who emphasized the patterns of audience response to a work:

In referring to any particular aesthetic, I mean the syndrome of factors within a work of art which govern the audience's perception of and appreciation of the work, that is, the sum of factors with disparate, inter-related importances which are noted, consciously or unconsciously, by the audience and prized or disparaged. A black aesthetic therefore would be the syndrome of internal factors governing a black audience's perception and appreciation of a work of art.⁵⁴

In other accounts of a black aesthetic, the distinguishing criteria are drawn from a reflection on the character of traditional art: its social utility or functional aspect, the value of communalism

as opposed to individualism, and an epistemology of empathy, holism or intuition as opposed to analytical rationality.⁵⁵ The lack of consensus and clarity, however, in these attempts to define a black aesthetics is evidence enough of the plurality of meanings which the concept of 'blackness' can be made to sustain, and this in turn reflects something of the diverse and varied nature of black societies. As in other examples of tradition-building that have been mentioned thus far, discontinuities of region, language, class, and relative positions of power, are obscured behind notions of organic uniformity.⁵⁶

In these various critical initiatives, and in the differences of context and emphasis between them, one can discern the particular nature of the crisis of ideological legitimacy into which African criticism was launched. This crisis amounted to a failure on criticism's part to take adequate account of the conditions and circumstances of the African public. This failure is manifest despite the strong emphasis on the 'social reference' of literature. While the counter-myth of Africa, nationalism and anti-colonialism provided criticism with a sense of common purpose, and appeared to provide the basis for a common culture, increasingly they became unable to guarantee a progressive future. If criticism were therefore not to become merely defensive, it had to address itself less to the founding of a literary Africanness through opposition to the West or tradition-building along organicist lines, than to the literary implications of the social and cultural stratifications that the apparently common history had produced. Criticism had to begin to read its public, if it was to overcome the problem of legitimacy.

The situation which confronted criticism was very similar to one which presented itself to African writers from the period of the mid-1960's. In a seminal article published in 1966, Mohammedou Kane drew attention to 'the gap which has begun to widen and separate the writer from his African public.' The gap arose, according to Kane, because writers chose initially to 'direct their action mainly towards Europe and the world outside Africa', and Kane adds, it is 'the consequences of this choice that concern us now'.⁵⁷ In retrospect, it is ironic that one of the solutions to this problem that Kane proposed was the formation of an 'autonomous African criticism' which would tell the African writer where he stood in relation to his public:

It is obvious that the University is what is best qualified to make an appreciable contribution to the formation of an autonomous African criticism which, without turning its back on the outside world, can encourage all signs of original taste and talent. It can, thanks to the means at its disposal and the possibility it has of not going beyond the bounds of strict objectivity, speed up the consolidation of a school of criticism which will serve the African public by preparing it first of all so that the latter can draw the greatest profit from it and, secondly, be an interpreter of this public's taste which, when analysed, would help the author to know where he stands in relation to his readers.⁵⁸

As a result of the directions which the indigenous criticism was to take, however, such a solution to the problem of the gap between writer and audience was not forthcoming. The reason for this, however, had not only to do with criticism's pre-occupation

with national or pan-African themes, as has been suggested thus far, but also because criticism was simply not in a structural position to be able to fulfil this task. At the colloquium on black aesthetics, Ali Mazrui noted with great cogency that 'The difficulty of African literature in the English Language in East Africa is that it remains for the time being a child of education and not of socialization.'⁵⁹ Having lost some of the aura which surrounded it in the days of high nationalism, the literary culture was becoming increasingly academicized. The social distances that enveloped it would be governed by the fact that it is a literate culture using a European language in the semi-official context of university education. Mazrui's solution to this is a form of cultural engineering:

What then is the answer? There are several parts to it, reducible to the following imperatives. Firstly, attempt to take the new art to the people as a way of building up a socialization base. Secondly, bring the old traditional arts to the university and modern schools as a way of reducing the cultural non-involvement of these modern institutions. Thirdly, what is foreign in the educational institutions should be diversified so that its foreignness is no longer easily identifiable with what is British, but becomes internationalized further. And fourthly, attempt a partial indigenization of the English language itself as a medium of literary creativity.⁶⁰

Similarly, in 1975 Ezekiel Mphahlele suggested that critics become involved in the task of building up a cultural 'machinery' to facilitate closer communication between writers, critics and audiences, a task which required that attention be given to the mass

media, the educational institutions, writers' clubs and the publishers. Mphahlele added, on a personal note, 'I must admit, very much to my own distress, that as long as I am physically removed from the audience for whom I think I'm trying to illuminate the literature, and outside the whole machinery I have described, my job remains a mere scholastic exercise, void of any social justification in an African context or social life to feed on.'⁶¹ Mphahlele is of course referring to his exile, but he is also regretting the fact that this 'machinery' is undeveloped.

While Kane, Mazrui and Mphahlele are alert, however, in pragmatic and empirical terms, to the problems of criticism and its place within the broader framework of social relations, they do not show much sensitivity towards the ideological implications of the dilemma which is being addressed. In other words, the question of 'audience' does not penetrate the prevailing assumptions and certainties of their critical language, or break into their basic conceptual paradigm. A positivistic, commonsense outlook remains intact in their treatment of the problem. I would argue that the problem of audience would be viewed more appropriately as an aspect of the hegemonic nature of cultural relationships. It could perhaps be argued that a prerequisite for such a paradigm shift or ideological break would be precisely the development of those closer ties between the literary culture and the wider 'audience' which these writers are advocating. Such a view, however, would be blind to the structural complexities of the problem, implying that literary criticism has an active, mobilizing role to play in a political system. This is obviously naive and untenable. This view

would also contradict the experience of literary cultures elsewhere. In South Africa, for example, the recent development of a socio-logical and Marxist challenge to a more orthodox liberal criticism has come about without there being any radical re-structuring of the relationships between criticism or the teaching of literature and the wider populace. The factors at work in the development of this challenge have not involved a change of 'audience' but rather, as N.W. Visser suggests, the exhaustion of conventional methodology and the failure of liberalism to act as a significant force in the socio-political system.⁶² Similarly, there is no indication in the growing body of British literary Marxist writings of any indebtedness to a significant change in the social relations affecting the literary culture. It has been suggested, in fact, that throughout the West Marxism has turned its attention to culture because of the absence of a programmatic working-class political mobilization.⁶³

These observations have led us to the point where we can recognize that African criticism was not able to internalize within its discourse the implications of its stratified socio-cultural circumstances. We have seen that this failure was partly the result of the criticism's absorption into the national infrastructure of the states concerned, and consequently its espousal of the familiar national themes. But we can also begin to recognize that this failure is as much internal to the criticism's discourse, as it is conditioned by social factors. The impasse we are describing is partly an intellectual one, and can be ascribed to the blindnesses and deficiencies of the critical resources on which the criticism was relying.

It is at this point, therefore, that we must turn to the British legacy, and the role it has played in anglophone African criticism's development.

III

A reconstruction of all the basic tenets of orthodox British literary liberalism would be both unnecessary and impossible here. What we are concerned with is the situation in which the British orthodoxies were taken up, and the effects of this process on the indigenous discipline.

The reception of the British heritage in African criticism has been, in an intellectual sense, typically provincial. I use this term to denote a certain intellectual relationship, and to suggest one of the constraints African criticism has encountered in its efforts to develop an autonomous tradition. Some of the typical features of a provincial-metropolitan relationship can be described as follows:

1. It is the more established and formalized of metropolitan traditions that become reproduced under provincial circumstances; further, the reproduction of these traditions is both incomplete and inappropriate in the new context.
2. A sense of marginality is inherent in provincialism, and this leads to a contradiction between an awed fascination for metropolitan traditions, and an antagonistic assertion of provincial ideals.⁶⁴

I shall pay attention to only two aspects of the British heritage,

and the kind of reception they have been given in African criticism, aspects which seem to be particularly relevant to the African situation. These are, firstly, the British conception of the public function of literature (the 'national language and literature'); and secondly, the intellectual and ideological character of the dominant British critical discourse. Obviously, my argument here will have to be selective. I shall be relying on a comprehensive and analytical body of works in which the traditional literary system in England is the focus of sustained enquiry.

The public function of literature and the role it was to play in the educational system was established in England during the later 19th century. For Arnold, the following factors were involved:

It is of itself a serious calamity for a nation that its [the nation's] tone of feeling and grandeur of spirit should be lowered or dulled. But the calamity appears far more serious still when we consider that the middle classes, remaining as they are now, with their narrow, harsh, unintelligent, and unattractive spirit and culture, will almost certainly fail to mould or assimilate the masses below them, whose sympathies are at the present moment actually wider and more liberal than theirs. They arrive, these masses, eager to enter into possession of the world, to gain a more vivid sense of their own life and activity. In this their irrepressible development, their natural educators and initiators are those immediately above them, the middle classes. If these classes cannot win their sympathy or give them their direction, society is in danger of falling into anarchy.⁶⁵

In the class dynamics which followed industrialization, a literary

education was to serve as an agent of cultural continuity and cohesion. As the idea became popularized and formalized, Arnold's tone of pragmatic beneficence seems to have been replaced by more candidly hegemonic considerations. By the turn of the century an early professor of English at Oxford could pronounce:

England is sick, and . . . English literature must save it. The Churches (as I understand) having failed, and social remedies being slow, English literature has now a triple function: still, I suppose, to delight and instruct us, but also, and above all, to save our souls and heal the State.⁶⁶

The Arnoldian thesis, however, remained intact, and it was borne out by the way in which English literature gradually became institutionalized. It entered first, not into the universities, but the 'Mechanics' Institutes, working men's colleges and extension lecturing circuits English was literally the poor man's Classics', says Eagleton.⁶⁷ It was also an appropriate subject to accompany the increasing admission of women into higher education.⁶⁸ It was introduced into the Civil Service examinations during the Victorian period, thus serving as a useful adjunct to the education of the servants of Empire.⁶⁹

It is not surprising that with such beginnings English was to encounter a certain resistance from the 'ancient' universities in the early part of this century. But the terrain on which the battle for English was fought by the Leavises and their followers, was no less nationally 'representative' than before and in fact it became increasingly so.⁷⁰ Eagleton toys with the Leavisian

belief in 'essential Englishness' as follows:

English as a subject was in part the offshoot of a gradual shift in class tone within English culture: 'Englishness' was less a matter of imperialist flag-waving than of country dancing; rural, populist and provincial rather than metropolitan and aristocratic. . . . It was chauvinism modulated by a new social class, who with a little straining could see themselves as rooted in the 'English people' of John Bunyan rather than in a snobbish ruling caste. Their task was to safeguard the robust vitality of Shakespearian English from the Daily Herald, and from ill-starred languages such as French where words were not able concretely to enact their own meanings.⁷¹

The critical tradition from Arnold to Leavis was dedicated to a view of literature as a rich national possession, the vital centre of the nation's cultural health. We have already seen that the connection between literature and nationhood was particularly persuasive in African criticism. William's remarks on this connection within the British context apply equally to Africa: 'The whole notion of the rise of a national literature, the definition of a nation through its literature, the idea of literature as the moral essence or spirit of the nation - these are supports of a specific political and social ideology.'⁷² An interesting feature of the African reception of the idea of the link between literature and nationhood is the role played in it by liberal English expatriates. Killam, for example, on the subject of 'African Literature, National Identity and the University', saw the public function of African literature in the familiar terms:

Literature has, traditionally, played a vital role, has

always had as one of its primary commitments the formulating of the values of a society and has been both a reflection and a criticism of those values. It creates a sensation of the life of the society and the peoples it evokes and as such forms part of the total cultural experience of that society.⁷³

Such a remark is convenient in a climate of nationalism, but the naivety of its sociological premisses, and the direct, unmediated relation it assumes between literature and society, (literature 'reflects' and 'criticizes') are misplaced in a stratified, heterogenous and hegemonic context. This brings me to the second aspect of the British heritage's reception in African criticism, its intellectual and ideological character.

In 1968 Perry Anderson attempted a 'political and structural analysis' of what he called the 'Components of the National Culture'. It was a symptomatic reading for New Left Review of the current state of 10 academic disciplines in their native English form. The focus of his analysis was 'a spectacular fault in the English intellectual landscape', the fact that Britain, alone of major western societies, produced neither a national Marxism, nor a classical sociology. Anderson regards the 'Marxist decade' of the thirties in England as a short-lived flirtation, without any significant influence either on the working-class movement or on the general character of British intellectual life. Similarly, Britain escaped the mode of social thought that is represented by Weber in Germany, Durkheim in France, and Pareto in Italy. British intellectualism is therefore characterized by an 'absent centre', the lack of any

tradition reflecting critically on the social totality. The effects of this void were 'a series of structural distortions in the character and connections of the inherited disciplines':

Philosophy was restricted to a technical inventory of language. Political theory was thereby cut off from history. History was divorced from the exploration of political ideas. Psychology was counterposed to them. Economics was dissociated from both political theory and history. Aesthetics was reduced to psychology.⁷⁴

Anderson finds, however, that there are two disciplines in which the idea of the social totality finds a 'displaced home'. In both cases, it is present in the form of an anomaly, the consequence of its displacement. The two disciplines are anthropology, in which 'primitive' societies become 'the surrogate object of the theory proscribed at home', and literary criticism, which was able, says Anderson, to take over the role of ethics, which in practical terms had a metaphysic and an epistemology (however sparsely they were defined), and which developed something approximating a philosophy of history. The achievements of literary criticism were such that it could regard itself as the centre of 'humane studies and of the university' and the 'chief of the humanities'.⁷⁵

Both disciplines left their mark on African criticism. The influence of anthropology on studies of traditional literature and on the celebration of pre-colonial values such as 'communalism' and 'holism' is marked.⁷⁶ This influence combined with the more

abiding one of literary criticism, whose distinguishing features were its empiricism and its organicism. These formed the modus operandi of literary criticism's achievements. Its outlook and methodology were empirical, and its central valuations, of pre-industrial English culture and historical lines of literary tradition, were organicist.⁷⁷ In the terms of Anderson's analysis, the absence of the idea of the social totality in British intellectual life was a necessary condition for the prominence which literary criticism was to achieve. The price of this achievement was an aversion to socio-historical precision.

But by what means, we should ask, did the dominant British critical discourse come to exercise this influence? The question is prompted by the necessary recognition of the fact that the claims of this discourse continue to be felt, a circumstance which there is little reason to believe does not apply to anglophone African criticism. From the point of view of hindsight, it seems to be the case that while this discourse's strengths never lay in its ability to provide convincing intellectual justifications of its case (witness the famous debates between Leavis and Wellek and Bateson) they did lie in the fact that it produced strategies of reading which were to become institutionalized well beyond the immediate contexts of debate in which they had been developed. In an assessment of Scrutiny's legacy to British literary studies, Francis Mulhern discusses the influence of these strategies in terms which apply to the African situation:

If the style of Scrutiny's campaign is an unhappy memory, its substance is more like a mortmain. This

component of the legacy was most obviously a literary one, itself comprising three elements: a critical-historical canon defining the major 'traditions' of English literature; a loosely formulated methodology of critical practice; and a cluster of ideas concerning the nature of literature and its place in social life. How have these been received by posterity? It might be said, somewhat schematically, that the first was extremely influential, winning widespread assent in the fifties, and, in spite of multiplying disagreement over specific judgements, has remained the one ineluctable point of reference in English literary-critical discussions ever since. The second, in company with Ricardian 'practical criticism' and the methods of the New Critics, was more or less naturalized as the technically necessary approach to literary language, and has only recently begun to be challenged by alternative methodologies, derived largely from French and Russian semiotics. And the third, commingled with kindred conceptions of a dilute romantic character, has become part of the spontaneous ideology of academic literary criticism and of English teaching at every level of education.⁷⁸

Another necessary corrective is provided by Mulhern here when he points to the congruence of the Scrutiny currencies with those of Ricardian 'practical criticism', and the American New Critics. In as much as the British critical discourse predates and influences American formalism, so does New Criticism predate and influence the work of African critics. It would be difficult to establish exactly how many African critics who are the products of a predominantly British-orientated literary education in Africa have had their studies rounded off by doing higher degrees in American universities, but this pattern is a familiar one. While there would

be exceptions to the rule (American criticism being far more diverse than I may be suggesting), the influence of New Criticism would involve a hardened formalism. Today the 'colonial' legacy — if I may use this term metaphorically for the moment — includes that of the American critical establishment.

Mulhern concludes his study by attempting to isolate what it is in the legacy of Scrutiny that must be broken with by British socialist cultural theory. (He does so after acknowledging some of the positive aspects of this legacy as well, in particular the forcefulness and courage implicit in the style of its interventions.) He finds it in the danger of socialist cultural theory's 'ingestion of a discourse whose main effect is to undo the intelligibility' of its ultimate political concerns:

It is essentially that the basic and constant discursive organisation of the journal, the matrix of its literary and cultural criticism and of its educational policies, of its radical and conservative manifestations alike, was one defined by a dialectic of 'culture' and 'civilization' whose main and logically necessary effect was a depreciation, a repression and, at the limit a categorical dissolution of politics as such.⁷⁹

Anglophone African criticism suffers from a similar condition. The critical tradition which it inherited from the British context spoke in a unifying, experientialist discourse, one which reinforced African criticism's search for Africanness, for community, for continuity with the comforting origins of the African experience, and for a sense of tradition in which a nationalist orientation could find support in an age of conflicting internal pressures.⁸⁰ These

are the predominant terms in which the 'social reference' of African literature are cast, terms which militate against the development of an indigenous, genuinely socio-historical literary criticism.

NOTES

2. Indigenous Tradition and the Colonial Legacy

1. I am not concerned here with a detailed empirical history of African criticism's development, even though this is feasible: Bishop uses the founding of Présence Africaine in 1947 as his starting point, thus recognizing the seminal role of negritude. The anglophone equivalent of this event is of course the founding of Black Orpheus. Claude Wauthier (see below) links developments in literary criticism with those of indigenous journalism. There is also the history of literary societies like Mbari, or further back into the past, the literary and social clubs of the later 19th and early 20th centuries. (see Hagan, Kwa O, 'The Literary and Social Clubs of the Past: Their Role in National Awakening in Ghana', Okyeame, IV, 2, 1969, pp. 81-86.) Izevbaye (see below) discusses the work of western critics on African writing as being integral to the development of African criticism. I am interested, however, in the development of an indigenous discipline, and in the terms of my approach, none of the above possibilities can be accommodated.

2. op. cit., p. 398.

3. Abiola Irele, 'The Criticism of Modern African Literature',

- in The African Experience in Literature and Ideology (London: Heinemann, 1981).
4. Solomon Iyasere, 'The Liberation of African Literature: A Re-evaluation of the Socio-Cultural Approach', Conch, V, 1 and 2, 1973, pp. 1-10.
 5. op. cit., p. 44.
 6. This applies of course to anglophone not francophone criticism. Mphahlele's reaction to negritudinst theoreticism is revealing: 'In this kind of critique there is a common vocabulary flourishing: l'angoisse, le ressentiment et la lutte, la convergence pan-humaine, l'ultra-réflexion teilhardienne, la chaleur africaine Négritude, or l'angoisse, or l'amour, whatever the subject of the criticism may be, it is often discussed in a way that at some stage makes it appear like a human being or some creature, trotting beside or following the author who is being reviewed.' In Moore (see below), pp. 80-81.
 7. These debates are thoroughly documented by Bishop. See also Jones, E.D. (ed.) African Literature Today No. 7: Focus on Criticism (London: Heinemann, 1975). Hereafter ALT.
 8. Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950 (Penguin, 1961) p. 50.
 9. Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983) Ch.1, 'The Rise of English'.
 10. Izevbaye, D.S. 'Criticism and Literature in Africa', in Heywood, C. (ed.) Perspectives on African Literature (London: Heinemann, 1971) p. 30.
 11. Several writers make this point (see Bishop, pp. 166-168)

- but none as succinctly as Obamselu: 'If there is continuity of African literary imagination, it will be found that this continuity is maintained by learning and not by the activity of some occult racial principle.' (op. cit., p. 168).
12. Lucien Goldmann, 'The Sociology of Literature: Status and Problems of Method', International Social Science Journal, XIX, 4, pp. 493-516.
 13. Kelwyn Sole, 'Culture, Politics and the Black Writer: A Critical Look at Prevailing Assumptions', English in Africa, (Grahamstown), 10, 1, 1983, p. 56.
 14. Gerald Moore, African Literature and the Universities, (Ibadan University Press, 1965).
 15. Izevbaye, in ALT No. 7, p. 11.
 16. Killam, G.D., 'Contexts of African Criticism', in Lindfors, B. and Schild, U. op. cit., p. 296. I have also established in correspondence with Heinemann that most of their critical studies are developed from university or thesis work.
 17. T.M. Yesufu (ed.) Creating the African University: Emerging Issues in the 1970's, (Ibadan: OUP for the Association of African Universities, 1973) p. 7.
 18. Quoted from Claude Wauthier, The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa, 2nd English edition (London: Heinemann, 1978) p. 102.
 19. Knipp, T.R. 'Myth, History and the Poetry of Kofi Awoo-

- nor', ALT No. 11: Myth and History (London: Heinemann, 1980) p. 40.
20. See Ali Mazrui on the teaching of history in Cultural Engineering and Nation-Building in East Africa (Northwestern University Press, 1972).
21. In Heywood, C. op. cit., p. 28.
22. ALT No. 7, p. 1.
23. ALT No. 11, p. 43.
24. This theme runs through several of Senghor's writings. See Reed, J. and Wake, C. (eds.) Senghor: Prose and Poetry (Heinemann African Writers Series, 1976).
25. 'The Writer in an African State', in Transition (Kampala) 31, 1967; and Izevbaye in ALT No. 7, p. 5.
26. Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971). See the essay by Chantal Mouffe on 'Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci', in Mouffe, C. (ed.) Gramsci and Marxist Theory (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979).
27. This question is taken up by J.P. O'Flinn, 'Towards a Sociology of the Nigerian Novel', ALT No. 7.
28. The effects are recorded in Moore, op. cit.
29. I have discussed this aspect of Soyinka's novels, though with different emphases, in 'Wole Soyinka's The Interpreters: Suggestions on Context and History', English in Africa, 8, 1, 1981.
30. Quoted from Cooper (see below) p. 61.

31. Brenda Cooper, 'Some generalizations about the class situation of the writer-intellectual from independent Africa', Africa Perspective, (Johannesburg), 16, 1980, p. 61.
32. A genetic-structuralist approach to this question has been mapped out by Ian Glenn, 'Ngugi Wa Thiong'O and the Dilemmas of the Intellectual Elite in Africa: A Sociological Perspective', English in Africa, (Grahamstown), 8, 2, 1981, pp. 53-67.
33. I rely here on Edward Shils, The Intellectuals and the Powers and Other Essays (University of Chicago Press, 1972), especially Part III, 'Intellectuals in Underdeveloped Countries'.
34. Arthur Ravenscroft, 'University Syllabuses and "African Literature"', Bulletin of the Association for African Literature in English (later ALT, I, 1964) pp. 1-4.
35. Chinua Achebe, Morning Yet on Creation Day (London: Heinemann, 1975).
36. *ibid.*
37. Gacheche, G. 'Editorial', Busara, II, 2, 1969, pp. 4-7. One wonders whether the Nairobi option would have come about were the American 'credit' system used there. Since the curriculum was based on a British model the decision was an all-or-nothing affair.
38. This compromise seems to have gradually fallen away. See the various course outlines advertised in Research in African Literatures, (Austin, Texas).
39. Abiola Irele, 'The Development of Contemporary African Literature', Appendix A to Herdeck's African Authors (op. cit.)

40. Published as Document II of 'The African Critic and his People as Producers of Civilization', Colloquium held at Yaoundé, 16-20 April, 1973, in Présence Africaine, 1976, p. 239.
41. *ibid.*
42. Kola Ogungbesan, 'A Reappraisal of English Literature Syllabuses in Nigerian Universities', Journal of the Nigerian English Studies Association, V, 1 and 2, 1972, p. 86.
43. It is interesting to compare the following preoccupations. J.P. Clark writes: ' . . . as the roots of European drama go back to the Egyptian Osiris and the Greek Dionysius so are the origins of Nigerian drama likely to be found in the early religious and magical ceremonies and festivals of this country. The egungun and oro of the Yoruba, the egwugwu and mmo masques of the Ibo, and the owu and oru water masquerades of the Ijaw are dramas typical of the national repertory still generally unacknowledged today.' (From Bishop, *op. cit.* p. 169.) Ngugi, on the other hand, writes: 'A stratified society, even in pre-colonial Africa, produces a stratified culture or sub-cultures, sometimes to the total exclusion from the central hub of national life of the ahois, the ndungatas, the osus, the mbaras, the slaves and serfs in such pre-colonial societies, and of the peasantry and working people in modern neo-colonial states.' (From Homecoming, see below, p. 13.)
44. Raymond Williams, Keywords (Fontana, 1976) p. 191.
45. Culture and Society, *op. cit.*, p. 252.
46. Kelwyn Sole, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

47. Landeg White is eloquent on this point in 'Literature and History in Africa', review article, Journal of African History, 21, 1980, pp. 537-546.
48. Kelwyn Sole, op. cit., p. 46.
49. Adedeji, J.A. 'Oral Tradition and the Contemporary Theatre in Nigeria', Research in African Literatures, (Austin, Texas) 2, 2, 1971. pp. 134-149.
50. Ali Mazrui, The Political Sociology of the English Language: an African Perspective, (The Hague: Mouton, 1975).
51. Kole Omotoso, 'East and West of Africa: Literary Criticism', Afriscopes, X, 1975, p. 38.
52. Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, 'On the Abolition of the English Department', Homecoming (London: Heinemann, 1978) p. 146.
53. Gurr, A. and Zirimu, P. (eds) Black Aesthetics, Papers from a Colloquium held at the University of Nairobi, June 1971 (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1973) pp. 1-2.
54. *ibid.*, p. 7.
55. See David Maughan Brown, 'Black Criticism and Black Aesthetics', in Chapman, M. (ed.) Soweto Poetry, (Southern Africa Literature Series No. 2) (Joahannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1982) pp. 46-55.
56. Ngugi's deafening silence on the subject of a black aesthetics is interesting. Characteristically, in a recent essay on Afro-American literature and thought he counterposes two perspectives within the field, those of 'the

- robber and the robbed'. Writers in Politics (London: Heinemann, 1981).
57. Kane's article, originally published in Présence Africaine (1966), is wrongly attributed to Cheikh Hamidou Kane in Killam, G.D. (ed.) African Writers on African Writing (London: Heinemann, 1973). I quote from the latter source, p. 55.
58. *ibid.*, pp. 62-63.
59. Ali Mazrui, 'Aesthetic Dualism and Creative Literature in East Africa', Black Aesthetics, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
60. *ibid.*, p. 43.
61. Houston A. Baker (ed.) Reading Black: Essays in the Criticism of African, Caribbean, and Black American Literature (Africana Studies and Research Centre, Monograph Series No. 4) University of Pennsylvania and Cornell University, 1976) p. 14.
62. N.W. Visser, 'The Situation of Criticism in South Africa', AUETSA Papers, 1982 (University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg).
63. See Perry Anderson, Considerations in Western Marxism (London: NLB, 1976).
64. See Shils, The Intellectuals and the Powers *op. cit.* The provincial/metropolitan metaphor suggests constraint rather than weakness, and is less pejorative than 'dependency'.
65. Quoted from Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

66. *ibid.*, p. 23.
67. *ibid.*, p. 27.
68. *ibid.*, pp. 27-28. See also Brian Doyle, 'The Hidden History of English Studies', in Widdowson, P. (ed.) Re-Reading English (Methuen New Accents Series, 1982).
69. Eagleton, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
70. Raymond Williams, Writing in Society (London: Verso, 1983), 'Cambridge English, Past and Present'.
71. *op. cit.*, p. 37.
72. Raymond Williams, Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review (London: New Left Books, 1979) p. 119. It is interesting that Ogungbesan finds it necessary to justify an African syllabus by quoting Leavis: 'The main point is that if one is uneducated in one's own literature one cannot hope to acquire education in any serious sense by dabbling in, or by assiduously frequenting, any other.' Journal of the Nigerian English Studies Association, V, 1 and 2, 1972, p. 87.
73. In Darilite (Umma) I, 1, 1970, p. 49.
74. Perry Anderson, 'Components of the National Culture', New Left Review, 50, 1968, p. 56.
75. Anderson is quoting Leavis from Education and the University, *ibid.*, p. 50.
76. The preoccupation with anthropology is well documented by Bishop, *op. cit.*, pp. 231-249.

77. In addition to the works by Eagleton, Anderson and Widdowson, see Catherine Belsey, Critical Practice (Methuen New Accents series, 1980), and Francis Mulhern, The Moment of 'Scrutiny' (London: Verso, 1981).
78. op. cit., p. 328.
79. ibid., p. 330.
80. Landeg White's remarks serve as a useful point of reference here: 'It is astonishing that, as we enter the 1980's, there is so little that can be regarded as essential reading, so little that matches the intellectual vigour of debates in related subjects Forced by the very nature of the literature to look a little further, critics have been content to take their image of Africa from the literature itself and then praise the literature for its 'truth', operating within such simple concepts as the 'traditional African way of life', 'the clash between African and Western culture', and the 'corruption following independence' — concepts which must seem strangely innocent to the historian or political scientist.' Journal of African History, op. cit., p. 539.

3. ELDRED JONES: Othello's CountrymenThe Writing of Wole Soyinka

'Not for all time, but for an Age' is how Derek Longhurst begins a recent essay on how Shakespeare has evolved as the British 'National Poet', and 'how his work has been used, especially since the 1920's, to construct and justify dominant conceptions of a literary education.' Quoting from the Newbolt Report, Longhurst illustrates how Shakespeare has been assigned a pre-dominant role in fostering the idea of a national culture in literature; interestingly, in this 'official' Shakespeare of the schools' syllabus, it is precisely because Shakespeare exemplifies the 'timeless', 'eternal' and 'universal' qualities of 'great literature', that he is placed at the centre of the national 'traditional culture': although he shows 'what Englishmen were like' in the early 17th century, more importantly he shows 'what all men are like in all countries and at all times'; and it is because of this timelessness and universality that he (along with other great writers in the canon) should be valued as a 'source of pride', and a 'bond of national unity'.¹

The dedication to Eldred Jones's The Writing of Wole Soyinka reads 'For W.S. Our W.S.' The abbreviation probably signals a certain diffident mischievousness, but the meaning is clear: Soyinka is being modelled as the Bard of West Africa. (Or perhaps of Modern Africa: it cannot be Nigeria since Jones is based in Sierra Leone.)

The point would be trivial, were it not for the fact that the evidence shows that in a certain sense, Jones is entirely serious. Just as Shakespeare has been used — in Longhurst's perhaps rather rigid terminology — to 'construct and justify' dominant conceptions of a literary education in the United Kingdom, so Jones's readings of Soyinka appear to be aimed at establishing the latter's credentials for, it seems, eventual canonization and incorporation into the cultural treasury of literary education in contemporary Africa:

Poetry has not yet saved the world, and it is unlikely that even if Soyinka's poetry were to be widely read, it would save Africa. It still needs — along with the rest of his work — to be read very widely — by those in power as well as by those who put them in power, but especially by the young. For Soyinka's work has all the civilizing influence of a combination of vibrant ideas with art.²

Jones's understanding of the purposes of a literary education ('the civilizing influence') seems to be derived directly from the official position, as regards literary educational policy in the schools, adopted in the United Kingdom. If the widely influential Newbolt Report³ can be taken as representative of official thinking, then this connection becomes plain: the Report takes an Arnoldian view of literature as a 'spiritual influence' which could be set to work on the 'morbid condition of the body politic', as it is 'an embodiment of the best thoughts of the best minds, the most direct and lasting communication of experience by man to men.'⁴ Jones is clearly aware of how tenuous such claims are (particularly, he implies, with respect to Africa) but he ends by affirming them

as if no alternative point of reference were available to him.

A decade before the publication of The Writing of Wole Soyinka in 1973, Jones was far more circumspect and cautious in his pronouncements about new writers and their work. One of his contributions to the Freetown conference in 1963 was the following statement:

Because we are dealing with a young literature with promise rather than fulfilment, criticism should be judicious, and without being patronizing, should be at pains to reveal whatever promise the work has, rather than to destroy it by unsympathetic criticism.⁵

The difference between the 1963 and 1973 statements involves much more than simply the fact that after 1963 a major writer in the form of Soyinka emerged on the scene. Jones's major contribution to the Freetown conference was a discussion of Things Fall Apart, and Achebe had by then already achieved significant status. In order for Jones to give Soyinka's poetry such accreditation (with similar praise going to the plays and fiction) he would have had to rely on a changed climate of opinion. While it would not be necessary for there to have been a favourable consensus as to the quality of Soyinka's personal output, Jones would have had to rely on an environment of shared professional experience, in which such canonical statements could be entertained. The change of tone and expectation in his statements reflects the consolidation, discussed in the previous chapter, of an institutionalized literary culture claiming increasing allegiance and representativeness in public life, in the intervening years.

Jones's stature as a literary historian, critic and editor in African literary studies does not need to be argued. His influence over the institutionalization of African literature has been considerable.⁶ It seems appropriate therefore, to attempt to assess the terms of that influence, by isolating the values that Jones affirms in his criticism, as well as the analytical conventions that are used to establish them, and by placing these values and conventions within the context of the growth and development of the indigenous discipline.

✓ / It will be argued that the normative or ideological dimensions of Jones's criticism are derived from certain dominant conceptions within British literary culture, and that the tensions produced by the interaction between Jones's inheritance and the pressures of his time and place are severe. In their most acute form, these tensions have to do with the problems of regionalism as opposed to universality, and contemporaneity as opposed to timelessness, problems which inhere in the British legacy but which when transplanted into the local context, become exacerbated.⁷ (It will be argued, in particular, that in Jones's work history and social context, though not ignored, are valued negatively, as the means whereby an idealist realm of transcendent literary values is established and affirmed. Finally, I shall attempt to identify the historical pressures to which this idealism is a response.

In 1965 Jones published Othello's Countrymen, a study of the 'African in English Renaissance drama'.⁸ The project which the

work undertakes would have had considerable appeal in African literary studies, for a number of reasons: firstly, in a particularly fertile field of historical scholarship, it holds out the possibility of establishing a new kind of orientation to Shakespeare and his contemporaries (surely, from a traditional British point of view, the body of literature which is at the 'centre' of English studies), an orientation in which local interests have prominence.⁹ Secondly, Jones's project could be seen as taking part in that development within comparative criticism known as 'image studies'. This development could be seen as having been dynamic and strategically appropriate at the time. It constituted a bold delineation and rejection of foreign or imperial stereotypes of local peoples and their cultures, and included attempts at alternative forms of self-definition. In its stronger forms, an active politicization of cross-cultural perceptions was involved, undertaken in concert with the nationalist and anti-colonial sentiments of the period. Ezekiel Mphahlele's The African Image¹⁰ (published in 1962, the year Jones was completing his research for Othello's Countrymen¹¹) is a fine example of the possibilities within image studies in this period.

Given a potentially receptive environment, the degree of scholarly caution (and lack of adventurousness) in Othello's Countrymen is extraordinary. The book is notably marked by a complete absence of polemic, of pioneering flourishes. In no sense can it be said to belong in the company of The African Image, because Jones allows his material to divert attention away from contemporaneous pressures (i.e. the accretion of historical detail is allowed

to dominate, and consequently the dynamic and interpretive aspects of the enquiry are severely restricted) and if there were any temptations to speak a popular language, Jones rigorously avoids them. However, precisely because of these tendencies, the work is in retrospect illuminating in pointing to the set of literary predispositions which Jones had absorbed from the British context, and which he was later to bring to bear on the work of African writers.

The central argument of Othello's Countrymen is that a 'progressive development' is to be found in the uses made of Africa in English Renaissance drama. In the more primitive uses, the continent and its imagined inhabitants provide a fund of spectacle and exoticism (especially in Greene and Marlow). In marginally more sophisticated uses, certain stereotypes of Africans begin to emerge: for example, that of the black or villainous Moor, a heathen, who is inherently treacherous (such as Muly Hamet in The Battle of Alcazar, Aaron in Titus Andronicus, Eleazor in Lust's Dominion); also the 'white' Moor, who is dignified, noble, and pious (though misguided) in observing his religion (such as the Prince of Morocco in The Merchant of Venice). The development culminates in the figure of Othello, in whom Shakespeare breaks with convention to present 'a Moor who was not so much a native of Barbary, as he was a player in this wide and universal theatre. He illustrated in his fall not so much the weakness of Moors, but the frailties of human nature . . . Othello stands alone among the Moors of the era.'¹²

It is a commonplace of historiography (of literary historiography no less so) that one's perspectives on the past are shaped by the present, that history can be put to different uses, depending on one's assumptions and priorities. This fact is obviously well known to Jones, who is able to show to what uses the Renaissance dramatists put the historical material provided for them by the classical legends (Herodotus, Pliny), reports of explorers (written up or translated by Hakluyt and Pory), and popular myth. However, the uses to which Jones puts the results of his research, his evaluative judgements, seem to reflect the pressures as much of the British as the African context. The high points of literary history are made for Jones (at least in Othello's Countrymen) when cultural stereotypes arise and are broken. The breaking of conventions is the central historico-cultural event. The tracing and recording of such moments does make for lively scholarship, and there is, latent in Jones's study, a certain appealing sense of cultural history as a dynamic process. The idea of process, however, is negated by Jones because the breaking of stereotypes does not take place in a continuous, perhaps dialectical fashion. At a particular point (essentially, a mythic moment) the process reaches the stage of culmination or fulfilment, when a certain text departs from convention sufficiently to enter a realm of timelessness and universality (Othello becomes Man). Thus the text achieves a kind of apotheosis where history has no claim on it anymore, and we are presented with the paradox of an historical development making possible the emergence of a work which is loosed from all historical ties. How this paradox arises is perhaps not really a mystery. In a conventional literary education, one

begins with 'the major work', i.e. it is already freed from history by its insertion into a canon of similarly free-floating works. If after an encounter with this work one's curiosity is aroused to enquire into its context then, conventionally, one goes to the literary resources of the period and constructs the work's 'background' (Othello's countrymen). In a certain epistemological sense, therefore, the purpose of the exercise is to confirm what one already 'knows'.

Similar tendencies in Jones's approach to literary history are to be found in other parts of the book. In the first chapter he documents the literature about Africa that was available to the Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, and finds that while Hakluyt would have provided for plots and settings in his treatment of North Africa (stories of forced conversions to Islam, treachery, heroic resistance or surrender), Pory appears to have been used explicitly (direct textual parallels are found to passages in Antony and Cleopatra, Othello and The White Devil). In the survey of 'English Masque and Pageantry', Jonson's Maske of Blacknesse is singled out as being 'a perfect blend of matter and manner; in it the extravagance which was germane to the masque is controlled by a disciplined imagination.'¹³ In the discussion of the language of the plays, it is only Shakespeare who is able to integrate his images of Africa with the larger concerns of a work: in Antony and Cleopatra he creates a 'poetic image of Egypt and its queen which vibrates with energy and spirit', and the allusions are 'threads in the fabric of the whole poetic structure'.¹⁴ In all of these instances what is confirmed is con-

ventional (British) 'literary' knowledge (sources for a given text) or criteria for evaluation (integration of language and theme). The closing sentence of the study illustrates precisely my contention that Jones's view of the purpose of literary history (a view which is not of his own making, but which he clearly feels he must adhere to) is to confirm the dominant or received assumptions and valuations:

Thus by the oblique route of a study of the use made of Africa by Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, the triumphant genius of Shakespeare can once more be demonstrated.¹⁵

It is possible to draw out of Jones's study more subtle indications of his idealism. In attempting to do this I shall avoid suggesting that Jones ought to have undertaken a different kind of study altogether, based on different historical sources. Such an argument would not be very illuminating. What interests me here are the kinds of questions which Jones does not pursue, given that his research shows that they were available to him as avenues of enquiry. Jones shows that the stereotypes of 'black' and 'white' Moors persisted long after the appearance of Othello, that the stage characterizations of Moors 'reverted to type'. In other words, the cultural history which enabled Shakespeare to break with convention was by no means ended by the presentation of Othello as a representative of 'human nature'. (And then 'Moorish' figures were later to be replaced by the image of the Noble Savage.) The sense of Othello reflecting, then, an ideal summation or point of culmination in Renaissance perceptions of Africa, which is the explicit line of argument of the book, is contradicted by the his-

torical developments taking place. One would expect that this would lead Jones to review or qualify the argument, to distinguish more clearly between his 'ideal' and the historical forms of these stereotypes, or perhaps to look into the factors which enabled the cultural stereotypes to persist, despite interventions such as Shakespeare's. Clearly, an historical interest in these stereotypes would go beyond the immediate context of Renaissance drama or its direct literary resources, and would have to be developed with reference to the material determinants of the popular culture. It is not the case that Jones is entirely uninterested in such considerations. He does enquire in a way into the social basis of popular consciousness:

Apart from [the stage types of Moors], popular notions of Africans were circulating widely in the form of books both scholarly and popular, and in the gossip of sailors, traders and slavers who were now sailing to Africa in ever increasing numbers In addition to all this second-hand information, Londoners seem to have had opportunities of seeing Moors both black and white [sic] in their streets. The newly discovered portrait in England of a sixteenth-century Moorish nobleman has revived interest in the embassy sent by the King of Morocco to Queen Elizabeth in 1600. The presence of Negroes in England at about the same time is also clearly attested by Queen Elizabeth's edict in 1601 for the transportation of 'negars and blackmoores' out of the country, where their increased number was giving cause for alarm It was against this background of stage tradition and popular experience that Shakespeare's Moor appeared.¹⁶

The method here is informal and anecdotal, showing that Jones

is interested more in illustrating the 'background' to the text, than in exploring in some depth the social determinants of the given ideas. And yet the passage does have possibilities in this direction: 'sailors, traders and slavers' shows an awareness of the economic dimensions of early English exploration, and the remainder of the passage points to the social consequences of this economic imperative: on the diplomatic front, there appears to have been a need for a rapprochement of nobilities (could the figure of Othello have been representative of a certain political or merchant élite, known in the circles of political life or merchant capital in England; in which case, he was not 'universal' but Renaissance 'man'?¹⁷); and on the popular level, what would the social relationships of the English and North Africans have been like, what kind of a nuisance were they, that the 'negars and blackmoores' were to be deported? Such questions, clearly within the compass of Jones's study, would throw much light on Othello and its relation to the cultural stereotypes of the period.

Perhaps the dominant impression left by Othello's Countrymen is that the investigative or interpretive aspects of the book are remarkably thin, given the amount of care that has been taken in documenting the Africa-related features of the language and dramaturgy of Renaissance drama. The interpretive core of the study, which is essentially the point about Othello's break with convention, is repeated three times: in the third and central chapter, in the summary of that chapter, and in the conclusion. The inference that one draws is that Jones's concerns are largely belle-lettristic; in terms of cultural enquiry, there is little that could

be said to contradict this view.¹⁸

Before examining The Writing of Wole Soyinka it would be useful, as a preliminary test case, to look at an early paper by Jones on an African work. While preparing Othello's Countrymen for publication Jones was already participating in the growing debate on the future of local criticism and the nature of its engagement with indigenous literature. At the 1963 Freetown conference he spoke freely in open sessions, and his contribution on Things Fall Apart was intended to be exemplary of the approach that he was advocating.

For Jones the Africanization of the syllabus meant that it was possible in the teaching of literature to re-establish 'the vital connection between literature and life', a connection, so the argument ran, which was largely lost on Nigerian students reading the literature of England.¹⁹ Given a broadly empirical view of literature, this argument is entirely consistent with Jones's affirmative stance with respect to received assumptions and valuations. There is no contradiction here between the manner of Jones's response to a local priority, and his absorption of the British orthodoxies. What remains to be seen is in how far the received orthodoxies are carried through, as analytical conventions, in his criticism of a given text.

The purpose of the exercise was to illustrate by practical example what ought to have been the functions of a university-based criticism at the time: namely, to 'stimulate a discerning readership

for African literature', 'to reveal the qualities of individual works' and 'to help establish general critical standards'.

In his analysis Jones's method was to set up a general critical principle in terms of which various aspects of the novel could be described and evaluated (aspects such as language, characterization, depiction of incident, theme, plot, tone). This first principle or primary category is 'wholeness' or 'unity'; thus all aspects of the novel must relate in some way to the main 'theme', which is 'the clash between traditional Ibo society and the Christian imperialism of Britain'. Germane to this theme is Achebe's sensitive use of English to depict the Ibo environment, his use of local, rural imagery and traditional proverbs. Achebe thus 'presents life and belief in Umuofia in the idiom of people who believed in it.' Certain iterative references assist in the creation of 'unity': for example, hanging is referred to twice, which prepares the reader for Okonkwo's death by hanging at the end; similarly, before Okonkwo commits the offence of killing a kinsman accidentally with a gun, he almost kills one of his wives by similar means (this being a sign of consistency in plot and characterization). Also on the grounds of 'wholeness', Jones identifies the 'one structural weakness' of the novel, namely that Ezinma, Okonkwo's daughter, 'is made so much of in the earlier sections of the novel', but 'does not feature in the climax in any significant way.' Finally, by noting Achebe's irony in the novel's closing paragraph, Jones highlights with due weight the moral implications surrounding the 'callousness' of the colonial administration; thus in conclusion the formal aspects of Achebe's

novel are seen as an expression of the work's moral seriousness.

'Wholeness', realism in establishing the setting and idiom (or 'life and belief'), iteration and consistency of formal details, an appropriate apportioning of emphases in a narrative, a sense of moral seriousness: these are the prevailing analytical conventions of the paper, the practical meaning of the 'general critical standards' required by the new discipline. The tradition in which such criticism is schooled is readily identifiable as British orthodox. It involves a cluster of currencies which public education in the United Kingdom has distilled out of the line of continuity that runs from Coleridge, to Arnold, to I.A. Richards, to Scrutiny. What can we infer, at this point, about the value or usefulness of these currencies to Jones, given his context and the purpose of his paper?

The value of these analytical conventions is partly, of course, that they are readily available as a set of valuations and procedures; crudely put, they provide terms for something to be said about the new literature, without throwing the critic into methodological difficulties at a time when the introduction of the literature to the syllabus has become a matter of some urgency. But there is of course more than mere convenience at issue here. An ideological function, I suggest, is being served by these conventions as well; its specific character can be gathered from the fact that it is the poetic features of the literature that are, in the main, being held up for attention. The emphasis on 'wholeness' (in the traditional terminology this is of course

'organic unity'), on iteration and integration, on thematic reflection, derives from a poetics of practical criticism whose favoured genre is the contemplative lyric. Such an emphasis holds to a fairly static view of the text, one in which the literary object is firmly set and framed. Thus in Achebe's novel narrative texture is subject to thematic integration, which in turn derives from moral seriousness. In the circumstances of a new discipline seeking to define and establish itself (and where, in the prevailing ideological climate the idea of nationhood is a governing principle) such an emphasis is useful: it conveys a sense of the secure foundations of a literary order, an achieved tradition.

Is it the case, then, that Jones implicitly makes British New Criticism do for African Criticism what it did for its lesser exponents in the United Kingdom, i.e. assist in the delineation of an ideal order of literary values which could be given prominence in public education? With this question in mind, we shall turn to Jones's work on Soyinka.

It is a well known phenomenon in Anglo-American critical history that fresh departures in criticism are often based on a fairly specific or circumscribed range of literary texts, and that as these departures then become institutionalized, the applications of the theoretical principles involved become universalised. In this way the innovations become the entrenched and challengeable orthodoxies. One thinks here of Northrop Frye's study of Blake leading eventually to a mythopoesis of the literary system as a whole, or of Eliot's retrieval of the Metaphysical tradition leading

to the 'dissociation of sensibility' thesis, which became a formula for a certain literary history of England. What is highlighted by this phenomenon is the fact that certain texts (or select traditions) serve particular ends, and that sometimes it takes an act of critical scepticism to recover and reveal those ends.

Similarly, we may ask what it is about Soyinka's oeuvre that it lends itself to the kind of reading that Jones will bring to it. More specifically: what, in Soyinka's writings, makes him available as a candidate for the title 'Our W.S.' in Jones's estimation? Part of the answer is provided by Jones himself:

Soyinka's plays have the complexity of organisation and of language that distinguishes literature from mere writing. The seriousness of their content make [sic] him a vital voice to his generation, but it is his art that sets him apart from a large number of well-meaning writers with a message. His work responds to serious criticism, and indeed needs it, for in the more serious plays there is a surface difficulty which has to be penetrated before the essence of the work of this important writer is fully revealed.²⁰

It is important to note that the meaning of 'serious criticism', for Jones, is fairly restricted, involving the 'penetration' of 'surface difficulty'. If the epistemological assumptions behind this metaphor are decoded, it is clear that Jones understands serious criticism to be necessarily empirical or text-immanent. Surface difficulty is rendered intelligible by close reading in the conventional sense, by practical criticism. At the same time, the 'essence' of the work lies in the inner reaches of the text,

'under' the surface. Meaning or value is therefore located in an ideal realm, only marginally or inchoately revealed in the language of the surface. These assumptions are fairly common currency in the dominant or traditional forms of British criticism. But what is of particular interest here is the fact that Jones should take up Soyinka in earnest — and we may extrapolate at this point — because, unlike those of 'a large number of well-meaning writers with a message', Soyinka's writings present a rather more dense literary texture,²¹ thereby lending themselves to the procedures of practical criticism. Soyinka provides grist for the mill, therefore, of a certain code of established professional practices, and in this narrow methodological sense can do for African literary studies what Shakespeare did for the metropolitan literary culture. In the British context, however, especially in Scrutiny, the procedures of practical criticism came to be associated with much more than simply a technical repertoire. Text-immanence was bound up with the ideological imperatives of a liberal-humanist 'minority' position which viewed the reading of literary language as an act of apprehension by a refined sensibility. Jones is clearly quite comfortable with this position, but more to the immediate point, Soyinka's writings appear to provide him with fertile grounds for applying it. In an essay entitled 'Progress and Civilization in the work of Wole Soyinka' (published in 1971, before the full-length study appeared) Jones is able to discuss a significant body of Soyinka's works from the point of view of the moral distinctions between material and spiritual progress, vulgarity and taste, arrogance and sensitivity, superficiality and depth, and so on.²² Behind these distinctions, of course, lie those of culture/anarchy

(Arnold) and mass civilization/minority culture (Leavis), but Jones commands these distinctions in his analysis with a facility which suggests that the writer has served the critic well.

One would expect Jones to have inherited from Shakespeare studies a wider critical repertoire than the form of textual exegesis and 'sensitivity' which the term 'practical criticism' has come to suggest. In Edgar Wright's The Critical Evaluation of African Literature, an anthology of essays which attempts to foreground the whole question of theoretical approaches to African literature, Jones contributes a chapter entitled 'Wole Soyinka: Critical Approaches'. Since Wright's book and The Writing of Wole Soyinka were first published in the same year (1973), it would be appropriate to regard the essay on 'Approaches' as a kind of companion piece to the fuller account of Soyinka's work provided in The Writing of Wole Soyinka. In fact, since Jones does not offer any theoretical speculation at all in the book, the essay could be regarded as the means whereby Jones was attempting to formulate a critical position, in the context of the more extended project of a critical introduction to Soyinka. This is how Jones addresses the question of 'approaches' in the essay:

Coming to Wole Soyinka from Shakespearian criticism is excellent preparation if only because it puts us on our guard against trying to fit him into preconceived patterns. Shakespeare by his practice produced a personal poetic which demonstrates that drama cannot be circumscribed by rules, not even when those rules claim the authority of as observant a mind as Aristotle's. Anyone who approaches Shakespeare therefore

with his mind made up comes away angry, confused, or just disappointed. Contrary to prescriptions, his clowns mingle with kings; he created soldiers who behave like blackguards and black men who speak like poets. His characters and his scenes put a girdle around Europe, and his five acts are as likely to span sixteen years as four hours. He used the romantic convention while undermining its mechanical concepts. Shakespearian criticism requires an informed but open mind.²³

The paragraph shows tellingly that — despite the expectations aroused by the essay's title — Jones's critical intuitions rebel against the notion of 'approaches', which are equated with 'pre-conceived patterns' and 'prescriptions'. The approach being advocated is in fact anti-theoreticism, the approach of 'no-approaches' which is a reflex of British empiricism. But more alarming than this, perhaps, is the use that is made of the Poetics: Aristotle's codification of the elements of Greek tragedy amounts in this context to a rather antiquarian straw target. It is thus a markedly conservative caveat that is used to support the appeal to 'an informed but open mind'. When Jones begins to apply this concept of openness to Soyinka, he makes use of a particular cause célèbre of Shakespeare studies, the playwright's transformation of his sources:

The critic of Soyinka should approach him in a similar way; equipped but open. His drama incorporates (more accurately, fuses) diverse elements from quite different traditions of thought and methods of presentation. The product of this fusion is often striking and novel, having transformed the original particularities from which it sprang.²⁴

Jones then moves directly into close analysis, having despatched, as it were, the question of approaches. His procedures of analysis rely on a familiar range of critical methods: through a discussion of Soyinka's use of the device of the 'flashback', his 'fusion of various elements' is shown; Soyinka's use of popular and folk traditions is discussed, with reference being made to Yeats; there is some discussion of the variety of status-roles and social registers found in the plays, this providing enrichment and local appeal in the characterizations; and finally, emphasis is placed on Soyinka's themes in the early plays, and Aristotle is invoked here in more positive terms ('Soyinka is a serious dramatist in the Aristotelian sense; his plays deal with things that matter; things that are worth troubling about.'²⁵) The following themes are listed and discussed: 'the fate of man in his environment; the struggle for survival; the cost of survival; the real meaning of progress; the necessity for sacrifice if man is to make any progress; the role of death — even the necessity for death in man's life.'²⁶ The direction of the essay, therefore, is towards a closing affirmation of the moral wisdom of Soyinka's drama, a wisdom embracing the universal category of 'man'.

At this point, it will no longer be necessary to illustrate Jones's dependence on the orthodoxies of the metropolitan literary system. In turning to The Writing of Wole Soyinka, the discussion will hinge on the nature of Jones's engagement with his time and place; in particular, I shall look more closely at the values that are actively sought by Jones in Soyinka's writings. My intention is to understand more fully Jones's criticism as an intervention

in a given context.

Wole Soyinka has his roots in Yoruba culture . . . but his experience extends far wider; his formal education and his working experience have brought him into contact with ideas from the whole modern world . . . His imagery ranges from tropical yam roots to the falling acorns of Tegel. But he starts as a Yoruba.²⁷

Part I of The Writing of Wole Soyinka introduces the reader to 'Soyinka, the Man and his Background'. The intention here is clearly to provide the broad outlines of the biography of a great writer; in fairly conventional terms, Soyinka is presented as a man of letters, possessing a wide-ranging critical intelligence and moral wisdom which have been shaped by certain formative influences. There are, however, particular features of this brief biographical introduction which deserve comment. Firstly, while an interpretive argument is presented, the selection and organisation of detail are not designed for a critical examination of the facts; the emphasis is primarily on 'the man', with various aspects of the biography highlighted under clear headings such as 'Yoruba Culture', 'Christian Influences', 'Soyinka and the Stage', 'Basic Concerns', with the effect that the anticipation of a certain kind of undergraduate consumption is suggested by the formal outlines of a didactic literary register. Secondly, as the paragraph quoted above illustrates, Soyinka is presented as a writer with clearly-marked regional origins, but with a wider appeal as well: 'Yoruba culture' and 'the modern world' are the principal axes in terms of which the writer is valued. Jones's responses (in this study) to the demands of his context therefore,

are to attempt to formalize Soyinka's position within literary education, and to present Soyinka's socio-cultural background as the dominant influence in the shaping of an essentially individual vision, which, through its depth and contemporary relevance, becomes universally applicable. These intentions, I suggest, can be seen as illustrating the main features of the situation of anglo-phone criticism as described in the previous chapter: the institutionalization of African literature is undertaken within the framework of cultural nationalism, with orthodox metropolitan assumptions assisting actively in this process.

But we should look more closely at the ways in which Jones's intentions are realized. What is of immediate interest is how Soyinka's relation to the traditional culture is viewed, since it is this question that is perhaps most crucial in revealing the ideological dimensions of the study. We are told that apart from 'having been born a Yoruba and thus being naturally a part of the culture, Soyinka has taken a deep and scholarly interest in the culture of his people.'²⁸ The scholarly interest is illustrated with reference to the care that Soyinka takes in translating Fagunwa in The Forest of a Thousand Demons, and to his mythopoetic essay on tragedy in a Yoruba context, 'The Fourth Stage'. Soyinka's involvement with Yoruba culture is thus treated simply as a given: there is no enquiry made into the claims that are advanced in this aspect of Soyinka's work, instead we are told unproblematically that Soyinka shares 'the same mythological world as Fagunwa and Tutuola'. The extent to which Soyinka may also be distanced from traditional culture, the fact that scholarship has its own

priorities over and above those of a 'natural' involvement (by birth) in this culture, or the fact that translation involves the placing of a work in a context of readership with altered assumptions from those in which the original work was received, these are some of the issues which are ignored.

This uncomplicated insertion of Soyinka into an indigenous cultural tradition is congruent with the treatment that the tradition itself is given. 'The Yoruba', Jones says, 'are one of Africa's most remarkable peoples. Their culture is not only rich, but shows a remarkable capacity for survival in areas far removed from its original home . . . for example in Brazil and other parts of South America, the Caribbean, and in Sierra Leone, areas which centuries ago, largely through the slave trade, came into contact with Yoruba of the diaspora.'²⁹ It is essentially a fixed and static view of culture which emphasizes those elements which survive centuries of social life and even historical upheaval. How these elements would have been moulded to the demands of their new situations would surely be a valid line of enquiry. And one may add that Jones clearly means survival rather than adaptation, since the comment is not developed in any significant way. The comment is also in keeping with a general tendency to treat the traditional culture as property, as a kind of dead weight. For similarly, in discussing Yoruba 'Occupations and Festivals', Jones shows no concern for the problem of how the rites and mythological systems of the culture of an agrarian subsistence community, when extracted from their original context and used in the cultural practices of an urban literate or university community, change

in both their forms and social meanings. For example, after mentioning the prevalence of palm wine in Soyinka's writings as a symbol of ceremony and celebration, Jones tells us that 'Soyinka's special interest in palm wine . . . is exemplified by a celebration of the rites of the Harmattan solstice which he organized at the University of Lagos and for which he composed poems both in Yoruba and English, all around the theme of palm wine.'³⁰ The information is provided without comment or further enquiry. Even when the evidence that Jones uses calls for a more careful weighing of the social dynamics of the phenomenon involved, Jones does not confront the problem:

The head of Yoruba government is the Oba. He is a king who rules surrounded by ceremony, and combines both political and priestly functions. The Oba's spiritual authority is exemplified in Kongi's Harvest in which, even when the Oba's political authority has been eroded by the new regime of Kongi, he still has reserves of moral and spiritual authority with which to compel deference from the functionaries of the new regime. Baroka, the wily Bale of Ilujinle, is another of Soyinka's evocations of the Yoruba traditional ruler.³¹

In both of these figures the meaning of traditionalism is more complex than this suggests. The Bale in The Lion and the Jewel³² is capable of using his traditional authority for corrupt purposes, while the Oba's moral legitimacy in Kongi's Harvest,³³ which derives from his traditional position, has to be taken up and mobilized in an act of defiance by a younger generation of the political avante-garde (represented by Daodu and Segi) before it is seen as having any effect on Kongi's regime; and even then the effect

that it has is mainly psychic and momentary, with the values of the traditional authority capable of being affirmed only through a form of tragic sacrifice.

In general, then, Jones uses the evidence of traditionalism in Soyinka's writings to affirm in normative terms the continuity and survival into the present of elements of the traditional culture. The assumption being made is that the mere evocation of tradition carries its own kind of critical authority. It is the mere presence of tradition rather than the uses to which it is being put, that engages Jones's interest. This failure to address the social meanings or functions of Soyinka's use of tradition is, I believe, both the consequence of an intellectual conservatism,³⁴ and an indication of the cultural nationalism at work in Jones's discourse. On the evidence provided by Jones, tradition becomes a kind of symbolic or moral property in the dialogue that cultural nationalism conducts with the West (I refer here to the ideological relations discussed in the previous chapter) and this can be seen as having imposed limits on the development of a more contextualized or historically dynamic understanding of the varied roles that tradition could be made to play in a literary culture.

Turning now to the introduction to Soyinka's 'Basic Concerns', it is worth illustrating in some detail Jones's absolute insistence on humanist and universalist categories. All of the following statements appear in less than 100 lines of text:

(1) 'The essential ideas which emerge from a reading

of Soyinka's work are not specially African ideas although his characters and their mannerisms are African. His concern is with man on earth.'

- (ii) 'Any universal god or any abstraction for the source of life could take Forest Father's place just as any man of sensibility could take the place of the Yoruba artist.'
- (iii) 'Atunda is a symbol for a universal idea which Yoruba mythology and religion conveniently supplies.'
- (iv) 'This is not a Yoruba or an African idea. If it has validity, this is a general validity.'
- (v) 'The clash between the individual and the society . . . is a universal phenomenon; the martyr who is the positive product of the clash is also fortunately (I reproduce Soyinka's irony) universal.'
- (vi) 'Soyinka's work celebrates life, and deprecates its opposite.'
- (vii) '. . . the general wastefulness of war . . . is an aspect of Soyinka's work that is most obviously relevant to the whole modern world.'
- (viii) 'The message of "Idanre" is a universal one, equally applicable (only more so) to those who are armed with nuclear weapons as to those who have only swords.'
- (ix) 'Human life represents constant challenges and constant choices, and man has to thread his way through all the contradicting alternatives.'
- (x) 'These are the sorts of ideas which give Wole Soyinka his universal appeal.'³⁵

Responding to similar comments made elsewhere by Jones concerning Soyinka's work, Achebe has said, 'would it truly be invalid for a Nigerian writer seeing a dissatisfaction in his society to write about it? Am I being told for Christ's sake that before I write about any problem I must first verify whether they have it too in New York and London and Paris?' Achebe adds that he believes that Jones's comments were written 'absent-mindedly', and that he 'has simply and uncritically accepted the norms of some of the prevailing colonialist criticism'³⁶ The evidence set out above, however, clearly shows that Jones's argument is consciously and consistently intended.

I have argued that Jones's uncritical valorization of tradition reflects the imprint of cultural nationalism. The objection might be raised that Jones's insistence on Soyinka's work's being universally applicable contradicts this argument. However, cultural nationalism in criticism would require that literary quality is available for appropriation beyond the limits of a particular cultural community, by national and pan-African interests. Yoruba cultural phenomena are therefore to be seen as representative or typical, rather than as locally specific. Furthermore, cultural nationalism tends, for obvious historical reasons, to draw the West into its sphere of reference, and this tendency could well emerge in criticism in the form of an appeal to universal values, even though, more commonly, western appeals to universalism are rejected.

An account of Jones's procedures of critical analysis in The Writing

of Wole Soyinka would not reveal any surprises at this stage. It is sufficient simply to note that both in the formal arrangement of the analyses and in the blow-by-blow treatments of each text, the received or orthodox conventions apply. The analyses are arranged according to the generic categories of Soyinka's oeuvre, 'Plays', 'Poetry' and 'Fiction', and each analysis proceeds in routine though scholarly fashion to provide interpretations, to show the integration of language and theme, to explore imagery, metaphor and symbolism, to reveal Soyinka's thematic depth and consistency, and so on. Before concluding this chapter I shall look more closely, however, at Jones's treatment of The Interpreters, because at first it seems to advance certain propositions which are not characteristic of Jones's criticism in general.

There are signs in Jones's reading of the novel which show a desire to press beyond the empirical givens of the text, and to advance conclusions which relate the novel to perceived socio-cultural conditions obtaining in Nigeria. What the reasons are for this incipiently new line of enquiry is not clear. It may be possible that the change of emphasis is the result of Jones's having been alerted, perhaps by comments such as Achebe's, to the fact that universalism was not a particularly popular theme. It is also curious that this emphasis should emerge in the discussion of The Interpreters, with which the study closes, but that it does not appear in the introduction or earlier analyses. Whatever the background might be for their appearance, Jones does seem to be posing (tentatively) new kinds of questions:

The primary society with which the novel is concerned is contemporary Nigeria in which, although the ancient traditional life still makes its appearance, the predominant impression is of a society in the grips of a turbulent modernity. Its institutions — universities, hotels, churches, night-clubs, newspapers, etc. show an uneasy blend of influences. Somewhere in the background linger the numinous presences of the old gods . . . 37

And again:

Egbo's irritation reflects the uneasy quality of a society which has not completely come to terms with itself. It is in this uncertain atmosphere that corruption, tribalism, window-dressing hypocrisy, and moral uncertainty flourish. It is through all these uncertainties that the interpreters seek a path . . . 38

Jones seems more than usually willing, then, to situate this text within a wider framework of socio-cultural phenomena. What needs to be assessed at this point, is how this contextualization takes place, on what terms it is achieved. From the extracts quoted above, it would appear that Jones's interest in Nigerian society or in Soyinka's depiction of that society is predicated mainly on moral grounds. The stress is on 'moral uncertainty' and by implication, the protagonists' quest for authentic values. At the same time, the question of morality is brought into play by the transitional character of this society, the passage between two different moral orders, the 'old' and the 'new', or the 'ancient traditional life' and the 'turbulent modernity'.

The emphasis on moral integrity in this analysis reveals itself elsewhere in Jones's criticism. We have seen, for example, that when the 'thematic' dimensions of literature are addressed the emphasis falls on moral wisdom, depth or profundity. This emphasis also emerges in Jones's repeated usage of an opposition between the 'forces of life' and the 'forces of death', notably when discussing imagery.³⁹ The particular nuance that is given to this emphasis in the discussion of The Interpreters, however, deserves comment, for it is made with reference to a given social context. In this regard the distinction that is made between 'traditional' and 'modern' needs to be decoded. In a different though comparable context, Michael Vaughan offers a materialist interpretation of the ideological meaning of this distinction:

. . . the couple traditional-modern . . . not only severely inhibits the possibility of socio-critical analysis, it leads in another direction altogether. This couple polarizes two social systems, each defined as the negation of the other, bound in a relation of absolute complementarity. Furthermore, the terms of the couple are invariably used with the implication that traditional means static and modern means dynamic. The ideological dimension of this couple is its capacity to evoke a problematic of modernization: a problematic of adjustment. The . . . history of Western colonial and capitalist penetration is rendered in terms of a problem of adjustment to 'modern' life.⁴⁰

While Jones does argue that the past continually invades the present in different ways, and is therefore an active and not static dimension in this present (I refer to the fictional past in the novel, not the historical past of the traditional culture) the results

of the conflicting tensions between traditional and modern are generally presented in the terms described by Vaughan. Thus the confrontation between Dehinwa and her rural relations shows that 'the old and the new Africa in this fluid society sometimes confront, sometimes uneasily blend with each other'; and when Egbo says that 'the dead should have no faces' (referring to his ancestral home at Osa), Jones 'replies': 'The fact is, they have.'⁴¹ In these instances, as in others, the old and the new are certainly 'polarized', and it is clearly a 'problematic of adjustment' — specifically moral adjustment — that is being asserted. It becomes possible at this point to identify the source of Jones's diagnosis of the society depicted in the novel. The 'moral uncertainty' of the society-at-large (which is explained as the consequence of the transition from old to new) is a concept which is in fact derived from a liberal metaphysic of individual or personal growth. The concept of the individual as essentially a free agent who is capable of self-correction, is generalized to apply to the social totality. Thus we are told not only that all 'the young interpreters are individuals trying to make sense of their world', but also that this society is one 'which has not completely come to terms with itself'.⁴²

The individualist dynamic of growth, adjustment, creative choice, the quest for personal solutions, is the central organizing principle of Jones's analysis. It is articulated first in the discussion of Egbo's characterization, it is sustained in the analysis of Sekoni, and used again in relation to Kola and Sagoe. (Bandeleg is dis-

cussed mainly in terms of his function as a 'prod' for the others' 'consciences'.) It also provides the link for Jones to move on to a discussion of the satirical aspects of the novel, for the chief failure of Oguazor, Faseyi, Chief Winsala and Sir Derinola, is that each of them has a false facade which disguises a lack of moral integrity and humanity.⁴³ Both the group of interpreters, and the butts of Soyinka's satire, are drawn into and judged in terms of the quest for moral integrity by the closing remarks of the analysis:

The young interpreters, as distinct from others in the novel who are self-satisfied and complacent, are engaged in a search for individual solutions . . . They have to cut their way through a maze consisting of their own personal resources and limitations and the opportunities offered by their immediate environment of Nigeria The novel is an artistic realization of the opportunities as well as the awful responsibilities of being an individual on his own in a maze of world.⁴⁴

In sum, Jones's analysis links all the various aspects of the novel (characterization, satire, social diagnosis) under the organising framework of a bildungsroman. The problem with this perspective is that it fails to deal adequately with the sense of fragmentation and disparateness which dominates such 'closure' as the novel is able to achieve. I wish to avoid performing a cheap sleight-of-hand at this stage, by revealing the true 'meaning' of the novel which Jones has missed. Jones himself does recognise this sense of fragmentation, and he points to it obliquely on several occasions. Bandele's rise to prominence comes at a time when, towards the

end of the novel, 'the various relationships move uncomfortably to some sort of resolution'.⁴⁵ The lines of Joe Golder's Negro spiritual symbolize 'the essential loneliness of each of the seekers'.⁴⁶ The interpreters have to 'make sense' of their world, one which is described as a 'maze',⁴⁷ and a 'coherence' has to be made of 'the jumble that is life.'⁴⁸ Apart from registering the sense of fragmentation in his turn of phrase, Jones also writes about the novel's 'restless' style, and the fact that it 'makes few assertions, but it probes and exposes themes for judgement.'⁴⁹ And while Jones is committed to a view of the novel as a bildungsroman, he also on occasion appears to have difficulty organizing the central 'experiences' depicted into the kind of progressive, developmental pattern that is usually associated with this form. There is a certain fixed opposition suggested, between an aggregated confusion of experiences, and the individuals who are looking for 'solutions':

. . . the total meaning of life for Soyinka's young men is to be painfully pieced together out of the trivia and the routines of existence — sexual encounters, riotous nights at the night-club, cocktail parties, interviews for jobs, encounters with corrupt politicians, witnessing the chasing of thieves, attempts at formal philosophical formulations, attempts at artistic expression, teaching university classes and marking uninspired essays, witnessing gory road accidents, being bereft of friends by death, looking for residual presences of the ancient gods in their midst, trying to make sense of the claims of new religious manifestations. Through all these, men are to make a coherence of the jumble that is life.⁵⁰

The difficulty Jones has in ordering these experiences is shown in his moving from 'trivia and routines of existence', to a catalogue of the major experiences encountered (it is not clear, inter alia, where the trivia or routine lies in 'looking for the residual presences of the ancient gods'), to a closing affirmation of the quest for personal meaning. The various strands of this argument are not connected, which suggests that the notion of bildung is not being (or cannot be) carried through.

The notion of bildung is not only uncomfortably imposed, it also diverts attention away from the novel's suspended or fragmented sense of closure. David Maughan Brown has argued that the lack of coherence in Part II of The Interpreters is the consequence of Soyinka's failure to bring anything to bear on his analysis of society other than a 'cult of sensibility' or 'taste', which is informed by the normative dimensions of 'practical criticism'.⁵¹ The main support for this argument lies in the fact that the targets of Soyinka's satire seem to be derided chiefly for their lack of taste. Also, the opposition of the interpreters to the satirized elite never emerges in stronger terms than random rebellious or iconoclastic gestures. The alternative to this view, is to understand the sense of fragmentation or lack of coherence as a formal attempt on Soyinka's part to develop a mode of characterization that relies on a traditional Yoruba mythological framework.⁵² Specifically, Soyinka draws on the creation-myth of the Yoruba pantheon, as the formal means to achieve a high degree of individuation in characterization. The splitting of the original Yoruba

deity into the multiple godhead of the pantheon provides a point of reference for the depiction of the growth to maturity of each of the interpreters. Similarly, the kind of 'interpretation' expected of the main protagonists, is not that of social analysis, but a psychic identification with the local mythological sources. This view draws for support both from the novel and from the mythopoeic emphasis of Soyinka's essays.⁵³

The latter view is one that, strangely enough, was quite available to Jones, at least as a line of enquiry. In his analysis he makes several references to the traditional 'gods', and in the biographical introduction to the book he includes a section entitled 'Salvation and the Individual Will' in which Soyinka's interest in the process of individuation, and the traditional myth which is invoked in support of it, are discussed. However, this aspect of the introduction and the analysis of The Interpreters are not connected. One infers that, in the end, a particularly stringent, empirical dedication to the 'facts' of the text, coupled with a commitment to the novel as a bildungsroman, may have prevented Jones from entering into this broader kind of enquiry, even though he had, in a sense, prepared the ground for it.

In conclusion, and to return to the polemics of the beginning of this chapter, it can be argued that at various levels of Jones's criticism, in the critical models he adopts and in the analytical conventions and valuations with which he is most familiar, the effects of his work are to entrench a range of operations in literary idealism. The consequence of this tendency is a denial of history, cultural enquiry and social process.

NOTES

3. Eldred Jones: Othello's Countrymen
The Writing of Wole Soyinka
1. "'Not for all time, but for an Age": an approach to Shakespeare studies', in Widdowson, P. (ed.), Re-Reading English, op. cit., pp. 150-151. Mulhern (op. cit., p. 131) points out a more sophisticated identification of Shakespeare with the 'national culture' in the context of Scrutiny, one which relies on the popular, homespun and 'felt' qualities of Shakespeare's language.
 2. The Writing of Wole Soyinka (London: Heinemann, 1973, rpt. 1978) p. 152.
 3. Board of Education Report, The Teaching of English in England (Newbolt, 1921), quoted by Longhurst, op. cit. The influence of the Report as a collation of dominant ideas on literary education continues to be felt to this day.
 4. *ibid.*, p. 151.
 5. 'Academic Problems and Critical Techniques', in Moore, G. (ed.), African Literature and the Universities, op. cit., p. 91.
 6. Jones is Professor of English at Fourah Bay College. Othello's Countrymen was given an award at the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar (1966), and The Writing of Wole Soyinka was both reviewed with acclaim in African Literature Today and Research in African Literatures and re-published in the Twayne World Author Series (1974). His introduction accompanies the African Writers Series edition of The Interpreters. Thus far he

has edited all 12 volumes of African Literature Today. Achebe has said, 'I regard Eldred Jones as our finest literary scholar, a man of great sensitivity and perception whom I should have much preferred not to disagree with.' (Morning Yet on Creation Day, op. cit., p. 52).

7. I am indebted here to Michael Vaughan who has discussed this process in the South African context in 'A Critique of the Dominant Ideas in Departments of English in the English-Speaking Universities of South Africa', Critical Arts (Grahamstown), 3, 2, 1984.
8. Othello's Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama (London: OUP, 1965).
9. This line of enquiry is also developed in American Black studies. See Lemuel Johnson's review of Tokson, E.H., The Popular Image of the Black Man in English Drama 1550-1688, Research in African Literatures (Austin, Texas), 15, 3, 1984.
10. The African Image (London: Faber, rpt. 1974).
11. See the Preface to Othello's Countrymen.
12. op. cit., p. 119.
13. ibid., p. 33.
14. ibid., p. 132.
15. ibid., p. 132.
16. ibid., p. 87.
17. Shakespeare's immediate literary source for Othello is known to have been Giraldi Cinthio's Hecatommithi, first

published in Venice in 1566. (See the Arden edition, M.R. Ridley (ed.), Methuen, 1958.) Jones's study highlights the question of the popular thinking which is likely to have surrounded the reception of the source, and of course Shakespeare's interest in it.

18. A fondness for belle-lettrism is also apparent in 'Freetown - The Contemporary Cultural Scene', in Fyfe, C. and Jones, E. (eds.), Freetown: A Symposium (Freetown: Sierra Leone University Press, 1968), which is simply a survey of Freetown's 'cultural life', with no serious attempt made to enquire into the meaning of the events listed.
19. in Moore, op. cit., p. 89-95 passim.
20. 'Wole Soyinka: Critical Approaches', in Wright, E. (ed.) The Critical Evaluation of African Literature (London: Heinemann, 1973) p. 72.
21. I am grateful to Michael Vaughan for alerting me to these implications in an Extension Lecture on The Interpreters (mimeo, 1982).
22. in Heywood, C. (ed.) Perspectives on African Literature, (op. cit.) pp. 129-137. See David Maughan Brown, 'Interpreting and The Interpreters: Wole Soyinka and Practical Criticism', in English in Africa, (Grahamstown) 6, 2, 1979. Maughan Brown's argument is also referred to below.
23. in Wright, op. cit., pp. 51-52.
24. *ibid.*, p. 52.
25. *ibid.*, p. 64.
26. *ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

27. The Writing of Wole Soyinka, op. cit. p. 3.
28. *ibid.*, p. 3.
29. *ibid.*, p. 4.
30. *ibid.*, p. 7.
31. *ibid.*, p. 8.
32. Wole Soyinka, Collected Plays 2 (OUP, 1974).
33. *ibid.*
34. It may be possible that Jones's treatment of tradition in Soyinka is influenced by certain commonplaces in Shakespeare studies, where popular medieval tradition such as the festivals of the solstices are revered in uncomplicated ways as being simply a part of Shakespeare's (or England's) inheritance.
35. op. cit., pp. 10-13 passim.
36. Chinua Achebe, Morning Yet on Creation Day, op. cit., p. 52.
37. op. cit., pp. 162-163.
38. *ibid.*, p. 164.
39. The opposition is used most frequently in the analyses of the poems; for example, *ibid.*, p. 132.
40. Michael Vaughan, 'Ideological Directions in the Study of Southern African Literature', English in Africa (Grahamstown), 9, 2, 1982, p. 48.
41. op. cit., pp. 163-164.

42. *ibid.*, p. 156, p. 164.
43. *ibid.*, pp. 160-162.
44. *ibid.*, p. 166.
45. *ibid.*, p. 160.
46. *ibid.*, p. 165.
47. *ibid.*, p. 166.
48. *ibid.*, p. 159.
49. *ibid.*, p. 166. This valuation may owe something to Leavis's emphasis on 'a reverent openness before life' in The Great Tradition (Penguin 1968, rpt. 1974).
50. *op. cit.*, pp. 158-159.
51. David Maughan Brown, 'Interpreting and The Interpreters: Wole Soyinka and Practical Criticism', in English in Africa (Grahamstown), 6, 2, 1979.
52. David Attwell, 'Wole Soyinka's The Interpreters: Suggestions on Context and History', in English in Africa (Grahamstown), 8, 1, 1981.
53. In arguing for this view now I would attempt to address the social meaning of Soyinka's use of this mythopoetic framework. Soyinka's use of a myth of creation and individuation, in relation to his group of protagonists, seems to be a means whereby their objective social position (in their education, vocations and social attitudes the interpreters are unquestionably part of the élite) is harmonized or meliorized in relation to the broader populace.

4. WEST AFRICAN TRADITIONS:

Wole Soyinka, Myth, Literature and the African World

Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike,

Toward the Decolonization of African Literature

Emmanuel Obiechina, Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel

I

I have argued that in the ideological programme of cultural nationalism, literary criticism has been anxious to affirm the completeness and coherence of African cultural systems, and that its themes have implied the creation of national and pan-African allegiances. I have also argued that in West Africa, where the ideological effects of social stratification and the history of popular struggle are less marked by conflict than is the case in the East, the sense of an indigenous tradition based on vernacular, oral or traditional sources is given particular emphasis. In this chapter I shall look more closely into some of the strategies by which the process of identification with local cultural resources, and the generalization of their value and applicability, is achieved. I do not claim that the three texts I have chosen are fully representative of West African or even Nigerian efforts in critical tradition-building; rather, they illustrate appropriately that the various strategies of tradition-building are not uni-dimensional; that is, within a common ideological framework, they reveal a range of emphases and formative influences. (On occasion these differences come into explicit and polemical confrontation with one another.

In the case of Chinweizu et. al. versus Soyinka, the style of debate has even moved beyond the bounds of normal academic respectability.) Briefly, and schematically, the characteristic critical operations which are employed in these three works can be described respectively as mythopoeic, formalist, and sociological (in the sense which is derived from the 'sociology of literature').

In 1967, with the Nigerian nationalist movement undergoing the violent schisms associated with the Biafran secession, Soyinka was moved to address the question of 'the lack of vital relevance between the literary concerns of writers and the pattern of reality that has overwhelmed even the writers themselves in the majority of the modern African states.'¹ He charged that in the context of independence, writers found a new significance in 'cultural definitions' and 'unfelt abstractions', in prospecting 'in archaic fields for forgotten gems which would dazzle and distract the present.'² However, while characterizing this 'present' as the 'stage of disillusionment', Soyinka was equally concerned with maintaining a sense of continuity with the past. While calling for a particular quality of 'vision' which would be focussed on this present, writers were at the same time to keep faith with the traditional culture:

The test of the narrowness or the breadth of [the writer's] vision . . . is whether it is his accidental situations which he tries to stretch to embrace his race and society or the fundamental truths of his community which inform his vision and enable him to acquire even a prophetic insight into the evolution of that society.³

This statement contains some of the key coordinates of Soyinka's critical position, one to which he has held firm for at least a decade since 1967.⁴ The principal concerns in this standpoint are undeniably social in emphasis, insofar as the writer is called on to speak cogently to his time and place; however, Soyinka adds a prescriptive and evaluative dimension to this position, which relies on a particular orientation to the traditional past. Indigenous culture is seen as providing the essential epistemological and aesthetic categories for a fully engaged social consciousness in literature. The task of the writer is to re-discover and activate indigenous systems of perception and value, in his engagement with the socio-historical burdens of the present. The ambiguities of this position, judged from the point of view of this study, lie in the implied tension between historical and a-temporal (or idealist) conceptions. That Soyinka should characterize the writer's situation in history as 'accidental', and that he should refer to indigenous systems of belief in terms of 'fundamental truths', suggests an appeal to idealism in a discourse of cultural nationalism. But let us examine Soyinka's position more fully.

Soyinka's critical position is most fully developed and applied in the thematically integrated collection of essays, Myth, Literature and the African World.⁵ I shall attempt to trace the relationship between historical and idealist conceptions in these essays, and in so doing, attempt some kind of assessment of the social meanings of Soyinka's involvement with the traditional culture.

The critical project (which goes under various names, such as

'self-apprehension' and 'race retrieval') is grounded in a mythopoesis of Yoruba ritual and contemporary drama. Before interpreting this mythopoesis in terms of the concerns of this study, I shall have to summarize briefly the key aspects of the argument. In 'Morality and aesthetics in the ritual archetype', Soyinka discusses the three mythic 'paradigms' represented by the deities Sango, Obatala and Ogun, and places them within the context of their evocation in different dramatic settings. The primary dramatic context is ritual, where the setting is the 'cosmic entirety', and where the purpose of the performance is to enable the community to respond to a 'fundamental, visceral questioning' concerning the 'cosmic location' of 'being'.⁶ The communal presence in ritual establishes the stage as a 'charged space' which is experienced as being identical to the realm of pure meaning, a 'chthonic' realm of 'essence - ideal'. Collectively, the deities are the primordial challengers of this realm, and are represented in drama in their different passage-rites which are 'a projection of man's conflict with forces which challenge his efforts to harmonize with his environment, physical, social and psychic.'⁷

The story of Sango (the instrument of a 'swift, retributive justice', whose agency is lightning) is that of a king's apotheosis; consequently, it represents the consolidation of the 'racial or social origination' of the community. As the first king of Oyo, Sango ruled a land cursed by death, famine and plague, caused by a crime of injustice against a disguised deity. Sango had to bear the responsibility for this act, but, being the principle of justice, this involved confronting his own fate. He blasphemes the supreme

deity, Oludumare, commits suicide, and thereafter becomes accepted into the Yoruba pantheon.⁸

Obatala represents the 'aesthetics of the saint', the 'virtues of social and individual accommodation', 'patience', 'suffering', 'peaceableness', the 'imperatives of harmony', the 'essence of quietude and forbearance'. He is also the creator of human life. His story begins with his passion for palm-wine, which leads him, while drunk, to create malformed creatures, the crippled, deaf and dumb. On a journey to Sango's kingdom he is tricked and imprisoned by Esu, and a plague descends on humanity. As in Sango's story, the god is then called on to exercise the attributes of his own nature, confronting his own destiny in 'a trial of the spirit'.⁹

Ogun embodies the principle of continuity between the world of 'essence-ideal' and materiality. His history completes the Yoruba cosmogony, in that he was the first 'pathfinder', linking the gods with mankind. He is 'craftsman and warrior', 'lord of the road', embodiment of 'will', of both 'creative and destructive' energies. His story also involves an episode of drunkenness: while acting as the king of Ire, during a particular battle with the town's enemies he drank palm-wine and slaughtered some of his own people. But his principal act was that he traversed the 'primordial chaos' which separated the deities from mankind; for this reason he represents 'the communal will invested in a protagonist of its choice'. The experience of the communicant in ritual who plunges into the realm of pure meaning is paralleled by Ogun's passage.¹⁰

Such are the three paradigms which Soyinka elicits from Yoruba mythology. But what is the relevance of these paradigms, to what purpose are they turned? The essay contains several extended 'digressions', in which Soyinka teases out the implications of the Yoruba mythological resources, in a sustained debate on the uniqueness of the 'cultural matrix' from which they are drawn, a uniqueness which is established by contrast with what are perceived as typically western conceptions. It is thus by way of setting the indigenous mythological framework in an oppositional relationship with putative conceptions of western culture that Soyinka is able to generalize from the immediate context of Yoruba tradition to what is presented as the separate and essential domain of 'the African world'. I shall illustrate this pattern of argument.

The first of Soyinka's digressions involves a discussion of the metaphorical space which is invoked in ritual. This space represents the cosmic totality, and it is defined in opposition to the 'Manichean' divisions of European culture. Ritual drama does not survive in cultures which 'narrow' the 'cosmic whole'; the further the cosmos recedes, the less it can be 'challenged' or 'appeased' in 'communal action'.¹¹ The second digression involves a discussion of the 'temporal anachronism' of Sango's being associated with lightning after his act of suicide. The 'anachronism' is apparent, however, only in a western, linear sense of time, whereas in 'traditional thought' it is accommodated within a 'cyclic' conception of time.¹² In a third digression he considers the possibility that the apotheosis of Sango may reflect a forgotten phase of Yoruba religious history, involving the struggle for authority

of an élite priesthood. The implication here is that African religions, like others, were open to manipulation by competing interest groups. However, when evoked in ritual, such considerations in the history of the deities' relationship with the community are said to be irrelevant, for in this dramatic context the gods are invested with meta-historical powers. The 'drama of the gods' involves the community in 'bringing to birth a new medium in the cosmic extension of man's physical existence'.¹³ In a fourth digression Soyinka discusses the acts of hubris committed by the gods, and notes that in each case the deities have to pay recompense to humanity in some way. A principle of 'natural restitution', or 'morality of reparation' is therefore affirmed, with the congruent claim that this principle is absent from the Greek pantheon (and by implication from Christianity).¹⁴ Soyinka then illustrates this 'attribute of fallibility' of the gods, and supports the claim that the principle is uniquely African by comparing two plays concerning the god Obatala. In a Yoruba play by Obutunde Ijimere (The Imprisonment of Obatala) it is simply asserted that the god's error was the result of his being tipsy, whereas in a Brazilian play (Zora Zeljan, The Story of Oxala) the act of hubris of the god is ameliorated through Christian syncretism, so that 'the existence of the malformed in human society' is rationalized 'within the overall framework of farsightedness and supra-human understanding of the creator-god'. The tendency of the deities towards an infallible and abstract ideal in the Brazilian play is foreign to the Yoruba context.¹⁵

The thematic thread which links these various arguments appears

to be the structural-functionalist principle of the balancing and adjustment of tensions,¹⁶ the regulation of the cultural health and cohesion of the community. The affirmation of the 'communal will' in response to the disturbing presence of the 'cosmic totality', communal 'recollection and cohesion', the release of 'compensating energies' for disruptions in nature, a principle of 'complementarity' between society and the gods, these are affirmed as the moral codes which are implicit in the Yoruba mythological heritage, codes which provide that heritage with its distinctiveness.¹⁷

The functionalist element in Soyinka's reading of Yoruba metaphysics is not endorsed, however, by other commentators. While John S. Mbiti notes that the Yoruba tended to associate many natural phenomena with gods or spirits (he numbers the Yoruba deities at 1,700) and that sacrifices, offerings and prayers were the 'essence of the Yoruba religion',¹⁸ he also argues strongly that the divinities were hierarchically related to each other with Olodumare at the head, a pattern which was 'parallel to the Yoruba socio-political structure'.¹⁹ Idowu also affirms this hierarchical element (describing Yoruba metaphysics as 'diffused monotheism') and says that all the cults of the separate deities derive their strength from Olodumare, who as 'the head of the whole community [i.e. the pantheon] is the Pontifex Maximus of all the cults together. Hence the saying, "Every festival is the king's festival".²⁰ It is curious then, that Soyinka should underplay the hierarchical factor, and even go so far as to see the 'drama of the gods' as being untouched by the stratified relationships of the deities and their various cults.

Soyinka's is not, however, structural-functionalism in the usual sense of the term, as an anthropological understanding of the ways in which societies adjust to social tensions by resolving historical contradictions at the level of myth or ideology. For the process of adjustment or accommodation, the regulation of the community's inner cohesion, and its perceived relationship with the cosmic whole, appears in Soyinka's essay to be a process which takes place purely within culture. Although Soyinka argues that the realm of pure meaning, which is made accessible by ritual, is 'the essentialization of a rational world-view, one which is elicited from the reality of social and natural experience',²¹ he does not provide any historical illustration of the sort of circumstances in which ritual has this efficacy. He writes instead of a 'fundamental', 'visceral' questioning, which suggests that the 'reality of social and natural experience' (i.e. a community's history) is identical with a community's metaphysical speculations. The two orders of experience, historical and metaphysical, are collapsed into one another, merging in a trans-historical psyche. With Yoruba mythology apparently somewhat decontextualized and dehistoricized, we are presented with the 'African world' as a collective psyche, a set of distinctive epistemological traits. These traits — most importantly, the capacity to see the essential and the material as fused with one another (a form of animism), and the capacity to accommodate or adjust to disruption — are, above all, non-western and race-specific.²²

My drawing of a hard distinction, however, between historical and metaphysical categories, raises difficulties. Is it fair to ask

of Soyinka that he should demonstrate historically the efficacy of his reading of Yoruba metaphysics, when the historical records are at best indirect or diffuse? The question leads us to a severe limitation which African historiography has seldom confronted. Our problem, essentially, is the lack of integration between, on one hand, African history, social studies and materialist accounts of pre-colonial modes of production, and on the other, the study of pre-colonial cultures. The general historiographical dilemma can be illustrated forcefully by the following encounter between Ranger and Kimambo and Parrinder's Religion in Africa:

The need to demonstrate the possibility of African religious history emerges . . . clearly from Dr Parrinder's recent survey. . . . The book has been generally well received; it makes an attempt precisely to avoid the separate treatment of 'traditional' religion, of Islam and of Christianity. But this attempt is undercut by Parrinder's renunciation of the possibility of a historical approach to African 'traditional' religion. He gives us an almost exclusively narrative history of Islam and Christianity, hardly pausing to analyse them in their various African forms, but his treatment of African 'traditional' religion is purely descriptive and in the idiom of a timeless ethnographic present. Thus his book cannot help reinforcing the distorting impression of the dynamic 'historic' religions of Islam and Christianity confronting passive traditional cosmologies.²³

This 'timeless ethnographic present' is certainly the dominant mode of representation of pre-colonial belief-systems, both in anthropology and in studies of traditional religion such as Mbiti's and Idowu's, referred to earlier. As is apparent from the remarks

of Ranger and Kimambo, historians would seem to have less difficulty writing historical accounts of cultural transformations occurring under the impact of Christian or Islamic interventions. That this is so may seem self-evident enough. But why is it that in materialist investigations of pre-colonial modes of production there is virtually no attempt made to come to terms with culture? These studies discuss pre-colonial political economy, the relations of production and the formation of the state or 'polity' (these reflecting, I believe, appropriate priorities in research) but there seems to be a common silence on ideology and consciousness.²⁴ The work of Ranger and Kimambo seems to point the way in this regard, though their emphasis on East and Central Africa cannot assist us in examining Soyinka's interpretation of Yoruba metaphysics.

The problem is not, however, entirely paralysing. For although we are unable to achieve a genuinely historical perspective on traditional Yoruba belief, we are certainly able to discern what Soyinka is attempting to do with it, and this, after all, is the point. The comments of Lye and Murray, though made with reference to Sotho-Tswana culture, are apposite in this regard: '... anyone who represents a culture as an integral package, the private property of a given population, is guilty of reifying the concept of 'culture.' And later they add, 'a culture cannot be studied in a historical vacuum. ... an assertion of cultural integrity serves intellectual or political interests of one kind or another.'²⁵ Soyinka's account of Yoruba metaphysics not only claims it as the property of a given population, thus reifying it, but it also generalizes about who or what group benefits from an attachment

to this culture. The generalization applies both to groupings within traditional Yoruba society and to contemporary Nigerians (perhaps West Africans?). Exactly by whom (and when) is the 'African world' 'possessed'?

Given, then, that Soyinka's argument implicitly involves a denial of historical process, with the 'African world' defined as a permanent set of epistemological attributes or a form of trans-historical ideation, how does he reconcile this with the overtly socio-political orientation of so many of his statements? In terms of Soyinka's argument, in order for writers to be able to get to grips with the burdensome 'present' in the terms of concepts derived from the traditional culture, he needs to be able to deal with the problem of change, i.e. change within the systemic ordering of the 'African world'. The dilemma is implicitly recognized by Soyinka, and its 'resolution' (as we shall shortly see) is closely bound up with his understanding of tragedy in an African context. Before we can come to this question, however, we shall have to follow the development of the argument in the second essay of the collection, 'Drama and the African world-view'.

The idealism which has been noted in Soyinka's poetics thus far is further entrenched in this second essay. Here we are told, '... western dramatic criticism habitually reflects the abandonment of a belief in culture as defined within man's knowledge of fundamental, unchanging relationships between himself and society and within the larger context of the observable universe'.²⁶ The two cultures are said to be essentially different: the 'artifacts'

of the African 'are evidence of a cohesive understanding of irreducible truths', and in the western, 'creative impulses are directed by period dialectics'.²⁷

There are two central and related themes in this essay. The first is developed from the brief discussion in the first essay of the 'charged space' in ritual. Basing his comments on observed performances, Soyinka argues that through the choric chants and liturgies, and by the isolation of the individual communicant as the communal representative challenging the numinous world, the arena of performance comes to represent the entire, metaphysical cosmos. The performance must therefore be seen as an integral part of 'man's constant efforts to master the immensity of the cosmos with his miniscule self'.²⁸ This basic dramaturgical model is said to be only briefly glimpsed in western theatre history: in Greek tragedy, in medieval liturgical drama, and in Shakespearian tragedy (particularly in King Lear). Soyinka then goes on to show that the model is still operative in African tragedy, in analyses of J.P. Clark's Song of a Goat and Duro Ladipo's Oba Koso. The discussion of western and African views of tragedy, the essay's second theme, is premised on the idea that 'the socio-political question of the viability of a tragic view in a contemporary world' is foreign to the African context, since social change does not affect the basic dramaturgical model referred to earlier. In support of the argument George Steiner is cited (from The Death of Tragedy): the decline in 'tragic grandeur' of the European 'dramatic vision', is related to the decline of 'the organic world-view and of its attendant context of mythological, symbolic and ritual

reference'.²⁹ Perhaps the central argument of the essay is conveyed in the following:

Where society lives in a close inter-relation with Nature, regulates its existence by natural phenomena within the observable processes of continuity — ebb and tide, waxing and waning of the moon, rain and drought, planting and harvest — the highest moral order is seen as that which guarantees a parallel continuity of the species. We must try to understand this as operating within a framework which can conveniently be termed the metaphysics of the irreducible: knowledge of birth and death as the human cycle; the wind as a moving, felling, cleansing, destroying, winnowing force; the duality of the knife as blood-letter and creative implement; earth and sun as life-sustaining verities, and so on. These serve as matrices within which mores, personal relationships, even communal economics are formulated and reviewed The profound experience of tragic drama is comprehensible within such irreducible hermeticism. Because of the visceral intertwining of each individual with the fate of the entire community, a rupture in his normal functioning not only endangers this shared reality but threatens existence itself.³⁰

This argument takes the form of assertion only, for the cultural traits which are valorized are entirely uncontextual and generalized. However, in the absence of adequately historical accounts against which to test Soyinka's view, we can only offer a counter-assertion: the all-too-obvious response is that such organicism is difficult to sustain in the light of the colonial and capitalist penetration of Africa; and, since Soyinka invokes the question of modes of production and their effects on consciousness, the subordination of subsistence economies to money economies and

the alienations from land tenure and labour that follow from the imposition of new markets. What cannot be doubted is the fact that the passage is an example of cultural nationalism working with organicism, both as a means of 'identifying down'³¹ with local communities, and as a means of establishing itself in opposition to the West. But our problem remains: how does Soyinka deal with the question of change within the ordering of 'the African world', given that his position asserts the need for a contemporary engagement?

The question of change is resolved for Soyinka by the inherent flexibility of animist cultural systems. An attitude of 'philosophic accommodation' is apparent in the attributes of 'most African deities':

attributes which deny the existence of impurities or 'foreign' matter, in the god's digestive system. Experiences which, until the event, lie outside the tribe's cognition are absorbed through the god's agency, are converted into yet another piece of the social armory in its struggle for existence, and enter the lore of the tribe. This principle creates for society a non-doctrinaire mould of constant awareness, one which stays outside the monopolistic orbit of the priesthood, outside any claims to gnostic secrets by special cults.³²

This regulative principle of adjustment, the balancing of tensions, the domestication of intrusive pressures, is crucial to Soyinka's insistence on the need to re-activate indigenous conceptual systems for use in the present, for its implications are that colonialism can have no essential hold on the indigenous culture. Thus the

distinguishing feature of the 'African world' (i.e. its functionalism) also ensures its survival. The African world is retained as a centre of psychic authority because it can assimilate intervention. While there is a certain paradox in, on one hand, Soyinka's insistence on the need for an active re-creation of the indigenous culture, and on the other, his affirmation of the resilient autonomy of this culture, the paradox is deflected in Soyinka's terms by the claim of the culture's inherent adaptability. One cannot fail to notice a certain circularity in this argument; in effect, Soyinka is saying that the 'African world' is autonomous because it adapts, and because it adapts it is autonomous. Soyinka's analyses, however, re-introduce the concept of tragedy. In J.P. Clark's Song of a Goat, the problem of impotence as a vehicle for tragic drama is validated because of the organic culture of the society in which it is set. In Ladipo's Oba Koso the audience is made aware that 'the tragic unfolding of the reign of Oba Sango is not merely an interesting episode in the annals of a people's history but the spiritual consolidation of the race through immersion in the poetry of origin.'³³ In both plays the resolutions that are earned through death or sacrifice affirm the sense of origins, of continuity between past and present. From this one can see the importance of tragedy in Soyinka's poetics: through tragedy, the replete organicism of the 'African world' is preserved.

In the third and fourth essays of the collection, Soyinka's analyses of contemporary African literature (mainly the novel) are geared towards an elucidation of the term, the 'social vision'. In 'Ideology and the social vision (1): The religious factor', he begins

by drawing a distinction between a 'literary ideology' and a 'social vision'. The problem of a literary ideology is said to be a European obsession with 'the ontology of the creative medium', with literature having an 'objective existence in itself.' The realm of manifesto-art, or even, by implication, of aesthetics, is rejected as consumerist (art is packaged and labelled for consumption) and essentially un-African ('the lack of excessive stylistic contrivance in modern African literature is due to the refusal of the artist to respond to the blandishments of literary ideology — manifesto art . . .',³⁴). Yet Soyinka recognises that African literature has predominantly been 'formulated around certain frameworks of ideological intent'.³⁵ But this literature is, or ought to be, one of social vision, in which the writer 'is far more preoccupied with visionary projections of society than with speculative projections of the nature of literature, or of any other medium of expression. The ontology of the idiom is subservient to the burden of its concerns . . .',³⁶ The following passage then defines the 'social vision' more closely:

A creative concern which conceptualizes or extends actuality beyond the purely narrative, making it reveal realities beyond the immediately attainable, a concern which upsets orthodox acceptances in an effort to free society of historical or other superstitions The intellectual and imaginative impulse to a re-examination of the propositions on which man, nature and society are posited or interpreted at any point in history; the effort to expand such propositions, or to contest and replace them with others more in tune with the writer's own idealistic disposition or his pragmatic, resolving genius; this impulse and its integrative

role in the ordering of experience and events leads to a work of social vision.'³⁷

Within a western literary tradition this position of attributing special significance to the artist's 'social vision' is familiar as quite simply, Romantic. There may be some acknowledgement of this coincidence in Soyinka's saying that writing which 'claims for itself, subtly or stridently, the poet's famous province - unacknowledged legislators of mankind - with or without the poetry or the poetic insight, is always socially significant.'³⁸ Shelley's dictum is perhaps less appropriate as a point of reference for Soyinka's concern with 'social vision', than would be Blake's or Coleridge's concern with the transforming powers of imaginative perception. But western literary precedents can be pushed too far here, since Soyinka's stated models for the position he adopts are indigenous. Behind the 'social vision' lies Ogun, the creative principle, the embodiment of will, the link between the ideal and the material.³⁹

✓ How is the notion of 'social vision' to be interpreted? In order to answer the question we shall have to follow the development of Soyinka's argument further. In his applications of the principle to literature, Soyinka comes close to developing a canon of 'great texts' which exemplify his poetics. What interests him are works in which a coherent system of belief or normative code both informs a writer's depiction of reality, and presents possibilities for the 'resolution' of social conflict. In the third essay the emphasis falls on 'the religious factor'. Both Christianity and Islam have

led to a literature of 'reconciliation'. However, the social perspectives in this literature are not simply valorized on the grounds that they are informed by religion. The social vision must adhere to the demands of realism. In William Conton's novel The African and Lewis Nkosi's play Rhythms of Violence the theme of Christian love as the resolution to South African race-conflict is seen as naive: '. . . writing directed at the product of a social matrix must expect to remain within it, and resolve the conflicts which belong to that milieu by the logical interaction of its components, one cannot stand outside of it all and impose a pietistic resolution plucked from some rare region of the artist's uncontaminated soul.'⁴⁰ These weaker examples of the literature of reconciliation are contrasted with Richard Rive's play Make Like Slaves and some of the poetry of Brutus. Soyinka is broadly in sympathy with the efforts of Islamic writers (Hampate Ba in Tierno Bokar and Cheikh Hamidou Kane in L'Aventure Ambigüe) who, in articulating a principle of 'universal humanism', are also attempting 'to counter the Christian colonial culture of African experience with another cultural force from within the heritage of the society.'⁴¹

This brings us closer to decoding the social meaning of Soyinka's attachment to 'social vision'. It may be the case that his sympathy with Islamic efforts in literature to displace a Christian influence derives from his own commitment to cultural rehabilitation, though in the interests of 'the African world'. Certainly, Soyinka claims that the creation of new gods, and the destruction of outmoded ones, is a process which is familiar to traditional culture.⁴² (The purpose of Soyinka's analysis of Achebe's Arrow of God is to illus-

trate this process at work in the novel, where Achebe's depiction of traditional religion (represented by the priesthood of Ulu) consistently shows the indigenous deities being manipulated by secular pressures and conflicts within the clan.) An interesting implication in this is that systems of belief or value are presented as being potentially contestable, as being available for appropriation and re-activation in what seem to be historically variable ways. However, for Soyinka this conflictual dimension in metaphysics is not, principally, subject to social determination. It is rather an arena of choice, where the definitions and re-definitions are made by a rational individual consciousness, directing and controlling the various conflicts of interest. Soyinka seems to be unattached, as it were, by belief or some other form of necessity, to a particular metaphysical code (even the 'African world' is activated not by faith but by definition); but what belief or necessity there is in Soyinka is attached to the discourse of cultural definition itself. Meaning resides, replete, in discourse: the construction of the 'African world' is its own validation, and the form of social liberation that it implies exists, as an order of words, as solid as any institution. Perhaps it is here that we can finally locate Soyinka's slippery idealism. The first sentence of his collection reads, 'I shall begin by commemorating the gods for their self-sacrifice on the altar of literature, and in so doing press them into further service on behalf of human society, and its quest for the explication of being.'⁴³ The discourse of the essayist has taken over from ritual as the mediator between society and the world of pure meaning.

The question that must be posed is, what historical priority urges Soyinka's attachment to the definition of an African form of 'being'? The final essay opens with the following quotation from one Lothrop Stoddard (1920):

Certainly, all white men, whether professing christians or not, should welcome the success of missionary efforts in Africa. The degrading fetishism and demonology which sum up the native pagan cults cannot stand, and all Negroes will someday be either christians or moslems.⁴⁴

Soyinka's reply to this is that sub-saharan Africa must be 'the largest metaphysical vacuum ever conjured up for the purpose of racist propaganda.'⁴⁵ It is to counter the well-nourished myths of cultural imperialism that Soyinka undertakes his 'quest for and the consequent assertion of the black cultural psyche'.⁴⁶ His work is a further indication, if one were needed, of how historically serious are the consequences of these myths. But how does Soyinka mediate the historical necessity for their repudiation? Soyinka's position as a literary intellectual would of course predispose him to the cultural dimension of colonial penetration. But even more to the point, it seems that precisely because the European mythology of Africa proposed that the continent had no culture, Soyinka intervenes within this realm, providing definition for the 'African world' in order to contradict the theory of the 'vacuum'. The task can only be accomplished, as it were, in a discourse of immanence.

The final essay of the collection, 'Ideology and the social vision

(2): The secular ideal', distinguishes between perspectives which are informed by institutionalized religions, and those which are informed by 'rational' choices based on forms of perception that are claimed as authentically indigenous. 'In contrast to what would be called strictly religious processes in other societies, the harmonization of human functions, external phenomena and supernatural suppositions within individual consciousness emerges as a normal self-adjusting process in the African temper of mind.'⁴⁷

A first phase of this process of 'self-adjustment' within literature is given as the rejection of 'foreign' religious and cultural systems, including Christianity and Islam. This phase, which is described as initiating a 'secular' social vision, is seen in the iconoclasm of Mongo Beti, Yambo Oulougouem and Ayi Kwei Armah. A second phase 'combines the re-creation of a pre-colonial African world-view with eliciting its transposable elements into a modern potential.'⁴⁸

Works in which this tendency is evident (a tendency which Soyinka would like to regard as 'prescriptive'⁴⁹) are Armah's Two Thousand Seasons (which asserts a past 'whose social philosophy was a natural egalitarianism'⁵⁰); Sembene Ousmane's God's Bits of Wood, where the discipline of a collective struggle is said to be conveyed in the terms of a communal, heroic epic; and Camara Laye's The Radiance of the King, whose central objective 'is the re-establishment of a cohesive cultural reality, with its implicit validation and imperviousness to explication through external world-views.'⁵¹

Soyinka's appropriation of Sembene's God's Bits of Wood to the literature of secular social vision is noteworthy, since this novel

is more commonly referred to as a cause célèbre of the possibilities for historical-materialist fiction in Africa. What interests Soyinka is not the novel's depiction of a collective struggle whose roots lie firmly in the relations of production, but the fact that it develops and articulates a social ethos or moral code in which the prescriptions of international socialism have become fully indigenized:

In spite of the talk of books, the widening of foreign knowledge and the usual paraphernalia which accompany the process of external indoctrination, the emphasis of social regeneration is carefully laid on the intrinsic ethical properties of existing society, their adaptation and universal relations. Key events are brought into being by this adaptive process, making both of revolution and the emerging social structures a growth process which can be described as truly indigenous.⁵²

The stress is placed on the uniqueness of the context, not on economic or socio-political determinants. The passage does show, however, that Soyinka is able to envisage making common cause within the political sphere with those tending towards socialism, despite the generally racial, cultural and national emphasis of the essays. What he specifically rejects as 'foreign' is materialism, informed by Marxist theory:

. . . the new ideologue [the Marxist] has never stopped to consider whether or not the universal verities of his new doctrine are already contained in, or can be elicited from the world-view and social structures of his own people. The study of much contemporary African writing reveals that they can: this group of literature I have described as the literature of secular social vision. It marks the beginning of a prescriptive validation of an African self-apprehension.⁵³

In this passage and on other occasions Soyinka has registered a clear sense of anxiety about the challenge presented to him by critics on his left, and has both issued rebuttals and made overtures of accommodation.⁵⁴ We shall return to this debate shortly. At this stage, I wish to note simply that the existence of the debate is significant in itself, for it indicates that despite Soyinka's claims for the authenticity and traditionalism of his poetics, he was unable to prevent the rifts developing and the challenges being delivered. It is certainly the case that Soyinka's particular form of racial and cultural nationalism, a product chiefly of the climate of his formative years, was by the mid-1970's having to operate in a more pressured space, with more attenuated reception, that it would have had to when the project in self-apprehension' was launched. There is, I believe, a process of etiolation in Soyinka's successive definitions and refinements of the 'African world'; in the progression from the confident assertions relating to Yoruba metaphysics, to the emphasis on the traditional culture's adaptability, to the function of tragedy, to the 'social vision' and finally, to a disgruntled accommodation with more radical positions, we can see a criticism which is constantly shifting ground in an effort to keep faith with its original tenets. That these shifts correspond broadly with the historical trajectory of the literature under discussion, from pre-colonial dramatic forms to the post-independence novel, is perhaps an indication of how difficult Soyinka finds it to adjust to historical demands. The further in the past the literature he discusses, the firmer is the ground beneath him, though of course this ground can only consist of abstraction and a-historicism. But the process of attenuation

which is to be found in Soyinka's discourse is undoubtedly a function of a broader and more profound change, one which occurs in the cultural relations of the time. For the nationalist movement and for the writer, once the 'stage of disillusionment' — as Soyinka called it — had set in, it was not to be easily surmounted by the rally-cry of a social vision based on a return to the roots.

II

The cultural task in hand is to end all foreign domination of African culture, to systematically destroy all encrustations of colonial and slave mentality, to clear the bushes and stake out new foundations for a liberated modernity.⁵⁵

Such is the announcement which opens the assault by Chinweizu et al. on the 'cultural hegemony' of the West over contemporary African literature and criticism. This position is not particularly original in African criticism: it is a position well catered for in Bishop's formulation of African critical 'standards' between 1947 and 1966. What is new in this intervention by Chinweizu et al., is the level of stridency which the book attains, and the degree of thoroughness with which the authors have demonstrated their case. The book's reception, and that of related work by the authors (essays published in Okike and Transition, and the volume The West and The Rest of Us) illustrates the forceful originality of their presentation. Soyinka has written at least five papers in response, either directly to Chinweizu et al. or to the position he believes them to occupy.⁵⁶ And James Gibbs has named

them as the vanguard of a new generation of Nigerian iconoclasts espousing (in Gibbs's view) a rhetorical and tendentious Marxism.⁵⁷

We shall have to assess whether or not Gibbs's view of the authors' being Marxist is accurate. But first, let me establish the parameters of their argument. Chinweizu et al. advocate a conscious and active black nationalism in literature and criticism. The position is acknowledged and explicit. The target of attack is Eurocentrism in all its forms, in its 'privatism', 'pseudo-universalism', and 'anglo-modernism'. Eurocentrism intrudes in the work of western critics of the novel, the oral tradition and contemporary poetry, and in the influence that 'foreigners' have had on the work of African writers and critics. The oral tradition is presented as the appropriate resource for a revitalized nationalist literary culture.

The thrust of the first chapter, 'The African Novel and its Critics (1950-1975)' is an assault on Eurocentrism in the criticism of the novel. The particular targets of attack are Roscoe, Povey, Larson and Palmer, though these critics are also representative of a general state of affairs in 'colonialist criticism'.⁵⁸ The central argument is that an ideological disaffection in these critics' works is masked by their judgements on the formal properties of the African novel. Thus their familiar charges of a 'lack of depth' in characterization, 'thin' plots', 'picaresque' descriptions, 'situational', 'anthropological' and 'autobiographical' themes, 'too much fascination with the past', lack of a 'consistent moral attitude', 'protest literature', etc. are all disguises for the maintenance of Anglo-

Saxon hegemony over African literature. In taking the hatchet to this criticism the indignation of Chinweizu et al. is often justified. They point to any number of selective, partial comparisons with western traditions, the gerrymandering of evidence and selective readings, failures of observation, contradictions of argument and paternalistic generalizations. It is also the case that any suggestion of cultural imperialism in the work of these critics (correctly, they seem to imply that biases can never be 'slight' for they reveal ideological tendencies) is siezed on with relish. One example will suffice. In Mother is Gold Roscoe asserts a theory that Africans are predisposed by cultural factors to shorter narratives, and that if only the writers would realize this, the quality of their work would improve. The rebuttal reaches the following ad hominem crescendo:

After reading such a litany of thoughtless put-downs it is hard to resist the temptation to point out that such so-called perceptive critics as Roscoe are probably the best of the intellectual dead wood floated out from Europe to Africa to clutter up our cultureways with their bloated ignorance. Their mission appears to be to disorient our young minds with dicta that are racist, imperialist and half-baked It is stupid and racist criticism.⁵⁹

There is much comic farce in these exchanges. But more seriously, the alertness of the authors to ideological hidden agendas is a sign of their interest in the socio-political conditioning of literary cultures. (It is no doubt this aspect of their work which Gibbs observes when he refers to them as Marxist.) In how far is this interest carried through, however, to a consistently historical

position in their criticism? In the earlier part of their debate on narrative, the authors venture into the social background of the rise of the novel as a form, concluding that the 'well-made novel' is a function of the development of a bourgeois, secular culture which finally achieved predominance in the mid-19th century.⁶⁰ The distance of this culture from contemporary Africa serves the authors' purposes of showing how criteria of aesthetic evaluation based on the formal properties of the 'well-made novel' are inappropriate in the local context. From the point of view of historical criticism there is an interesting one-sidedness here. The social circumstances behind the rise of the European novel are made explicit, with the territory of literary history being raided, perhaps appropriately, that of Ian Watt in The Rise of the Novel.⁶¹ But this historical interest is not carried through sufficiently to the African novel. Indeed, the argument tends in another direction altogether, to the debate on appropriate formal criteria for evaluating literary quality in African fiction. Literary history, in other words, is made to serve the interests of the polemic against western critics. We shall find, shortly, that this pattern of argument is symptomatic of a more general condition.

Some of the charges against the African novel by colonialist critics (in particular, those of 'thin narrative texture', 'uncomplicated plots' and 'undeveloped characters') are based on the assumption that these 'failures' are attributable to the influence of the oral tradition. Chinweizu et al. go to considerable lengths to prove this argument fallacious, quoting extensively from transcriptions

(mainly from various performances of a classic folk-tale). What is particularly curious here is the conventionality of the analyses to which these pieces are subjected. Of one version of the tale (this rendition of the race between the deer and the turtle running to seven pages) we are told that it has 'arresting images, explanatory digressions, philosophical reflections on life, on social existence and the nature of things, and a variety of moods and tones — including humor, doubt, surprise, and dramatic suspense', all of which proves that the story — given a good transcription — has a good deal of narrative texture. And further:

It contains deft character studies: the deer is portrayed as a smug, over-confident, arrogant, insolent character, a spoilsport who insists on having his way The turtle comes across as a serious, cunning fellow with tremendous imagination and dare, who knows his opponent's psychology and how to take advantage of it The other animals are portrayed as beings who love a good time, who enjoy the thrill of running and showing off their athletic form The society of animals is rendered as, on the whole, a fun-loving, proud, realistic and happy one Now, what more could any reasonable person ask for by way of characterization?⁶²

In proving the colonialists false, the authors rely on a pedestrian, textbook formalism of which the above passage is an illustration. They then quote Eldred Jones's saying that 'we must constantly remind ourselves that the central document is the work itself. It must eventually be judged by what it contains or what can legitimately be implied [sic] from it', and go on to argue:

For literature the central document is the written text itself. For orature the central document, the work itself, is the live performance. Claims that a work of orature does not have one thing or another and is therefore inferior to a comparable work of literature are not to be taken seriously unless it is made clear that the work itself, i.e. the performance, has been consulted.⁶³

The adequate recording of oral performances would involve technical research into an appropriate alphabet of notation, incorporating all aspects of performance such as music, gesture, movement, tonal inflections, speech rhythms, etc. over and above the transcript of speech, so that the notation would approach 'something like a fully scored operatic text'.⁶⁴

There are problems in this argument. We would agree that an alphabetic rendering is an adequate means of transmission for the text of a western novel. Chinweizu et al. are raising the question of an adequate alphabet for the text of oral literature. The point is certainly valid, but to what purposes is it being turned? The authors wish to refute disparaging comments from western critics, and this is understandable, but their argument is to insist on the need for research into an appropriate form of notation for oral performances in order to validate their aesthetic quality. Recently, White and Couzens have had occasion to address the same question in relation to Southern African oral literature. They argue as follows:

A further difficulty lies in the likelihood that by making 'performance' the centre of our attention we may be

in danger of insisting on distinctions that would not be recognized by African audiences. As Isidore Okpewho has pointed out, the practice of the 'new criticism', with its attention to the text as sacred object, could only have arisen in respect of written literature in which it is taken for granted that constant revision by the artist will achieve the perfection of the product. With oral literature, in which the context and contingencies of the performance can appear determinant, there can be no such thing as a definitive text. Nevertheless, the differences between the performed versions may well not seem so important to African audiences as they do to western-trained critics. Schapera observed that the praise of Tshekedi was particularly admired by his Ngwato informants 'because it is full of history', Schapera adding his comment that 'praises in general do seem to be appreciated more for what they say about a chief than for how they say it'. Most literary critics would wish to argue that this is a false distinction but the point is worth attention: an exclusive insistence on the individuality of the performance may itself be the product of a text-conditioned mind.⁶⁵

What Chinweizu et al. have done is to construct the argument about the notation of oral performance in such a way as to value aesthetic form (i.e. the formal features of performance) above historical concerns. / Thus, in fact, the formalism of colonialist critics is accepted on to the agenda and transferred to the oral tradition. The Eurocentrics have dictated the terms of discourse, and we may even go as far as to say that in the end, the Eurocentrics are being judged for not being formalist enough. Thus the interests of Chinweizu et al. in the social determinants of literary cultures stretch only so far as will be allowed by the terms of their form

of radical nationalism; social conditioning and the workings of ideology serve as analytical concepts the purpose of deflating and demystifying the work of western 'universalist' critics, but when it becomes necessary, for nationalist ends, to demonstrate the completeness and autonomy of indigenous literatures (rather than explore their conditions of production) the interest in historical determinants is abandoned and the authors revert to a New Critical-trained formalism."

In the chapter on 'African Poetry and its Critics (1950-1975)', the focus of attack is the 'Ibadan-Nsukka' school of Nigerian poetry, whose principal practitioners are Okigbo (the earlier work, before 'Path of Thunder' which is seen as a departure), J.P. Clark and Soyinka. Through extensive quotation and analysis, occasionally through ridicule, these poets are castigated for their archaic language, unnecessary obfuscation and imported imagery and attitudes. The iconoclasm includes a rather fine demonstration of how aspirant poets can contract the Euromodernist 'Hopkins Disease':

I. How to write 'Serious' and 'Significant' Poetry in Seven

Easy Steps

1. Take any everyday sentence, as prosaic as possible.
2. Chop it into metric lines.
3. Take each line and juggle the word order, breaking as many punctuation and syntactic rules as possible.
4. Suppress all auxiliary verbs and as many other logical or narrative linkages as you can, always with an eye to creating at least seven types of ambiguity per line

5. Inject as many neologisms as you can, preferably in double- or triple-barrelled phrases, using as many alliterations and assonances as you can, e.g.: fresh-firecoal; chestnut-falls, wring-world . . . (Hopkins); grain-spray; feather-flakes; . . . moon-breasts; . . . glow-swarms (Soyinka); brow-beat bribe-beat; . . . kestral-together-leaf-flaps; fear frou-froued in fronds (Clark); he-goat-on-heat; malisons malisons mair than ten (Okigbo).
6. For prosody, shake up the rigid metric lines and free them up a little, tickling some phrases into 'sprung rhythm'
7. If you have sufficient erudition, sprinkle in as many foreign phrases and allusions as you can — allusions to obscure persons, places and events from some foreign folklore, mythology or history
66

Part II of the exercise is addressed to the reader, and it explains that in reading 'Serious' and 'Significant' poetry (Hopkins 'Nigerian style'), the words must simply be restored to their normal order and the missing links supplied, a piece of advice which is given by Nwoga (who is quoted) in all seriousness.⁶⁷ As with the rejoinders to the critics of the novel, the assault turns ad hominem when the authors trace the source of the inculcation of Euromodernism into Nigerian poetry to the 'scandalous Leeds-Ibadan connection', and the personal influence of Martin Banham who, by his own account, persuaded some of the undergraduates of the Ibadan English department to start The Horn. This connection is seen as having set in motion an 'alienated anglo-modernist' sensibility which effectively came to exercise cultural hegemony over the Nigerian literary scene, with members of The Horn coterie assuming

positions of leadership and influence at Lagos, Ibadan and Ife. ✓ The consequences of this coup were that the influence of negritude ✓ was resisted (the period includes Soyinka's famous pronouncements on dukkertude and tigritude) and the literary culture of the universities and journals was diverted away from an active nationalist consciousness.⁶⁸

Such a consciousness, however, is once again predicated on criteria of form. The main caveats, as is illustrated above, despite the vigour of argument and a certain progressive tone, reflect a pre-occupation within a problematic of formalism. We are told that the chief failure of the Ibadan-Nsukka school of poets is their 'failure of craft'. Against the claims of this school an alternative canon is constructed, consisting of poets working with traditional forms: the later Okigbo, Awoonor, Kunene, Okot, and Senghor.⁶⁹

The major part of the chapter on 'Issues and Tasks in the Decolonization of African Literature' is given over to mapping out the road ahead for African writers, a road of 'traditionalist experimentation', the re-working in a contemporary idiom of vernacular, traditional forms. Here, apart from their drawing attention to a range of formal devices used in the work of the above-mentioned poets, advice is also provided for contemporary writers of narrative, and the expositions of transposable narrative techniques draws heavily on the distinctly American scholarship of the formal study of Rhetoric.⁷⁰

The nationalism, then, of the critical discourse of Chinweizu et al., would seem to de-historicize their treatment of indigenous

literatures, which are presented primarily as symbolic resources in the fight against cultural imperialism. The de-historicization becomes complete when contemporary writers are urged to take over the role of the artist in traditional Africa. Through a greater attention to 'craft' and by rejecting the alien readerships, this role apparently becomes readily available.⁷¹ Such a position mystifies the complexity of social relations affecting literary production in Africa. It is extraordinary that although the authors construct the antagonistic social constituencies as the 'western bourgeoisie' and the 'African bourgeoisie',⁷² they still use this latter term purely descriptively, or uncritically, without fully absorbing its implications for the recognition of internal social stratification.

And yet, the pressures of internal Nigerian social relations do impinge on the authors' work. These pressures can be glimpsed through the schisms which they open up between themselves and the apparently more influential and established literary academics of the Nigerian scene. The bitterness of the following passage is instructive:

Let us all bear actively in mind that the British, in their imperialist guile, will slow down what they cannot prevent; and will guide astray any movement which they cannot block, and which they deem dangerous to their hegemony. And in their campaign to slow down and guide astray any active nationalist consciousness in the literature of their African colonies and neo-colonies, Soyinka served them as pointman and demolition expert. Soyinka's success has wasted for us a generation of opportunities for our cultural liberation. This lamentable waste should indicate

the enormity of our loss from that British cultural coup in which Soyinka, who delights in masquerading as the authentic and quintessential African literary force, played so quisling a role.⁷³

There does not seem to be enough in the intellectual differences between Soyinka and Chinweizu et al. to explain this pitch of resentment. Both are nationalist (each claiming to be more authentically representative than the other): Soyinka's traditionalism is principally a matter of ethics and epistemology, while for Chinweizu et al. it is one of aesthetic form. The differences would appear to be associated with professional or social position rather than purely 'intellectual' concerns, and the effect that these social differences may have on nationalist intellectuals' being more or less radicalized. Brenda Cooper has discussed a similar phenomenon with reference to Sembene and Ngugi. She quotes Beckman on the question of the 'national bourgeoisie' as follows:

In Nigeria, as in many other parts of Africa, a main source of theoretical influence in recent years has been underdevelopment theory as represented by Frank and Amin, popularized by Rodney, and reinforced by Fanon's earlier devastating exposure of a subservient, imitative, corrupt, parasitic, and unproductive 'national bourgeoisie'. But . . . such underdevelopment theory is selectively incorporated into the ideological arsenal of the aspiring domestic bourgeoisie itself. Its [i.e. the national bourgeoisie's] radical critics are threatened by co-option onto the platform of bourgeois nationalism by which sections of the ruling class seek to legitimise their ascendancy.⁷⁴

The situation is one in which radical nationalists use underdevelop-

ment theory (or dependency theory as Cooper calls it) to distance themselves from a nationalist old guard. The attacks of Chinweizu et al. on Soyinka et al. certainly make use of dependency theory, as is seen in the accusation of collaboration with cultural imperialism. Chinweizu and his co-authors do not seem, however, to be 'aspiring', but settled, academics, and Madubuike even occupied (at the time of the book's publication) a ministerial position in the Federal government.⁷⁵ It seems to be the influence over university departments and cultural debate which is exercised by the ex-members of The Horn 'coterie' (mainly, it seems, Soyinka, Clark and Echeruo) that disturbs Chinweizu et al., a matter perhaps of professional rather than social or inter-class relations. But whatever the precise nature of the rivalry within this social constituency may be, it emerges in the discourse of the various actors in the terms highlighted by Cooper: when a radical nationalism breaks with a more established or bourgeois nationalism, in this case claiming greater authenticity through a more narrow, perhaps fundamentalist allegiance to tradition, its main line of attack is to accuse the opposition of dependency, of subservience to cultural imperialism. But the break is not final. The ideological consequences of a nationalist literary discourse, in particular, populist conceptions of the role of the artist and allegiance to the principle of literary traditions as symbolic capital, over and above an historical interest in these traditions, are threads which are perhaps strained, but not broken.)

III

In contrast to the two West African critical works discussed thus far, Obiechina's Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel⁷⁶ does not set out to formulate an aesthetic-ideological manifesto; it achieves, in fact, sufficient 'distance' from the pressures of the milieu to address the question of cultural nationalism's formative influence over the contemporary West African literary culture, without explicitly taking up the cause on behalf of the literature. Not that this work achieves a supra-ideological, scientific objectivity; from the perspective of this study such a position is not possible. But what Obiechina does achieve is a mode of enquiry and a critical discourse — drawn from the sociology of literature — which attempts seriously to engage with the broader social contexts of literature. This book is in fact the only attempt (as far as I am aware) in anglophone African criticism to develop the kind of structured, comprehensive, empirical attentiveness that is usually associated with a sociology of literature, though of course, any number of critics (perhaps most of them) show a concern of one kind or another with the relationship of text to context. Louis Tremaine pointed out in 1978 that there has generally been little effort to establish the theoretical and methodological foundations necessary for a sustained contextual analysis.⁷⁷ The observation is still valid, and indeed, as I have suggested, there are powerful factors at work in anglophone criticism which militate against such a development. Obiechina's study seems to be an exception to the general rule, for although it is not theoretically explicit, it has a particular quality of methodo-

logical rigour. At the same time, however, the work contains certain blindnesses and evasions which become apparent to a more strictly socio-critical perspective, and I shall argue that these are the consequence both of a theoretical weakness, and an ideological refusal to press certain questions to their limit.

The basis of Obiechina's study is a recognition of the different historical developments affecting the rise of the novel in England and in 20th century West Africa:

For us, social and cultural change in West Africa has not involved merely a transition from an old agrarian situation, in which oral tradition is the predominant mode of cultural expression, to a modern industrial one in which writing is the predominant mode, as was the case in Europe. The West African phenomenon is of the nature of a superimposition rather than a transition, so that we have a composite rather than a unified picture; elements of the old traditional culture exist side by side with those of the modern industrial culture, the oral tradition with the literary, and the traditional village with the modern town.⁷⁸

It is this 'composite picture' of the co-existence of the traditional and the modern that provides Obiechina with his methodological procedure. Taking a lead from Michael Vaughan, I noted in the previous chapter that the ideological element in the use of this distinction is that it evokes — to use Vaughan's phrase — a 'problematic of adjustment', i.e. social change is presented as a process of accommodation, assimilation and synthesis, with the result that social conflict (domination, exploitation) is sidelined as a factor in analysis. In the case of Jones, we also found that through

the distinction of traditional versus modern the process of change can become personalized, as a matter of individual choice. These are tendencies to which Obiechina is prone, as in the conclusion to his discussion of 'Culture contact and culture conflict', where he argues with reference to No Longer at Ease:

The cultural problems with which we are concerned here are of the nature of accommodation, synthesis or selection. In Obi Okonkwo's Umuofia, unlike the Umuofia of his grandfather, you either pray as a Christian or as a traditionalist; but good sense dictates that you pray the Christian way when you are in a Christian home and like a traditionalist in a traditionalist's home. There are alternatives, and one needs to take account of the context of each action to avoid muddle. And this is the problem of modern West Africans which the novelists deal with.⁷⁹

Thus, too, Obiechina sees the historical development of the 'culture clash' (a common variant of the traditional-modern debate) as a passage from the period of 'radical head-on collision of two autonomous systems of law, logic and convention', to one in which 'the hard points of conflict wore off and the hostility between Christian converts and their traditionalist kinsmen was ended if not removed altogether.' The situation passed from a stage of 'radical opposition', to one of 'ordinary opposition and adjustment'.⁸⁰ There can be little doubt that this presentation of social change (as an adjusting cultural conflict) is orientated towards the nationalist conception of a harmonized modernity.

The distinction between the traditional and the modern, however,

is not given exclusively - or even predominantly - in this form. In his introductory chapter and his analyses Obiechina carries this distinction over into another, one that is to some extent sociologically grounded. This is the distinction between urban and rural. When the traditional culture is linked to the agrarian situation of the rural villages and the traditional urban settlements, and the modern culture to the industrial technology, bureaucracies and mass communications of the towns and cities, the original distinction acquires a certain historical interest and a greater analytical resourcefulness. By way of illustration, this operation enables Obiechina, in an important chapter which tackles the question of the co-existence and inter-relationship of the oral and literary traditions, to discuss the different kinds of 'cultural transmission' at work in the sociological settings of the country and the town: in the former, it takes place in the primordial 'face-to-face' contacts of kinship and communal relationships, in the collectivisation of memory, through ritualization and symbolization, and in a context of cultural homogeneity; in the latter, transmission is mediated by literacy, the media, in atomised social relationships, in contract-orientated rather than kinship-orientated networks, and in a context of cosmopolitanism.⁸¹ When Obiechina moves from this delineation of the two contexts, to the more lengthy discussion of the different 'modes of apprehending reality' that they imply, he has at least anchored his discussion in a given sense of context. This contrasts strongly with, say, Soyinka's more idealist treatment of the two epistemological systems. However, we ought not to be entirely seduced by Obiechina's delineation of the rural or traditional culture. His references reveal

a heavy debt to anthropological sources appearing prior to the impact on anthropology of underdevelopment or dependency theory, consequently he ignores such factors as impoverishment and peasantization.⁸² We have little, however, with which to counter Obiechina's rather static and timeless picture of traditional culture, in view of the tendency (noted earlier with reference to Soyinka) in materialist accounts of both pre-colonial and early-colonial traditional societies to avoid extrapolating from their research into agrarian political economies, to the question of cultural transformations. Nevertheless, it is hardly worth stating that Obiechina himself is scarcely disturbed by this lacuna in materialist research. We shall find later that while his model for the social factors behind the rise of the novel in West Africa stresses change or process (though in the terms of 'modernization'), the model for the literary analysis of urban and rural novels stresses stasis, or what we have seen Ranger and Kimambo call a 'timeless ethnographic present'. One may perhaps add at this point that it is not necessary to hold a materialist view in order to take up the question of cultural transformations, as opposed to the static dualism of the folk-urban model. But we should follow Obiechina's arguments more closely before discussing their social and theoretical implications.

Obiechina's first chapter, which is the account of the social factors behind the rise of the novel in West Africa in the 1950's, is useful and instructive. It begins with the introduction and growth of literacy, and links this with the development of western education, westernized urban settlement, and the effects of a cash economy

and industry. These changes also brought on the spread of the mass media. (Obiechina notes that many West African novelists, like Defoe and Richardson in the 18th century, were closely associated with the world of communications in one way or another: Achebe, Ekwensi, Nwankwo, Nzekwu, Okara, Armah and Sembene.) He then discusses the rise of the literate middle class, beginning with the formation of élites in the coastal regions (and the cultural leanings of the 'Black Victorians'), the growth of journalism in the 1930's, and the dramatic increases in the numbers of school-leavers in the 1940's. The Onitsha pamphlet literature, which began in 1947, is taken as an index of the extent to which the literate middle class with its 'popular democratic spirit' had become established immediately prior to the appearance of the novel.⁸³

The strength of the nationalist movement in this period is seen as having prepared the ground for the cultural nationalism of the novels. The work of foreign novelists is discussed at some length, as this is said by Obiechina to have exercised a powerful negative motivating force on the West African novelists. Finally, Obiechina discusses — in his terms this would be a correction of the emphasis of the foregoing survey — the persistence of the oral tradition. Factors behind the survival of the oral tradition are given: the fact that despite dramatic increases in the levels of literacy, the figures still represent a small proportion of the total population; that three out of every four West Africans still live in village communities (or traditional urban settlements) with a relatively 'homogenous' culture, outlook and language; the fluidity of the inter-relationship between country and town, with individual life-trajectories and relationships of kinship extending across both

(a situation which applies to many of the novelists); lastly, 'cultural inertia', an anthropological term for the fact that the normative aspects of a culture are most resistant to change under new circumstances.⁸⁴

It is clear, then, that Obiechina takes the task of contextualization seriously. However, when he moves into the major part of his study, the analysis of the novels, the interesting shift in his use of theoretical models (which was noted earlier) takes place. The introductory chapter is undoubtedly historical and diachronic in emphasis, but when he undertakes the application of the traditional-modern, urban-rural categories in the analysis, while the principle of contextualization is retained, the emphasis becomes systemic and synchronic. I shall illustrate this tendency.

Obiechina establishes a corpus from the work of 10 novelists (Achebe, Aluko, Amadi, Armah, Conton, Ekwensi, Nwankwo, Nzekwu, Okara, Soyinka) whose settings are predominantly either rural or urban (though some span both, as in Achebe), with the proportions of rural to modern settings in this body of literature being roughly equal. Then, under the headings, 'Nature, music and art', 'Characterization', 'Space and time', 'Setting' and 'Language', Obiechina raids the novels for illustrations of how the two cultural traditions (traditional and modern) operate on each of these, predominantly formal, properties. Thus, in the representation of nature in the rural novels, nature 'is not "other" as in the industrialized and urbanized West, but is apprehended by the traditional West African as an integral part of his world order';

and in connection with the urban novels, he argues that nature 'is being recreated in the urban settlements as it is in the industrialized parts of the world; and individuals, especially the educated middle class, are beginning to develop modern aesthetic attitudes towards nature and modern concepts of it.'⁸⁵ Similarly, the treatment of music and art in the rural novels is collective and utilitarian, whereas in the urban novels it is predominantly aesthetic. Characterization in the rural novels 'recognizes the corporate nature of the social environment and its conditioning influence on the traditional, and therefore corporate, individual'; in the urban settings characters 'tend to be marked by their extreme individualism The absence of a unified cultural ethos leaves them with an immense degree of individual initiative and they are much freer in their thinking. The chances thrown up by great social and economic change encourage them to be physically and mentally mobile.'⁸⁶ In the rural novels time and space are more highly socialized, determined by necessity and experience, rather than being alienating, or internalized in individual consciousness, as in the urban novels. Settings in the rural novels are contained and specific, theatres of the community's natural and metaphysical experience; in the urban novels they tend to be presented either in a detailed realism or, as in *Okara* and *Armah*, as allegorical landscapes of moral and political corruption. Language in the rural novels incorporates such things as proverbs and highly ritualized conversations and forms of public address, allusive and symbolic structures, a high degree of concretization through imagery and metaphor, and rhetorical forms borrowed from the oral tradition; in the urban novels, traditional speech patterns

and proverbs appear, but they reveal social and cultural differences, or are controlled by contexts in which they are abused or bastardized. Also, in the urban novels, language is used in dialogue to individuate characters by means of idiolects, this not being characteristic of rural novels. In the rural novels, there is a greater degree of transference from English into the speech patterns of the vernacular, and in the urban novels the use of pidgin to create social distance is common. It is impossible, as is perhaps apparent, to do justice in a summary of this kind to Obiechina's analysis: he has great respect for detail, and applies the main categories of urban and rural, traditional and modern without the rigidity and level of generalization that I may have suggested here. There is a difference, however, between an analytical adeptness in applying certain categories to a body of literature, and the kind of theoretical self-consciousness which would raise questions about the socio-cultural implications contained in such categories in the first place.

I have noted that in moving from the conditions of emergence of the West African novel, to the literary analysis, Obiechina's interests shift from an historical, diachronic perspective which stresses change and development, to a systemic or synchronic perspective. This latter emphasis in the analysis foregrounds the essentially different properties of the two cultures, their distinctive epistemological, normative, and aesthetic attributes, conceived as separate (though mutually interacting) cultural systems. A further dimension to this implicit theoretical orientation of the analysis is its inherent reflectionism. The assumption being made is that the two

cultural traditions reflect the social reality, because they can be elicited from the novels. Reality is in the novels. The question of how the novels mediate the social reality, or intervene in it, is not raised to any significant extent. The commitment to contextualized reading is consistent throughout, there is some recognition of the effects of cultural nationalism, and attention is given to cultural systems being social products, as in the brief discussion of 'cultural transmission' and in fact, in the acknowledgement which is basic to the whole enquiry, that different forms of subsistence and social relationship have fundamental effects on consciousness. And yet there is an implicitly empirical reflectionism, a fact which is made even more curious by the attention Obiechina gives to the structuring properties of the novel as a literary form, its representational modes such as characterization, the delineation of space and time, the verisimilitude that creates settings, the manipulation of linguistic forms, and so on. How does such a theoretical weakness, or inconsistency, arise?

It seems to me that the inconsistency must inevitably be attributed to a nationalist ideological orientation. That Obiechina is alert to the structuring properties or the literariness of the novel as a form, can be explained with reference to the critical task immediately at hand, which is to give an account of the 'domestication' of the novel in the West African context. But the emphasis in the analysis on the systemic and synchronic properties of the two cultural systems, rather than on their historical or diachronic features, and the perspective of empirical reflectionism by which this emphasis is reinforced, suggest a desire to give witness,

to document the context, and thereby to grant it harmony, completeness and coherence.

Two major silences in Obiechina's study can be taken to illustrate the point. The first is the lack of historical variability in his account of the traditional or rural culture. Here Obiechina has been content simply to endorse the perspectives of his anthropological sources. Although this question is as I have shown, problematic, Obiechina does not even raise the necessary doubts. The second is his failure to address the question of neo-colonialism. For a study written in 1975 this is extraordinary. Let me illustrate this failing from Obiechina's analysis of characterization, before closing this chapter.

Obiechina periodizes an important development in characterization into two phases, with the transition occurring at about 1965. In the first phase he notes a relative lack of individuation or interiorization, in both urban and rural novels. In the rural novels this is explained with reference to the traditional communality of relationships, and in the urban novels it is attributed to 'the disorganization of social life, especially the disintegration of traditional values before there has been time for them to be replaced by new values', which has 'left people at the mercy of social and economic forces.' Both character-types 'tend to be dominated by environmental factors'. After 1965 a new type emerges (in The Voice, The Interpreters, A Man of the People and The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born) whose 'awareness of the self as an entity, separate and apart from the collectivity, is better developed

than in the earlier characters.' Because of the 'autonomy of their individual consciousnesses, they are able to see with greater clarity the problems that bedevil individual lives in society and (which is more important) to project solutions based on this perception.' And, we are told, 'their detachment and intellectual independence make them a reliable guide in social criticism.'⁸⁷ (The appearance of these characters is explained, one should add, with reference to their formal education and the economic security of their professions, advantages which correspond to the circumstances of the novelists themselves.) Obiechina thus uncritically vindicates the perceptions of these characters and through them, the novelists'. And yet, in each of these works the main line of attack is the situation of neo-colonialism, and specifically social relations under neo-colonialism, as perceived by the writers. The individuation of this character-type (while certainly, education and possibly even professional status are the givens of this orientation) has much more to do with their sense of disaffection from and betrayal by the leadership of the national bourgeoisie. Furthermore, to validate the social perspectives of these characters is to ignore the complex but necessary question of the degree of their popular representativeness in the hegemonic struggles of their social context.

NOTES

4. West African Traditions

1. Wole Soyinka, 'The Writer in an African state', in Transition (Kampala), 31, 1967, p. 11.
2. *ibid.*, p. 12.
3. *ibid.*
4. See James Gibbs's review of Guy Amirthanayagam (ed.), Writers in East-West Encounter: New Cultural Bearings, Research in African Literatures (Austin, Texas), 15, 3, 1984, pp. 431-435.
5. Wole Soyinka, Myth, Literature and the African World (Cambridge University Press, 1976).
6. *ibid.*, p. 3.
7. *ibid.*, pp. 2-3.
8. *ibid.*, pp. 8-11.
9. *ibid.*, pp. 13-20.
10. *ibid.*, pp. 26-32.
11. *ibid.*, pp. 4-5.
12. *ibid.*, p. 11.
13. *ibid.*, pp. 12-13.
14. *ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

15. *ibid.*, pp. 18-19, 23.
16. I am indebted here to Michael Vaughan, 'Ideological Directions in the Study of Southern African Literature', in English in Africa (Grahamstown), 9, 2, 1982, p. 46.
17. *op. cit.*, pp. 11, 13, 19.
18. John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy (London: Heinemann, 1969, rpt. 1980) pp. 60, 64 and 73.
19. *ibid.*, p. 76.
20. E. Bolaji Idowu, African Traditional Religion: A Definition (London: SCM Press, 1973) p. 136.
21. *op. cit.*, p. 34.
22. In this Soyinka is clearly the heir of negritude. The strength and virulence of his rejection of negritude, however, must be acknowledged (*ibid.*, pp. 126-129). The difference between the two positions seems mainly to be that while negritude posits black 'intuition', 'rhythm' or 'soul' as alternatives to western technological rationality, Soyinka sees the epistemological capacities of 'the African world' as being able to accommodate the rational and assimilate technology. Thus Ogun today becomes the god of technology, Sango of electricity, etc. (*ibid.*, p. 54).
23. T.O. Ranger and I.N. Kimambo (eds.) The Historical Study of African Religion, with special reference to East and Central Africa (London: Heinemann, 1972) p. 2.
24. See Peter C.W. Gutkind and Peter Waterman (eds.) African Social Studies: A Radical Reader (New York and

London: Monthly Review Press, 1977), especially the particularly useful bibliographical guide to radical themes in African social studies compiled by Allen. Section F of this guide, on 'Ideology and Consciousness', makes no reference at all to pre-colonial ideology. The Reader contains only one essay on the subject, a plea by Basil Davidson for research into the field. This would seem to be essential in the light of the use of a continuous historical present in most treatments of the subject.

25. William F. Lye and Colin Murray, Transformations on the Highveld: The Tswana and Southern Sotho (Cape Town: David Philip, 1980) pp. 17 and 19.
26. op. cit., p. 38.
27. ibid., p. 38.
28. ibid., p. 40.
29. ibid., p. 48.
30. ibid., pp. 52-53.
31. The term is Kelwyn Sole's, in 'Identities and Priorities in Recent Black Literature and Performance: A Preliminary Investigation', in James, W. (ed.) The Political Economy of Race, proceedings of the conference on economic development and racial domination, University of the Western Cape, 8-10 October, 1984.
32. op. cit., p. 54.
33. ibid., p. 56.
34. ibid., pp. 66-67.

35. *ibid.*, p. 61.
36. *ibid.*, p. 64.
37. *ibid.*, p. 66.
38. *ibid.*, p. 67.
39. Ogun as the model for the creative process in literature was formulated by Soyinka as early as 1966. See 'And After the Narcissist?', in African Forum, VI, 6.
40. *op. cit.*, p. 73.
41. *ibid.*, p. 77.
42. *ibid.*, p. 86.
43. *ibid.*, p. 1.
44. *ibid.*, p. 97.
45. *ibid.*, p. 97.
46. *ibid.*, p. 107.
47. *ibid.*, p. 122.
48. *ibid.*, p. 115.
49. *ibid.*, p. xii.
50. *ibid.*, p. 112.
51. *ibid.*, p. 124.
52. *ibid.*, p. 118.

53. *ibid.*, p. xii.
54. James Gibbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 431 ff.
55. Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, Ihechukwu Madubuike, Toward the Decolonization of African Literature: Vol. 1, African Fiction and Poetry and Their Critics (Washington, D.C.: Harvard University Press, 1983).
56. James Gibbs (*op. cit.*) lists three of these papers. There is also 'Neo-Tarzanism: The Poetics of Pseudo-Tradition' (Transition 48) and 'Aesthetic Illusions', in Houston Baker (ed.) Reading Black: Essays in the Criticism of African, Caribbean, and Black American Literature (Africana Studies and Research Center, Monograph Series No. 4) (University of Pennsylvania and Cornell University, 1976).
57. *op. cit.*, p. 431.
58. The term is Achebe's, in Morning Yet on Creation Day, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
59. *op. cit.*, p. 96.
60. *ibid.*, pp. 27-28.
61. Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding (London: Penguin, rpt. 1974).
62. *op. cit.*, p. 51.
63. *ibid.*, pp. 83-84.
64. *ibid.*, p. 82.
65. Landeg White and Tim Couzens (eds.) Literature and

Society in South Africa (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1984) pp. 11-12.

66. op. cit., pp. 175-177.
67. *ibid.*, p. 179.
68. *ibid.*, pp. 196-208.
69. *ibid.*, p. 275.
70. *ibid.*, pp. 261-274.
71. *ibid.*, p. 241.
72. *ibid.*, pp. 21-22.
73. *ibid.*, pp. 207-208.
74. Brenda Cooper, 'Chaiba the Algerian versus Our Sister Killjoy: The Case for a Materialist Black Aesthetic' (Mimeo, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1984).
75. op. cit., pp. ix-x.
76. Emmanuel Obiechina, Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel (Cambridge University Press, 1975).
77. Louis Tremaine, 'Literary Sociology and the African Novel: The Theories of Sunday Anozie and Lucien Goldmann', in Research in African Literatures (Austin, Texas), 9, 1, 1978, p. 31. Tremaine seems mainly to be concerned with stimulating more interest in Anozie's Sociologie du roman africaine in the anglophone context.

78. op. cit., p. 260.
79. *ibid.*, pp. 258-259.
80. *ibid.*, p. 258.
81. *ibid.*, pp. 31-36.
82. The theoretical background to this debate is usefully summarized in the Introduction to Robin Palmer and Niel Parsons (eds.) The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa (London: Heinemann, 1983). Useful articles by, amongst others, Samir Amin, Ken Post and Gavin Williams on forces and relations of West African agrarian production can be found in Gutkind and Waterman, African Social Studies: A Radical Reader, op. cit.
83. See also Obiechina's An African Popular Literature: A Study of Onitsha Market Pamphlets (Cambridge University Press, 1973).
84. op. cit., pp. 3-28.
85. *ibid.*, pp. 42, 50.
86. *ibid.*, pp. 86, 102.
87. *ibid.*, pp. 116-117.

5. EAST AFRICAN POLITICAL READINGS:

Micere Githae-Mugo, Visions of Africa

Peter Nazareth, An African View of Literature

I

In this final chapter I shall discuss two works of East African criticism in which the struggle between local priorities and the European heritage emerges in forms which have not been encountered thus far. We have seen in our examples of West African criticism that the principle of contextualization can lead in directions other than socio-historical analysis; mythopoesis, formalism and the 'sociology of literature' comprise three possible strategies of a common ideological programme involving the construction of organic traditions and a consequent de-historicization of literature. In the East African examples under discussion, however, the form of contextualization undertaken gives a certain prominence to the political aspects of the cultural relations by which the literature is said to be informed.

It must immediately be noted, however, that the 'politics' which is foregrounded in these analyses seldom moves beyond the dominant orientation in anglophone criticism of nationalism and pan-Africanism. Where a shift in orientation takes place, furthermore, it is seldom complete. But what interests me in these works is that the politicization which is attempted seems, in both cases, to place pressure on the literary-analytical assumptions that are brought

into play. The result is a kind of incoherence of discourse which represents, I shall argue, the beginning of a process whose ideal end-point is a conceptual break. While such a break has not arrived in these works, it is precisely the nature of their unsteadiness that is interesting. From the point of view of scholarly depth or quality, and especially of consistency of outlook and procedure, these works leave much to be desired; but it may be asked whether or not it is more difficult to break free from a settled position than one which is only equivocally held or formulated? If the potentially productive tendencies in these works are apparent more in the form of inconsistency or contradiction than of controlled or explicit statement, then this would reveal the extent to which they share the dominant and characteristic features of anglophone African criticism.

Four years after completing her doctoral dissertation in 1973, Micere Githae-Mugo added a foreword to its publication as Visions of Africa¹ in which she does explicitly testify to the conceptual struggle she was engaged in during and after the work's completion. She says that in reading through her graduate work she was struck by its 'incompleteness in the absence of conscious basic reference to Marxist criticism which is the only literary theoretical framework that squarely addresses itself to the themes of colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism in Literature.' And yet in her attempt to address these themes, even without what she was later to come to regard as the appropriate theoretical framework, she found herself at a point of confrontation with the

dominant perspectives of her literary training: Visions of Africa 'provided . . . the first wall of separation between myself — as a literary critic from a neo-colonial background — and Western (capitalist) bourgeois critics (on whom I had been brought up), who insist on alienating literature from its socio-economic roots within given societies.' And she adds that she now understands why she became 'involved in a big battle with my supervisors, who persistently complained that my approach was too political.'² Her development therefore, through the period of the mid-1970's, seems to have involved her finding her critical interests focussed and clarified; clearly, this process was assisted at the time by her close association and collaboration with Ngugi in the Department of Literature at Nairobi, whose career was undergoing radical shifts of orientation.³

The major failing of Visions of Africa, the primary source of its inner discursive tensions, is its personalization of historical and ideological processes. The emphasis is reflected in the title: 'visions' suggests a post-Romantic and empiricist outlook, through which the comparative study of Achebe, Margaret Laurence, Elspeth Huxley and Ngugi is to be made. The perspective of each writer on the 'common landscape of the African setting' is thus attributed to 'personal experience'. Part of the problem here is that as long as Githae-Mugo wishes to evaluate these perspectives through comparison, in terms of the category of personal experience nothing — quite literally — can be either validated or invalidated. Personal experience simply is (as it were) and nothing is advanced by Githae-Mugo's either agreeing or disagreeing. What is lacking

is indeed a central theoretical foundation (which as she says Marxism might have supplied) on which to organize the comparative assessments. She is aware of the problem, and goes as far as to pose the question, 'by what criteria is the audience to judge which of the accounts is authentic?'; but the question is not answered and she grasps for immanent principles of validation such as 'authenticity', 'completeness' and 'profundity',⁴ none of which do justice to her primary interests in the differences of perspective offered by the writers. At the end of the study, in the Evaluation, she finds it necessary to justify her 'political' concerns,⁵ which suggests that in the final analysis she was unable to continue to repress what she had regarded as her sub-text all along.

Before examining Githae-Mugo's study more closely it would be worthwhile, briefly, to make my intentions explicit. Since I am interested in the internal, discursive inconsistencies of this work, I shall have to trace their local manifestations; in other words, I shall have to follow Githae-Mugo's text-immanence, to a large extent, in medias res.

The emphasis on personal experience leads in the first chapter, 'Four Distinct Voices', to her offering short biographies of each of her writers. From Achebe's background she highlights such factors as his curiosity about traditional Ibo life, his 'involvement with the world around him' and his 'special ability . . . to turn experiences into meaningful lessons.'⁶ In the case of Margaret Laurence she tells of an autocratic Calvinist upbringing leading

to the writer's quest for individual freedom and self-knowledge, and the subsequent 'respect, caution and sensitivity' in Laurence's treatments of Africa.⁷ The introduction to Elspeth Huxley is less flattering in taking issue almost immediately with the writer's 'attitude'. Huxley's discerning ability to detect the various 'smells' of the 'tribes', her love for Kenya's wildlife and landscape (implying a complementary condescension about its people), her genetic explanations for the 'inferior' intellect of the African, her claims to understand the 'native mind',⁸ are various manifestations of colonial racism, but Githae-Mugo treats them as consciously held, individual attitudes. In the case of Ngugi, his peasant background and 'commitment' are stressed, and connections are made between Ngugi's biography and the settings and plot-situations of the early novels. Although the major changes in Ngugi's career were still to come, there is some attention given to his 'socialism'. Leeds, we are told, 'systematized [his] thinking', though earlier it is claimed that Ngugi's polygamous family background 'partly explains the origins of his socialist tendencies which appear to be an integral part of his personality.'⁹ Altogether, it is the sort of introduction which serves primarily as literary parlour-gossip about four 'geniuses', although there is some ambivalence about Huxley's status; that the reverence is unequally distributed suggests, at least, a certain discomfort with the conventional rituals.

The more serious limitations imposed by personalization and empiricism are apparent in the analysis of the writers' treatments of the 'traditional setting'. Githae-Mugo begins by noting Achebe's

efforts to restore dignity and autonomy to pre-colonial Ibo society, and goes on to discuss this society 'using Okonkwo as the nucleus and Umuofia as his sphere of action.'¹⁰ Her procedure involves her extracting an image of Ibo society directly from the novel, without distinguishing between Achebe's depiction as a particular and normative view and other kinds of social history. Thus from the example of Okonkwo, who through diligence and determination rises to a titled position, she infers that 'the sort of hereditary stratification that determines an individual's place at birth in certain social systems does not exist in traditional Ibo society', and that this society also 'extolled industry and despised idleness, for man was seen as the creator and perpetuator of his world and he remained answerable to the gods for any malfunctioning of this domain.'¹¹ One must note here both that fiction is being treated as an empirical reflection of history, and that it is an organicist history that is being asserted as 'real'. (We shall ignore for the moment that this is also a partial reading of Achebe, who does indeed show stratification in Ibo society in various forms: in age distinctions, sex-roles and matters of taboo such as the caste of osu.) The source of this empiricism is a mode of legitimation, for behind it lies the shared cultural nationalism of writer and critic. In the following passage we find Githae-Mugo elaborating on the generally organic society she finds in Things Fall Apart, in a kind of ideological symbiosis of literary text and commentary:

In this concept [the presence of the ancestors] Achebe has grasped the core of the philosophy that ties together all African traditional faiths: the fact that life and religion are concomitant parts of each other,

that the dead co-exist with the living — 'the ancestors are with us' — and that the community collectively draws its life-rhythms from this union, without which the earth would not give its yield or the natural sphere its blessings of water, rainfall, sunshine and fresh air. It is vital that every individual play his full part in this community of coordinates and wholes, that he maintain order, peace and cohesion all around him, all the time, because a disruption in any sector might mean a discontinuation of a part of life.¹²

The tendency represented here is familiar; it is not far off what has elsewhere been called 'the myth of merrie Africa': 'In this view the pre-colonial era was a Golden Age, in which generations enjoyed congenial lives in well integrated, smoothly-functioning societies.'¹³ Githae-Mugo does qualify this view, however, and to illustrate her argument that Achebe does not 'romanticize' the past she refers to certain of Okonkwo's destructive tendencies and Ibo practices which lead to disharmony and disunity in the clan. (And at this point she does mention such things as the osu phenomenon.) The 'concession' being made leads to the statement: the 'Ibos had a "civilization" just as self-sufficient and as faulty as any other'.¹⁴ The statement is perhaps harmless and self-evident, but it illustrates the kind of quandary that Githae-Mugo finds herself in as a consequence of her constructing a debate about the morality of a society whose image has already been filtered or mediated through fiction, and to which she seems to have no access but through fiction. One may add that it is perhaps the convention of the novel as a form that leads to this attempt, in an empirical reading, to establish the morality of a

putative society in the first place, since the novel conventionally pre-supposes a central pattern of meaning — often moral in emphasis — to which its various parts relate.

The empiricist acceptance, or substitution, of a fictionalized view for a socio-historical one is made possible in the analysis of Achebe because Githae-Mugo shares the cultural nationalism implicit in Things Fall Apart. (It is curious that the decade of divisions within the Nigerian nationalist movement, which corresponds to the time which elapsed between the novel's publication and Githae-Mugo's analysis, does not seem to have affected her reading at all.) However, when she discusses Huxley's Red Strangers with its 'settler' depiction of a traditional Gikuyu society (roughly contemporaneous with the Ibo society of Things Fall Apart) there is no longer such a convenient marriage of ideology and literary orientation; for in this case an empirical understanding of the relation between a literary text and social history would reinforce Huxley's perspective. In a situation in which either the ideology or the orientation of empiricism must be abandoned, understandably it is the empiricism that begins to give way, though not fully or consciously, and not without contradictory effects. (We shall have to discuss more than once this epistemological inconsistency.)

From Huxley's non-fictional writings Githae-Mugo establishes the writer's colonial or settler view of pre-colonial Kenya. Huxley is found to endorse the opinion, for example, of Sir Charles Elliot, Commissioner for the East African Protectorate from 1900 to 1905, that Europeans were not 'destroying any old or interesting system

but simply introducing order into blank, uninteresting, brutal barbarism.'¹⁵ Githae-Mugo prepares herself to be accommodating, however, on the basis of some rather contrived (though not deliberately ironic) literary Romanticism: 'assuming that at the moment of his or her creative vision the writer is more than his or her mundane self and that while afire, the creative imagination is capable of transcending prejudice and bigotry, let us turn to Huxley's Red Strangers and examine it as an artistic vision of the same society that she describes above.'¹⁶ Clearly, Githae-Mugo's literary training is in severe conflict with her genuine interests. In the end it becomes apparent that the concession being made is not fully given, for we are told later:

Yet the people who occupy this beautiful country in Red Strangers are depicted as so devoid of the creative urge that their very existence is dependent on magic. The older men spend most of their time either drinking beer, haggling over disputes, or conducting raids and counter-raids, while their youths seem to think of nothing other than night dances. Every man's goal is to accumulate as many goats, wives or children as he can - and in that order too. And so it is that the land remains undeveloped, stretches of it 'unoccupied'. Only the women toil to keep this world going; at least they cultivate the shambas, fetch the wood and the water, carry heavy loads whenever there is a journey to be made, do all the domestic work and literally run the essential sectors of life. Poverty, disease, ignorance, frequent raids, famines and at least one major plague add to the list of things that make the human world of Red Strangers seem a squalor.¹⁷

The total effect of Huxley's portrayal of Gikuyu society as a

'human world' is rejected; to put this explicitly, what is rejected is Huxley's ideology. But it is curious that while the total effect is rejected, Githae-Mugo accepts the 'accuracy' of some of Huxley's depictions:

Communal feeling and corporate living are the operational base of the Gikuyu traditional society and Huxley brings out this sense of sharing and oneness very successfully. Mrs Huxley also exhibits extensive knowledge of the Gikuyu society's customs, rituals and ceremonies, with which her book teems. Her description of the field workers and the ritualistic manner in which they attack their job is most accurate . . . and so is the preparation of the home brew . . . Matu's purification, or removal of thahu . . . is another well done episode, as is the account of the initiation ceremony . . . and so one could go on.¹⁸

Her empiricism does not enable Githae-Mugo simply to say that Huxley uses local colour as a form of legitimation, but it is interesting nevertheless that her acknowledgements of the writer's 'accuracy' are made grudgingly: the compliments are perfunctory and pejorative ('very successfully', 'exhibits extensive knowledge', 'teems', 'and so one could go on'). Towards the end of the analysis she does say that Red Strangers 'omits naked political propaganda' but this is not attributed (as she suggests earlier) to Huxley's 'creative imagination', but rather to 'very crafty workmanship'.¹⁹ Again, one may infer that Githae-Mugo has begun to wrestle with her trained predispositions. I also suggest that with Huxley's fiction her empiricism has led her to a kind of blind alley, and that without altering course sufficiently to rectify the

problem she has certainly registered her discomfort. It should be added, however, that it is a significant failing that the ideology of Huxley's fiction is never adequately contextualized. In keeping with a personalized analysis, Huxley's 'attitude' is never described more fully than in terms such as 'bigotry' and 'prejudice'; if Huxley's 'world' were explored in some historical depth, it may have been found that if Huxley's views were at all exceptional, they may well have been more reactionary than some of her compatriots'. We shall return to this point shortly.

Githae-Mugo's dissatisfaction with Huxley is taken a step further when she introduces Ngugi's depictions of traditional Gikuyu society. The conflict between Ngotho and Howlands in Weep Not Child is centred on land dispossession, and the absence of this issue in part of Red Strangers (which covers roughly the same period) is noted with particular force.²⁰ This shows that Githae-Mugo is alert to conflicting perspectives. A similar contrasting effect is created in the discussion of female circumcision in The River Between; she argues, for example, that

Ngugi's policy is to respect other men's 'sacred cows' instead of whipping or chasing them away as some missionaries and 'civilizers' did. It is for this very reason that I would suggest Ngugi borrows quotations from the Bible and mingles them with the ideas and beliefs held by his characters — to illustrate, in other words, that religion and faith are validated by the genuineness of the believer . . .

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Githae-Mugo wavers, however, between this emphasis on contrasting

perspectives, and one on 'inner meaning', 'personal conviction and commitment' and 'individual faith'. While noting that Ngugi's view of early colonial society implies a continuity of collective struggle, she adds, 'Ngugi goes beyond society to the individuals who comprise it and he seems to be saying that when wisdom is present and functioning at both levels, the kind of integration that accommodates past and present experiences is always possible.'²² The collapsing of the social and the individual ('both levels') is again illustrated in her discussion of the past as represented by Margaret Laurence. What is valued is the emphasis placed by Laurence on personal freedom and the quest for identity. Traditional Ghanaian society is shown to be represented in Laurence's stories primarily as a fitting context in which individuals are able to find a 'home', an environment of 'communication' and 'understanding'.²³ However, an implication of this discussion is that any context where individual identity can be realized will be valued by Laurence; in other words, the emphasis falls in this fiction on individual realization finding an appropriate social nexus, and the depiction of traditional Ghanaian society is subject to this priority. It is then no surprise that the depiction of this society is cautious, sensitive and non-judgemental,²⁴ for the point of the exercise is to make the social setting serve the interests of the characterization. The praise, therefore, that is given to Laurence on this count is unconvincing. From the short biography of Laurence provided in the first chapter, one may readily infer that the emphasis in Laurence's fiction has less to do with her sympathy for the African past than a certain spirited liberalism which rejects both a puritan upbringing and a superficial, con-

fining, hierarchical, colonial social morality.

Little would be advanced at this stage by a detailed discussion of Githae-Mugo's third chapter which covers the writers' representations of the period of colonial conquest. It will be sufficient simply to state that the chapter deals mainly with various kinds of response on the part of the colonized to the initial interventions of what are ironically called the 'white messiahs' (missionaries, traders, administrators, settlers), responses ranging from indifference or immediate surrender to continuing, suppressed (in the fiction under discussion) hostility. The critical assumptions behind this analysis are consistent with the approach taken thus far: from the literature an image of colonial penetration is extracted as predominantly a matter of individual challenges and responses, with an overridingly moral emphasis. I shall therefore pass on to the fourth chapter entitled, 'Uhuru (Freedom) and Black Power', which deals with Huxley's and Ngugi's accounts of the pre-war and Emergency periods in Kenya.

What is different about this chapter is Githae-Mugo's frank assertion of the inescapability of the socio-political relations informing the literature, and the fact that in respect of Huxley's fiction certain advances are made in terms of critical procedure. The chapter begins with a survey of political developments from the period of the First World War to the attainment of constitutional independence. The following factors are taken into account: the fact that land dispossession was at the root of the conflict; forced enlistment for military service and the consequent labour shortages

on settler farms; legislation restricting Africans to the reserves; the rise and banning of successive nationalist organizations; the rise of the independent schools and churches; the declaration of the Emergency, the imprisonment of Kenyatta, and the development of armed resistance with guerillas taking to the forest. It is a survey which, however brief, departs to some extent from the 'official' or ruling post-independence view of 'Mau Mau',²⁵ in that it regards the war as an essential part of the history of nationalist popular struggle. It also represents the first and only occasion in Githae-Mugo's study where she moves outside of the literature to establish a sense of context in explicitly historical terms. The problem with this form of contextualization, however, is that the literary analysis is appended to it without sufficient integration. The literature ought to be placed within the context of the ideological relations which are shaped and given their historical urgency by the developments outlined in the survey. What is at issue are the interests being served in the collective social memory of the war, and not the extent to which the literature accurately reflects the events being referred to.

However, Githae-Mugo goes to some lengths to deny Huxley's perspective the spontaneous naturalness of 'truth'.²⁶ With respect to Red Strangers and A Thing to Love she examines how Huxley uses characterization to portray political activism as pathological, and loyalism as weak, but moral and just. The following passage is worth quoting at some length, for it illustrates the style of analysis and the kinds of conclusions drawn:

The 'Jehoshophat' [Kariuki] group of African leaders seems to be characterized by a string of vices: empty arrogance, destructive tongues, thuggery, loose living, corruption, cruelty and hatred, especially for the white man. They normally meet with sudden or cruel deaths, depicted as God's judgement upon their wickedness: witness 'Jehoshophat', Roland, in The Red Rock Wilderness and Gitau in A Thing to Love. It is clear that for Huxley, political 'agitators' and revolutionaries are the wrong kind of 'messiahs'.

On the other hand, the Karanja type of man: half-traditionalist, half-Christian; half-illiterate, half-literate . . . half everything — though preferable to the Benson Makuna-'Jehoshophat' lot — is not Huxley's African 'messiah' either. Only, for a Karanja, there is still hope of eventually getting 'there'. For one thing, he has the qualities esteemed by Huxley in the elders' group, mainly: obedience, willingness to listen and patient acceptance.²⁷

In concluding her analysis of Red Strangers Githae-Mugo endorses Martin Tucker's view of the novel's being mainly about a form of cultural rapprochement: '. . . the final note suggests that the hero, and other Kikuyu natives like him, are gaining a share of Western progress in exchange for the loss of their past. It is a theme of rapprochement.'²⁸ While noting that Achebe, Ngugi and Laurence would disagree with this concept, Githae-Mugo does not carry her own disagreement far enough: one would want to know more about the social dynamics of loyalism, since the fostering of a loyalist caste seems to have been an essential part of colonial strategy, one which paid dividends in the consolidation of neo-colonial state structures after independence.²⁹ Since Huxley emphasizes in A Thing to Love the need for reconciliation

between the various loyalist groups and the settlers, under white tutelage,³⁰ one would want to have this theme placed with greater historical precision. The treatment of Huxley's portrayal of Kenyatta as the Spokesman in A Thing to Love illustrates the potentially unfortunate consequences of not asking precise historical questions: if, as Githae-Mugo observes, Huxley's Spokesman is a treacherous, terrorist conspirator (elsewhere Huxley refers to Kenyatta as 'a Mau Mau plotter'³¹ although he spent the war in detention and repudiated the movement both before and at his trial³²) then this would reveal Huxley's views as distinct from those of the colonial government, to whom Kenyatta was a nationalist moderate enough to negotiate a settlement which denied 'Mau Mau' demands. While Githae-Mugo supports her analyses by frequently quoting from Huxley's non-fictional works (thus 'verifying' her representation of Huxley's views) and on one occasion by comparing Huxley with Ruark (on settler attitudes to the 'irrationality' of 'Mau Mau' oathing³³) one would wish her to have gone beyond the literary evidence immediately before her.

Despite its failings, however, Githae-Mugo's treatment of Huxley's fiction contains more that is of socio-historical interest than does her treatment of Ngugi's fiction in the same chapter. In her return to a more strictly empirical reading in the case of Ngugi we again encounter the phenomenon of the shared nationalism of writer and critic. There is more to this reversion to empiricism than simply the logically obvious fact that Githae-Mugo does not agree with Huxley but agrees with Ngugi. The empiricism is not only a logical, but an ideological necessity, i.e. the epistemological 'naivety'

is part of the mode of an ideological discourse. My argument is based on Githae-Mugo's reading of The River Between. Waiyaki's self-sacrificial vision, and the symbolism of the Honia river flowing between the two antagonistic ridges, clearly suggest nationalist imperatives, with unification being predicated on humanist grounds.³⁴ Githae-Mugo affirms the novel's orientation, arguing that 'the book ends with hope':

only, in Ngugi, the possibilities of this hope do not depend on a selected group of people, as in Huxley's A Thing to Love. It already abides within every individual and all that is required is that the hearts discover the healing powers of love. Honia river symbolizes this experience and so the book closes with 'its beat rising above the dark stillness, reaching into the heart of the people of Makuyu and Kameno'³⁵

Githae-Mugo's chapter on 'Black "Messiahs"' takes us into the independence and neo-colonial periods. The analysis of Laurence's This Side Jordan in this chapter is consistent with earlier treatments of this writer's work. Laurence's depiction of the arrival of independence in Ghana is rendered in terms of a drama of individual quests, with the implication that the change of political control is ultimately expressed in the condition of the 'inner man'. Victor Edusel is the strong character of the novel: resolved, self-assured, with high integrity, educated and intellectually independent. Nathaniel Amegbe is the weaker one, straddling the 'traditional-modern' divide, without inner character. Johnnie Kestoe is the brutal and shallow white man who will use whoever

is on hand for his own purposes. For the most part, Githae-Mugo is comfortable with the novel of character, and submits willingly to its priorities.³⁶ What are more interesting are the analyses of Achebe's satirical novels and of Ngugi's A Grain of Wheat, for these discussions enable one to raise questions about the connections between criticism and the literature of neo-colonialism.

I shall define the central issue fairly coldly: an empirical approach to Achebe's novels about the post-independence situation would lead to a moral emphasis on the corruption of leadership, and on the conflicts faced by individuals who are part of an educated minority. The extent to which Githae-Mugo moves beyond empiricism to socio-historical criticism will be measured by her willingness to address class relations, and to examine critically the kinds of social alternatives which are offered in the novels. Crucial to our enquiry is the question of class-initiative: the forms of mobilization and their social bases that are put forward in the fiction, and of course, re-presented by the critic.

There is nothing in the brief discussion of No Longer At Ease to suggest an enquiry that goes beyond empiricism, in the terms outlined above. The conclusions on the novel can be taken to illustrate the point:

In Obi's case, inescapable social obligations and conflicting demands reach a climax for him at his most sensitive point and he falls, not as a villain, but as an unfortunate victim of circumstances. However,

this is not to say that Obi is innocent: he stands convicted of corruption, the evil that is destroying his country . . . in Achebe's eyes a man who will abandon his principles so suddenly when faced with a difficult test is unfit to be a leader in Independent Africa, and those who succumb to it are Africa's new agents of destruction.³⁷

In A Man of the People, however, the questions relating to class-relations and class-initiative become more pressing, and in introducing her analysis Githae-Mugo says, 'Constitutional independence simply sets another cycle of political tyranny rolling over society and the peasant continues to be its ready victim.'³⁸ Although the implicit distinction here between an elite and the 'peasant' appears somewhat categorical and monolithic, a clear recognition of hegemony is being made. But the social relations as depicted in the novel hinge on the class-position and perspective of the narrator Odili and the 'young turks' of the C.P.C. How does Githae-Mugo deal with the question of their political agency?

She is sensitive to the implications of Odili's membership of an intellectual elite, and reveals the complexities of this position both by discussing at some length Odili's susceptibility to corruption (which makes him an unreliable narrator), and by stressing the difficulties encountered by the C.P.C. in acting as a political vanguard. But the legitimacy of this role, however difficult it is said to be to fulfil in practice, is not questioned. We are told rather uncritically first that Odili and Max are to be the 'spokesmen of the oppressed masses',³⁹ and later, that their failure

to fulfil this function is to be attributed to the people who are supposed to be their followers:

Odili, Max and their C.P.C. group have an impossible job, for, obviously people are a long way from an understanding of justice or political rights on a national scale. Whereas they can tell — within the traditional setting — when a man like Josiah has 'taken more than enough for the owner to see', given a Western system of government, the same people become quite ignorant of their rights and quite happily surrender themselves to more dangerous 'Josiahs', the Nangas, and Kokos of their elected government.⁴⁰

Such remarks seem to lend themselves to the kind of well-known censure which Ngugi gives to Soyinka's early portrayals of crowds, the poor, or lower class-groups: '... often he ignores the creative struggle of the masses. The ordinary people, workers and peasants in his plays remain passive watchers on the shore or pitiful comedians on the road'⁴¹ However, to distinguish the objection being raised from mere populism, we should look more closely at the social constituencies which are the object of debate. The 'people' of Achebe's novel and Githae-Mugo's criticism (and we are dealing here with 'realist' discourses) are those of the towns and rural villages, as distinct from the large urban centres. Gavin Williams, in a lucid account of class-relations in Nigeria, has noted that whereas the 'urban petty-bourgeoisie' have tended to follow 'trickster' populist leaders and to enter into relationships of clientage with prominent representatives of the national bourgeoisie, industrial workers and peasant farmers (precisely the

groupings depicted de facto in the novel) have by contrast both taken collective action in terms of their interests in the relations of production. While Williams does say that at the national level, these groups have 'limited political capacity', clearly this has nothing to do with the 'traditional' setting, or their unfamiliarity with 'western' social structures, for it is their experience under capitalism which has led them to take collective action. The general tenor of the judgement that these people are 'ignorant of their rights' or willing to 'surrender themselves' to national politicians cannot be endorsed:

In taking political action in support of their immediate class interests, both urban workers and peasant farmers have regarded themselves as fighting for their rights in general, and thus in opposing the general unfairness of the existing order. In doing so, they provide a focus for the political consciousness of the urban petty-bourgeoisie . . . who lack the resources to articulate and enforce their own demands of their own accord. Thus . . . it is mistaken to regard the Nigerian proletariat at least as being quiescent, or only concerned with maintaining its alleged privileges against those more deprived than themselves.⁴²

Githae-Mugo's socio-political imprecision combines with an affirmation, when looking to alternatives to the existing order, of the need for an enlightened moral and intellectual leadership: '. . . Achebe considers it important that men of integrity and vision should enter the political field and oust those who occupy positions of power for merely greedy ends.'⁴³ It is the failure of this thesis, however, that is dramatized by the downfall of the C.P.C.

in the novel. We would appear, therefore, to be left with something of an ideological conundrum. The resolution that Githae-Mugo proposes (though she does not construct the dilemma in the terms suggested here) leans towards a vision of tragic sacrifice:

As an artist, Achebe clearly believes in man's ability to transform all manner of experiences into something of value; beauty can come out of suffering, for when suffering is for a good cause, it can be a purifying experience. For this reason, angry as he might be with Independent Africa for her mistakes, he has not altogether lost hope for her survival.⁴⁴

The appeal of the idea of moral integrity and redemptive sacrifice being invested in an enlightened minority is strong by the end of Githae-Mugo's study. Indeed, she reserves her analysis of A Grain of Wheat until this point (though it is not in keeping with the sequential arrangement of the study thus far, and takes us back from neo-colonialism to independence) precisely in order to enable the idea to dominate the closure of her work. The socio-economic 'reconstruction' of society demanded by Ngugi in the first chapter of Homecoming is cast, in this analysis, into the terms of a return to moral integrity, based on an empirical reading of A Grain of Wheat. The irony which Githae-Mugo usually attaches to the notion of social leaders being 'messiahs' is, in the end, partially abandoned, and the notion is affirmed: Mugo's 'confession' in the novel absolves him and his community from false messianism, but paradoxically, it is seen as showing the way.

Githae-Mugo's conclusions signify a failure, to use the terms provided by Fanon, to pass from a national to a social and political consciousness.⁴⁵ They also signify that at times there is an active collaboration between the dominant influences of her literary training (personalization, empiricism) and a nationalist ideological orientation, despite her saying in her Foreword that her literary supervisors had objected to the 'political' content of her work. Githae-Mugo may have begun to engage in a process of conceptual struggle in Visions of Africa, but the final break was still to come. What prevents it? I have referred to personalization and empiricism, and we may perhaps clinch this point by noting that the apparently unwitting collaboration between Githae-Mugo and her supervisors is founded on post-Romanticism. What brings Githae-Mugo to post-Romantic conceptions, however, is a certain nuance within nationalism. In my second chapter I noted (with reference to Raymond Williams) that the Romantic idea of art as an ideal realm or 'superior reality' has been appealing in African criticism, and we have seen that through tradition a connection is made between literature and the nation. In Githae-Mugo, however, this connection is not made on the basis of a large, public metaphor. It is not tradition that Githae-Mugo seeks, so much as vision — hence her openness to considering the work of colonial writers. The form of witness to national (and pan-African) interests that Githae-Mugo wishes to establish, is based on the wisdom and perspicuity of her writers. This approach is thrown off balance, however, by Huxley, for in Huxley Githae-Mugo encounters not wisdom, but ideology. Although Githae-Mugo cannot jettison the basic tenets of her position, one senses, in the tension that is produced by

the inclusion of Huxley's fiction in her study, the possibility of a socio-historical criticism.

II

The most obvious failure of Peter Nazareth's An African View of Literature,⁴⁶ is simply and unfortunately a failure of scholarship. Two areas of weakness stand out immediately. The first has to do with Nazareth's critical procedure: most of his essays consist mainly of summary followed by appended interpretive comment, a method which assumes that the reader is unfamiliar with the literature under discussion. The second weakness is the lack of any significant integration between the essays in the volume. The organizing theme presented in the Introduction is not analytically sustained (or perhaps, since it was probably added prior to the collection's first being published in 1972, with the essays having been written between 1962 and 1970, the Introduction asserts an integration which is not really there); and the literature discussed is too various in its origins and themes to be regarded as an integrated corpus, or one which can bear a thematically pointed analysis. Because of these weaknesses in the volume, I shall be brief and selective.

There is a striking disparity between the claims that Nazareth makes and the actualities of his criticism. Like Githae-Mugo, Nazareth testifies to a politicization which began during a period of study overseas. At Leeds (where he was a contemporary of Ngugi⁴⁷) Nazareth 'made the discovery':

that I was a 'coloured' person belonging to an ex-colonial country, which had been ruled by a foreign power because that power was an imperial power and not because it held the key to the cultural-cum-literary secrets of mankind. And with this discovery, I underwent a reorientation, a spiritual upheaval, where I began to re-think my relation to my society, my people, my country. I also began to re-think my relation to a literature which, on the whole, was not my own.⁴⁸

The intention of the collection, then, is 'to present a critical approach to literature of relevance to Africa, whether the literature is written in Africa or outside Africa. I wanted to stress the relationship between literature, the African reader, and African society today.'⁴⁹ What is to be noted here is the intention to formulate a critical approach as distinct from developing an indigenous canon. While the West African criticism that has been examined constructs rival traditions to the metropolitan ones, both Nazareth and Githae-Mugo attempt to politicize the reading of texts. As a statement of intent, Nazareth's would seem to represent an interesting development. Let us examine it more closely.

What kind of politicization is it that Nazareth professes? Firstly, he declares an allegiance to 'socialism' and, after acknowledging that there is some doubt as to the meaning of the term, to 'African socialism'. However, since this is given only in the form of a declared allegiance, and it is not supported by any socio-economic or historical analysis, one is unable really to distinguish these gestures from club-talk. Secondly, Nazareth places a premium on 'commitment'. Like 'African socialism', this is a troublesome

concept. It pre-supposes a dimension of rational, individual integrity in the political meanings of a writer's discourse, and involves to some extent a complementary mystification of the relations of literary production. It is therefore implicitly idealist, and can merge easily with post-Romantic assumptions — as it does in Nazareth's repeated insistence on the writer's being the 'sensitive point' of his society. Thirdly, and this point is related to the last, Nazareth is dedicated to the view that 'commitment' in literature must not 'falsify' individual experience. Thus Nazareth would seem to be bound by experientialist thinking, which is unable to re-conceptualize individual experience in literature as the privileging of personalized categories by means of rhetorical conventions. Although some of the theoretical equipment needed for such a step may not have been available to Nazareth, one would expect, with his professed allegiances, that he would be less affirmative than he is in his use of liberal humanist terminology.

Nazareth's critical assumptions are therefore mutually contradictory. However, the contradictions in his applied criticism vary in severity. On one occasion, his interests will lead him to raise questions of a genuinely socio-critical kind, and he will be limited only by his not having alternative critical models on hand; but on another occasion he will make evaluations which ideologically, are crashingly inappropriate to a professed commitment to socialism. The first of these kinds of limitation is illustrated by his discussion of Robert Tressell's The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists which, apart from being called (in the essay's title) a 'committed'

novel, is valued in the following more interesting ways: because those who encounter England primarily as an imperial power would benefit from having their attention drawn to class-exploitation; and because East African writers would benefit from being exposed to the social inclusiveness of the novel's perspective. This last point is made with reference to Perry Anderson's analysis of the 'Components of the National Culture' (cited in Chapter 2 earlier) and is argued as follows:

Tressel's novel shows us 'the great connection between things', which probably explains why it is not normally included in courses of English literature in English (and British) universities. It expounds socialist ideology as an economist and political scientist would; it deals with a definite society in a definite historical context; but as a novel, it draws our intellectual and emotional attention to the meeting point between individual human beings, the forces at play affecting the lives of such individuals, and the methods to be used to improve the living conditions of these human beings. Thus Tressel's novel serves as an antidote for a writer who is a product of the British academic tradition for . . . literary values do not exist in a vacuum.⁵⁰

One assents readily to the general argument, but particular points are at odds with its proper social and theoretical foundations: there is an uncertainty about the relations between the discourses of economists and political scientists and those of the novel, and about the novel's representation of individual life; there is also an implication of 'top-down' social policy ('methods . . . to improve . . . living conditions') which would be anathema to socialist theory.

The phrase, 'the great connection between things' as used by Nazareth (with reference to Anderson) stands metaphorically for the lack of integration between the various disciplines in British intellectual culture, and for the separation of literature from social life. But Anderson's analysis is more defined and pointed than this: the 'absent centre' for Anderson would be filled by a discourse of social critique reflecting on the social totality. That Nazareth does not recognize the importance of this point seems to me to be related to the fact that it is precisely a model of such a discourse that is lacking in his own work. There also seems to be an unfortunate marginality suggested here, in a third world scholar's relationship with the centres of socialist theoretical debate in England.

Nazareth does have critical models, but they lead in directions other than those he is claiming. This brings us to the question of ideological inappropriateness: The discussion of two plays by Murray Carlin ends by endorsing the idea of a common humanity being discovered beneath a surface of racial stereotypes. The point would seem innocuous, but it is attached to the liberal (and journalistically topical) problem of race-relations. The essay on Naipaul's The Mimic Men dwells on the subject of moral corruption, which 'is identified in the novel as sheer indifference towards other human beings coupled with a willingness to treat them as inferior beings and to mistreat them for the sake of personal gain, advantage or position.'⁵¹ The discussion of Conrad's Nostromo ends by affirming the 'last word' of those characters who 'believe in moral integrity and human relationship, values transcending

material interests, power and other unreal treasures.'⁵² The last illustration shows the idealism towards which Nazareth leans. The central problem is a humanism which, though not objectionable in itself, diverts attention away from social process and conditioning. One could produce further illustrations, but the trend is clear enough: the relation between 'literature and society' is often constructed in terms of liberal idealism and this undermines seriously the socio-critical pretensions of the volume.

The ideological personalization in Nazareth's analyses merges with an implicitly liberal aesthetics. This is fully illustrated in an appendix entitled 'What is a Novel?'. The posing of the question is Nazareth's response to a certain debate conducted in the correspondence pages of the press (following an article in The Sunday Nation) about whether Charles Mangua's Son of Woman was a novel or not. That Nazareth should take up this issue in all seriousness suggests an uncritical reification of literary forms as natural objects, and the answers he provides confirm one's fears: the novel reveals 'consciousness' or 'sensibility' in terms of a 'unity of theme' (the possibility of different 'dialectics' confronting one another is raised, but this is said to be the same thing as 'unity of theme'); it 'touches' the reader 'intellectually' and 'emotionally'; it involves a growth in 'moral understanding', either for the central character or for the reader; it uses language 'suggestively', to 'communicate the writer's vision'; it is structured so that no more episodes could be added without destroying its 'completeness'.⁵³ The dominant emphases here on an empirical

reliability of sensibilities and on organic unity are clearly inappropriate to Nazareth's stated purposes.

We should consider at this stage how the contradictions of Nazareth's criticism become realized in his treatment of the work of African writers. Two of the essays are most interesting and relevant here: 'The Politics of Wole Soyinka' and 'Is Ngugi's A Grain of Wheat a socialist novel?'. The essay on Soyinka begins by asking 'What kind of political thinking emerges from Soyinka's writings?'.⁵⁴ The question is prompted by Nazareth's wondering whether Soyinka's statement of 1967, that writers had entered 'the stage of disillusionment', was not the consequence of a failure on Soyinka's part to discern the imminence of the Biafran crisis: ' . . . if the African writer had foreseen the forces at work which would lead to the Nigerian/Biafran situation and to the rise of black dictatorship, would Soyinka blame him for "abdicating" his responsibility, for failing to give society its identity, for identifying himself with the victories of the politicians?'⁵⁵ The implication is that Soyinka himself would have to be indicted in the censure that he metes out to other writers if he were taken aback by the march of events.

The question is an appropriate one in so far as it draws attention to the partial or positioned perspective of a writer's involvement in his society, a partiality which is particularly apparent in a period of relative crisis. How does Nazareth follow the question up? He examines The Lion and the Jewel and finds, in the opposition it establishes between Baroka (representing the strength and

vitality which Soyinka associates with indigenous tradition) and Lakunle (representing an effete, westernized superficiality) that to a post-independence order it offers little that is challenging.⁵⁶ He then looks at A Dance of the Forests and finds that it displays a moral, rather than a political disenchantment with the situation that was achieved at independence.⁵⁷ Finally, at greater length he examines Kongi's Harvest, and while acknowledging Soyinka's condemnation of a corrupt dictatorship, he also argues:

that Soyinka's understanding of the political forces at work was still inadequate. It is as though Soyinka was discovering the significance of politics and political forces on the lives of people in Nigeria only because these forces could not be ignored and not because he had seen these forces at work under the surface. Had he to have recognized the forces at work before their effect had reached the surface of society, he would not have been taken by surprise when hostilities finally broke out.⁵⁸

The question posed at the beginning of the essay is therefore answered in the negative at the end (which is perhaps not surprising). What has been achieved? The question that is begged throughout the essay, is precisely the one which is inadequately answered: what were 'the forces' of Nigerian political development of which Soyinka was so unaware? I say 'inadequately answered' because although Nazareth does venture into this territory, he does so in terms that are exclusively literary. He discusses the characterization of Kongi, finds that it is based on Nkrumah, but that it lacks, above all, psychological depth. We are told that because Nkrumah was a complex figure he ought not to be caricatured.

(We are also told that a part of what made him complex was that he inherited the legacy of imperialism, but this is put in the form of a question and is not developed.) We are then informed that the complexities of Nkrumah resembled those of Julius Caesar in Shakespeare's play. In Caesar there is a balance of different tendencies. He is both 'great' ('interested in the welfare of the masses') and obviously 'becoming a tyrant'. 'We have none of this complexity with Kongi . . . who is so crude a figure that he is not representative either of political leaders or of political forces in Africa.'⁵⁹ Ultimately, Nazareth can only bring a literary emphasis to bear on his analysis of Soyinka's early plays in relation to Nigerian political developments in the mid-1960's. The incoherence is apparent in the choice of vocabulary: 'forces' suggests his reaching after an analysis which is alert to historical process, but the expansiveness of the repeated modifier 'in Africa' indicates an inability to press beyond abstractions to the specificity of particular historical moments. Kongi's characterization may be based on Nkrumah, but Soyinka is not writing a satirical revue; it is far more important that in Kongi Soyinka represents his contempt for Nigerian national politicians in power shortly before the events of the coup d'etat and the civil war, i.e. in 1965/66. Tom Lodge has pointed to the significance in Soyinka's work of the mid- to later 1960's, of Soyinka's personal involvement in the earlier 1960's, first with a socialist wing of the Action Group and then later with a group of young intellectuals and middle-ranking officers planning to intervene in the national government. (In October 1965 Soyinka was arrested in connection with a 'pirate' broadcast made from the Western Region Studios of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation

following the disputed Western Region elections.⁶⁰) The emphases of the later group, according to Lodge, fell on youth, efficiency, personal integrity and an assertive populism, though they were unable to mobilize any form of popular support and apparently did not wish to do so either, perhaps because exposure was impossible.⁶¹ The position adopted by Soyinka at the time could be reflected in the characterization and actions of Daodu and Segi in the play: youthful, intellectual and disenchanted, they disrupt Kongi's new yam festival which is a sham display of traditionalism; although they fail, Soyinka endorses their view and actions, though through a suggestion of tragic sacrifice. I suggest that Kongi's Harvest reveals Soyinka's 'politics' in this period as being alienated from any form of collective, popular struggle, an alienation which, from Lodge's account, could not have been avoided in the general slide into civil war; the 'failure' is not due to a lack of psychological depth in the portrayal of Kongi, as Nazareth argues. But even if Nazareth did not have access to information about Soyinka's political thinking or behaviour in the period, a political reading of Kongi's Harvest would look at the question of agency in the play, i.e. who is it that takes action against an existing order, in what form does the action emerge, and what are its consequences? These questions would require a closer examination of the roles of Daodu and Segi in the play. Nazareth's emphasis on 'character' even prevents him from using the resources that are immediately available.

The essay on A Grain of Wheat contains a similar incoherence, in that once again, the literary aspects of Nazareth's analysis

cannot be integrated with the socio-political issues that are raised. The question of whether Ngugi's novel is 'socialist' or not, is said to hinge on his fictionalization of violence: surely, Nazareth asks, the novel is 'anti-revolutionary' if, while recognizing the historical necessity for 'Mau Mau's' strategy of violence, it pays so much attention to the 'spiritual wounding' which affects individuals on both sides of the conflict? The posing of the question suggests, at first, that instead of simply affirming the humanist dimensions of a text, as is characteristic of Nazareth, he is in this case examining the implications behind the 'presence' of these dimensions, i.e. establishing analytical control over them. This would seem to be an appropriate shift, brought on by a sense of ideological affiliation both with the historical purposes of the Gikuyu revolt and with Ngugi, and it is strengthened by a reading of Fanon. The basic Fanonist thesis, that decolonization is only attainable through violence, is claimed as 'a description of Ngugi's approach in A Grain of Wheat':

Set in the actual and historical context of Kenya, Ngugi's novel describes the attempts made by the Kenyans to get back their land, beginning with Waiyaki and Harry Thuku. We are shown how all peaceful attempts fail and then how the only alternative left is guerilla violence. The novel shows that it was only violence that could win independence for Kenya and this is why the Mau Mau movement beings.⁶²

It is of course highly questionable that this is what the novel shows. More typically, it depicts the principal 'Mau Mau' representatives, Kihika, General R. and Koinandu, as hard-liners who impinge on and disrupt the lives of others, and the revolt makes

historical demands on Mugo, Gikonyo and Mumbi which cannot readily be met. Fanon's thesis is therefore rather uncomfortably imposed. However, when Nazareth begins discussing Ngugi's emphasis on the effects of violence on individual life, the appeal to Fanon is maintained — on the strength of the case-histories appended to The Wretched of the Earth. The following passage is worth quoting at some length:

The case-histories reveal that people became psychically disturbed by violence, whether that violence is fascist, imperialist violence or revolutionary counter-violence. For example, Fanon tells us about an Algerian who killed a white woman, wife of a colonel who had murdered two Algerians. The Algerian killed her on an impulse but undoubtedly out of revenge for the murder of his mother and rape of his two sisters by the French soldiers. After killing her, the Algerian has nightmares of the murdered woman: she keeps appearing and asking for his blood. His question, 'But my mother's blood — where's that?' is futile. This is the very end of the stick Ngugi has got hold of. Thus General R. says that Kihika was never the same person after he shot D.O. Robson, although the novel shows us that D.O. Robson was really a brutal, ruthless, senseless murderer and torturer.⁶³

Fanon's case-histories may well have been a formative influence on Ngugi in A Grain of Wheat. (Nazareth was a privileged witness to the circumstances of Ngugi's first encounter with Fanon's work.⁶⁴) What must be attended to here is the way that Ngugi seems to have taken them up. There is a substantial difference between their placing and function in The Wretched of the Earth, and the influence they appear to have had on Ngugi's novel. In

Fanon they have the status of appendices to a much broader socio-political and cultural enquiry, and their discursive context is that of an account of the ways in which clinical therapy revealed symptoms of the more general condition. In Ngugi, the emphasis on psychological wounding is foregrounded, with the historical processes being filtered through individual consciousness. What Nazareth would appear to have missed (though he tells of Ngugi's getting hold of a particular end of the stick) is a reversal of priorities. He says that 'the novel has not only a historical setting, but also what we might call a psychological sub-text.'⁶⁵ In fact, what is referred to as sub-text is really text, since 'consciousness' is given prominence. Nazareth is strictly more correct, though not in the way he intends, when he adds the following:

Ngugi goes even further: he wants to find out whether there is any hope that any of the scarred souls may regain their wholeness.⁶⁶

It is exactly such an emphasis that dominates the novel's closure, as is apparent from Mugo's act of confession, the stress on the need for communal forgiveness and self-examination, the sympathy given to Karanja, and the final reconciliation between Gikonyo and Mumbi. David Maughan Brown has argued that Ngugi's ambivalence about violence in the novel (which, it is argued, is the same thing as ambivalence about 'Mau Mau') is overdetermined by an 'aesthetic ideology' which insists on balanced, contrasting perspectives; which serves to stress the sanctity of individual life; and which (as a consequence of the last attribute) strips a policy of violence of political justification and presents it as

irrational and unnatural.⁶⁷ This argument would be strengthened if/one takes into account the different treatments of the effects of violence on individual life in Fanon and Ngugi's novel: Fanon's discourse places these effects in the context of therapy, and relates them to a broadly structural analysis (i.e. they are not denied, but placed); in the discourse of Ngugi's novel (in keeping with the aesthetic ideology referred to above) they are given a centrality of attention which makes the historical, structural aspect appear contingent. To the argument that the novel as a genre is constituted precisely by this kind of reversal of priorities, I would respond by saying that this is not necessarily so, that there are novelistic conventions which enable writers to reveal consciousness as historically bound. Ngugi's own Petals of Blood, for example, uses various conventions in its attempts to 'centre' historical processes: epic narration, social realism, and even the devices of the detective novel, where consciousness is sometimes given by Ngugi in the form of confession or evidence.)

The question arises, is Nazareth's reading both of Fanon and Ngugi conditioned by the same aesthetic ideology as that which seems to be at work in A Grain of Wheat? The question is almost superfluous: Nazareth states that Ngugi achieves his purpose of examining whether 'the scarred souls may regain their wholeness' by relying on literary models provided by Conrad. He then provides an illuminating analysis of the novel in relation, mainly, to Under Western Eyes and Nostramo. Nazareth approves of Ngugi's use of these models: they enable the novel to achieve complexity, specifically a complexity of moral ambiguities experienced by in-

dividuals caught up in turbulent social conditions. Thus the aesthetic ideology which seems to be at work in the novel (its presence is confirmed in the choice of Conrad to provide the appropriate models) is again at work in a reading which valorizes the effects which the use of these models produces. But how does Nazareth relate this analysis back to the question he poses in the title of his essay? Self-evidently, in the terms given by Nazareth, the 'complexity' of Ngugi's novel is not 'socialist' since it is 'anti-revolutionary'. Nazareth recognizes this, but it is disconcerting for him to do so. What he attempts is a discursive recapture, along the following lines:

The situation was different [from that of Fanon's Algeria] in Kenya. The Mau Mau did not fight right up to the point when Independence was won. Indeed, once Britain realized that it was too expensive to keep fighting a guerilla movement that would eventually succeed, she decided to grant Independence to Kenya. It would have been false to suggest in A Grain of Wheat that the guerilla movement was socialist when it had not been so in real life . . . it is one of the ironies of Kenyan history that although many tribes and even races were involved in the movement for independence, independence was only won by guerilla fighting, which was a Gikuyu movement. Ngugi overcomes this historical limitation by stressing the 'subjective' nature of the novel. He often uses the novelistic 'we' and 'us' to show that he, the novelist, was one of the people of Rungei and Thabai. Therefore, by implication he is telling the story from the point of view of the Gikuyu.⁶⁸

There are distinct signs in this passage of a discursive slippage

into evasion. Firstly, what has the delay between the end of the war and the granting of independence, or the fact that 'Mau Mau' was a Gikuyu movement, got to do with Ngugi's emphasis on personal 'wholeness'? It is one thing to claim that the political developments leading to independence did not lend themselves to socialism, but entirely another to claim that this justifies a personalized analysis of the consequences of the revolt. Secondly, the 'subjectivity' of the novel has been shown by Nazareth (with reference to Conrad) to be mainly a matter of moral complexity: what has this to do with the communal (plural) voice of the narrator? If Nazareth were saying that the various consciousnesses rendered in the novel are generalized, through the communal voice, to represent a consciousness which is meant to be typical of the populace as a whole (this would be an inaccurate and awkward description of the novelistic point of view, but it would make sense of Nazareth's point) then the claims of the novel to 'socialism' (Nazareth is attempting to strengthen these claims) would in fact be vitiated, for Ngugi would then be imposing a supra-historical consciousness on ones which are intended to be historically elicited. Thirdly, what connection is being made between the narrator's communal voice and the ethnic factors at work in the struggle for independence? On one hand, the fact that the revolt was a Gikuyu movement is said to be a 'historical limitation', but on the other, the identification of the narrator with the Gikuyu is endorsed. Presumably, Nazareth would not wish to assert sectional interests based on ethnicity; we must assume that he reads Ngugi's communal voice as an attempt to identify national interests with those of the Gikuyu forest fighters.

✓ But what has this to do with socialism? The predicament reflects a nationalist concern with unification, not a socialist concern at all. Nazareth ends his essay by arguing that because the novel does contain misgivings about the future class of 'black capitalists', it is 'implicitly socialist'. Thus a position of socialism is equated with one of anti-capitalism in the context of independence. What is obscured in this equation is how the class conditions of post-independence Kenya arose, a question which would draw attention to social relations under colonialism, and how indigenous groups were affected differently by white settlement. Nazareth is rather summary in his dismissal of there being any 'socialist' implications in the 'Mau Mau' revolt, for surely in this context, a demand for the re-possession of land carries profound implications for a basic re-structuring of the relations of wealth and property?

At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that the elements of contradiction and incoherence in the discourse of the two works under discussion were potentially productive. The argument is based on the observation that in both works an attempt at politicization places pressure on the authors' literary-analytical assumptions. At this point I need to refine the argument. Is this productive aspect a given, under all circumstances where contradiction manifests itself? There is clearly a degree of rigour which is absent from Nazareth's work, but which one finds in Githae-Mugo's, largely because she is engaged by the conflicts of perspectives of her writers. The difference between the two works in this respect suggests that the conceptual struggles in

which the authors are involved are potentially productive only to the extent that they signify an ongoing process, a willingness to re-examine continually the relationships between texts and contexts. To put this another way, one would wish the contradictions to lead to a certain theoretical self-consciousness which in turn, would generate further re-conceptualization. On this count one is more optimistic about Githae-Mugo's work than Nazareth's. The question of the failure of scholarship in An African View of Literature remains disquieting, and one must ask whether this failure is purely innocent of ideological implications. I am not seeking to de-historicize scholarship, but precisely to historicize it. The question is also urged by the remarkable publishing record behind Nazareth's book: having already appeared in various journals, his essays were collected and published by the East African Literature Bureau, and then re-published by Northwestern University Press. What lies behind the institutional forms of patronage which a collection like this receives, both locally and abroad?

These considerations lead one to take seriously a phenomenon such as Nazareth's second appendix entitled 'Bibliography', which contains no bibliography at all, but a polemic aimed at Taban lo Liyong's book of criticism, The Last Word. Nazareth is scornful of the East African Publishing House's blurb to this publication, which calls it 'the first book of literary criticism in Africa'. Nazareth is disturbed, not because he disagrees with much that Taban lo Liyong says, but because he objects to the book's being called literary criticism. In case one has missed the point, Nazareth is anxious to show that he can do better at literary criticism

than Taban lo Liyong. After pointing to various failings in The Last Word, Nazareth says:

Is this literary criticism? It is not a reasoned account but a hit-and-miss method of knocking bottles of [sic] a wall. ...The Last Word is not, after all, the kind of book that I have written, for Taban lo Liyong is only in his element when he forgets about ideas and comments and starts singing.⁶⁹

So Nazareth has the 'last word', appended (as it were) as a signature. The peculiar element in this debate is the faith that is being invested in the printed word, in the signs of literary criticism as a socially symbolic discourse, in the idea of the book.⁷⁰ What is the ideological meaning of this investment? In answering this question I shall refer to one of the theses of my second chapter. The context of social practice which produces this faith is clearly one in which 'modernity' matters, in which, in other words, the literary culture of the universities is being linked symbolically with the fortunes of the modern nation-state. When a nationalist orientation leads to a reification of discourses, or when literary criticism (or literature) is treated as the symbolic goods of the nation, the prospects for the development of socio-historical criticism are severely reduced. In the context of neo-colonial Africa, the question of whose interests are being served must continually be raised. If the question is pressed far enough, the pressures that would be engendered within literary-critical discourses could only lead to a definitive break from the conceptual legacies of the past.

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NOTES

5. East African Political Readings

1. Micere Githae-Mugo, Visions of Africa: The Fiction of Chinua Achebe, Margaret Laurence, Elspeth Huxley and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978).
2. *ibid.*, pp. ix-x.
3. See the prefaces to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Writers in Politics (London: Heinemann, 1981) and Ngugi and Micere Mugo, The Trial of Dedan Kimathi (London: Heinemann African Writers Series, 1976).
4. *op. cit.*, p. 7.
5. *ibid.*, pp. 187-190.
6. *ibid.*, p. 5.
7. *ibid.*, pp. 7-13.
8. *ibid.*, pp. 14-20.
9. *ibid.*, pp. 25, 21.
10. *ibid.*, p. 30.
11. *ibid.*, pp. 31-32, 33.
12. *ibid.*, p. 32.
13. Hopkins, A.G., An Economic History of West Africa, quoted

from Brenda Cooper, 'Some Generalizations about the Class-Situation of the Writer-Intellectual from Independent Africa', in Africa Perspective, op. cit., p. 67.

14. op. cit., p. 35.
15. op. cit., p. 41.
16. *ibid.*, p. 41.
17. *ibid.*, p. 47.
18. *ibid.*, p. 45.
19. *ibid.*, p. 48.
20. *ibid.*, p. 52.
21. *ibid.*, p. 58.
22. *ibid.*, pp. 58-59.
23. *ibid.*, pp., 60-64.
24. *ibid.*, p., 12.
25. See David Maughan Brown, 'Four Sons of One Father: A comparison of Ngugi's earliest novels with works by Mwangi, Mangua and Wachira', AUETSA Papers (Mimeo, 1984).
26. I refer here to Althusser's description of ideology as representing 'the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence', and as 'interpellating' or 'hailing' individuals as subjects; these two theses explain the 'naturalness' and 'spontaneity' of ideological effects. Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation', in Lenin and Philosophy and Other

- Essays (London: New Left Books, 1971). Of course, Githae-Mugo's suspicions are aroused not on theoretical but ideological grounds.
27. op. cit., pp. 111-112.
 28. Martin Tucker, Africa in Modern Literature, from *ibid.*, p. 112.
 29. David Maughan Brown, op. cit., pp. 4-6.
 30. op. cit., pp. 122-123.
 31. *ibid.*, p. 117.
 32. David Maughan Brown, op. cit., p. 7.
 33. op. cit., pp. 119-120.
 34. See Isabel Hofmeyer, 'On teaching The River Between', AUETSA Papers (Mimeo, 1984) for a full discussion of the novel as a nationalist text.
 35. op. cit., p. 130.
 36. *ibid.*, pp. 139-154.
 37. *ibid.*, pp. 160-161. It is perhaps worth noting that Achebe's views as represented here are consistent with those held as recently as 1983. See Chinua Achebe, The Trouble with Nigeria (London: Heinemann, 1983) which begins, 'The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership.'
 38. op. cit., p. 163.
 39. *ibid.*, p. 163.
 40. *ibid.*, pp. 169-170.

41. James Ngugi [sic], 'Satire in Nigeria', in Pieterse, C. and Munro, D. (eds.) Protest and Conflict in African Literature (London: Heinemann, 1969) pp. 68-69.
42. Gavin Williams, 'Class-relations in a neo-colony: the case of Nigeria', in Gutkind and Waterman, African Social Studies, op. cit., p. 289.
43. op. cit., p. 169.
44. ibid., p. 171.
45. Franz Fanon, 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness' in The Wretched of the Earth (1963; Harmondsworth: Penguin, rpt. 1982) p. 163.
46. Peter Nazareth, An African View of Literature (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974); first published as Literature and Society in Modern Africa (Nairobi, Kampala and Dar es Salaam: East African Literature Bureau, 1972.)
47. Githae-Mugo, Visions of Africa, op. cit., p. 25.
48. op. cit., p. 1.
49. ibid., p. 7.
50. ibid., p. 22.
51. ibid., p. 91.
52. ibid., p. 126.
53. ibid., pp. 218-219.
54. ibid., p. 58.
55. ibid., pp. 59-60.

56. *ibid.*, pp. 63-64.
57. *ibid.*, p. 65.
58. *ibid.*, p. 73.
59. *ibid.*, pp. 72-73.
60. Eldred Jones, The Writing of Wole Soyinka, op. cit., p. xiv.
61. Tom Lodge, 'Nigerian Literature and the Civil War', in Work in Progress, (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg), 5, 1978, pp. 26-27 and 34-37.
62. op. cit., p. 129.
63. *ibid.*, pp. 130-131.
64. Another Leeds associate from East Africa, Grant Kamenju, procured a copy of The Damned (later The Wretched of the Earth) in Paris and gave it to Ngugi shortly before he began writing A Grain of Wheat. (*ibid.*, p. 130).
65. *ibid.*, p. 131.
66. *ibid.*, p. 132.
67. David Maughan Brown, '"Mau Mau" and Violence in Ngugi's Novels', in English in Africa (Grahamstown), 8, 2, 1981.
68. op. cit., pp. 150-151.
69. *ibid.*, pp. 222-223.
70. Isabel Hofmeyer discusses the links between nationalism and the printed word in her analysis of The River Between.

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