

**NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE AND READERSHIPS IN POSTCOLONIAL
AFRICAN FICTION -- TOWARDS RECEPTION THEORY**

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To my grandmother, Chilombo, who struggled to feed me whenever I came back from school; my father, TTS, who first taught me the alphabet; my elder brother, M. C. Samiselo, who always thought that I would do it with a little effort; and my mother, Naomi Kutemba, who will never see this

ABSTRACT

For sometime now studies of African fiction have neglected to explore what most African writers conceive of as a critical aspect of African literature -- the readerships of African texts. This preponderance in African criticism could probably be explained in terms of the fact that commentators of African literature are unaware of any useful theoretical model that would assist to discuss both the points of view and reading constituencies in African fiction. Be that as it may, this trend in African criticism is unacceptable, for the role of the critic is partly to develop critical tools that are commensurate with, and relevant to, drifts in fiction. For this reason, this study proposes what it considers to be one of the viable methods with which to discuss African prose fiction. It is suggested that a most meaningful way to approach African texts, in particular and literature in general, is perhaps to focus on the style and intended audience(s) in specific texts. The reason for this is that such a critical approach would often yield insights both about the themes in the texts and the literary ideologies of the authors themselves.

Applied to the African novel, this thesis points out that focusing on the style and audience(s) in particular African texts ultimately leads to an understanding of a range and variety of interesting narrative strategies and axes of reading constituencies in African fiction. To demonstrate the vitality of such a critical methodology, this thesis explores the style and readers in select novels from Anglophone Africa. The result would certainly seem to be a commendable approach to African literature, which this thesis designates as *intentional criticism*.

Intentional criticism is a viable approach to African fiction precisely because it restricts itself to examining how specific African texts construct their intended audiences through narrative strategies. At the same time, intentional criticism attempts to show, in reverse, how particular reading constituencies are also able to construct specific narratives in particular African texts. A critical method such as intentional criticism, the study concludes, is ultimately desirable to the criticism of African literature because it assists to explain both the authorial and textual ideologies of African writers and their work.

In applying intentional criticism to explore the scope and span of reading constituencies and narrative technique in African fiction, the thesis employs insights from an eclectic variety of

Receptionists such as Hans R. Jauss and Stanley E. Fish. Notably, Jauss's notion of "horizon of expectations" and Fish's concept of "interpretative community" are central to the aims and objectives as well as arguments of this study. It is noted in the thesis that the theoretical implications of the views of these Receptionists on the social and historical relevance of writers and their work have far-reaching ramifications for a theory of African literature. Thus it is argued that any meaningful criticism of African fiction should focus on the style and readers in African texts, while taking cognizance of the views of the writers themselves about their own work. The point is that in focusing simultaneously on both the comments and texts of African writers, the thesis demonstrates the differences/ similarities between what African authors *say* and what they *actually do*; it further demonstrates some of the perennial problems/ contradictions in the African writer's literary programme(s).

In the context of this thesis, the results of intentional criticism are a fascinating compass of national and international readers in the African regional novel, superreaders in African metanovels as well as both in African political fiction and the African quest narrative/ tale/ novel. The construction of this variety of readers, the study emphasises, is, in fact, *intentional* on the part of the African authors this thesis examines precisely because of the *urgency* that informs the literary programmes of most African novelists. In this way, the thesis concludes that the most viable critical approach with which to interrogate the main concerns/ themes in African literature is to focus on the institution of the intended reader, and narrative technique in the African novel.

All this does not mean that African writers do not have problems with style and readers in their work: the thesis shows that the African writer who seems to draw inspiration from African orature, especially from the "language" of oral performances in order to work out appropriate narrative strategies for readers has insurmountable problems indeed. The study further points out that the attempt to merge aspects of *orature* with those of the *written* medium in African postcolonial fiction often leads to results that are not easily definable. In this way, the study argues that as long as African authors continue to *write*, they would probably do well to continue to work out/ create/ improve on narrative strategies that are commensurate with *reading*.

Keywords: Reception, intentional criticism, regional/ political novel/ fiction, metafiction/ novel/ text, quest narrative/ tale/ novel, extradiegetic/ intradiegetic/ schismatic narrator, first-person narrator technique, informational dialogue, multiple consciousnesses narrative technique, point of view, horizon of expectations, casual/ local/ popular/ national/ international reader[ships]/ audience, orature, postcoloniality, interpretative community, superreader[ships], authorial/ textual/ literary ideology

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The significance of narrative technique and readerships in any meaningful study of literary texts first struck me when I was a Rhodes Scholar in the English Department at the University of Liverpool, Great Britain. I was at that time working on a Master's degree comparative study in narrative technique and readerships in the work of two completely different authors -- Mrs Gaskell and Matthew Arnold. The focus was on *for whom* these two writers wrote. The conclusions I made in my Master's degree dissertation on these Victorian writers made me wonder whether or not I could later apply the same critical approach, although at an advanced level, to a study of narrative technique and intended reading constituencies in African fiction. I thank the Rhodes Trust, Oxford, for funding my studies in Great Britain because the fruits of my work at Liverpool University are again realized in another context.

With respect to postcolonial African fiction I should, perhaps, begin to acknowledge Lewis Nkosi; this eagle-eyed critic of African literature assured me that postcolonial African literature was a fertile terrain for specialized critical work. Listening to him give lectures in African literature to the University of Zambia students was always a jolly experience. Then there is also Dr Stephen P. C. Moyo: while we were both colleagues at the University of Zambia, I often listened to his comparative discussions of texts from different literary cultures; for example, his lectures on *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* were often enriched with his fascinating knowledge of the literature of other cultures. That experience could certainly be acknowledged as my initiation into comparative criticism, which is a notable feature of this study.

In any substantial academic study such as this, one needs perhaps, first, to appreciate the sympathies of the supervisor on whom a research student usually presumes too much. I must, therefore, thank my supervisor, Professor Kelwyn Sole, who, right from the beginning, realized both my strengths and weaknesses and, consequently, provided an amazing humane mainstay which has enabled me to maintain a delicate balance between perseverance in academic efforts, and the management of personal problems. Professor Sole has meaningfully directed this thesis.

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Like a drunk or a person who is madly in love, we inane and small minds have the unfortunate capacity to ignore advice when, in fact, we terribly need it; this tendency often leads to our own peril. Dr Mulenga was admirably patient with me in this kind of self-destructive behaviour. The misdemeanours in my private life during the early stages of this doctoral degree thesis need no mention here; they were many and insurmountable. Yet, Dr Mulenga was forbearing with me in all of them. In this way, I sometimes in my lone moments tend to ponder that in a sense this thesis and whatever its consequences belong to him, for had it not been for his constant discussions with me about my personal life, perhaps this thesis would never have been written at all.

I came to the University of Cape Town in July 1994 when, in fact, I should have been there in February of the same year. In their own wisdom, the then South African Representative Office in Lusaka, Zambia, did not allow me to come to South Africa to take up a teaching post -- Full Control, Level E Tutor -- in the English Department at UCT. Associate Professor G. Haresnape, the then Head of the English Department, needs special thanks for having made a timely intervention to convince the Home Office in South Africa that I needed to come to UCT. In the same breath, I also thank my friend and versatile scholar, Dr Andrew C. S. Mushingeh, for encouraging me to come to Cape Town: his confidence in my imagination and intellect is very humbling indeed. There are no words that adequately configure his belief in me.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: RECONFIGURING THE POETICS OF THE AFRICAN NOVEL

The audience ... [in] African literature have become an important factor in the evolution of a literary culture. It is crucial that critical methods reflect the place of the audience in lending significance to literary texts.

D. S. Izevbaye (1990: 135)

For the past few years we have been witnessing ... a change in the field of literary theory and criticism. The words *reader* and *audience*, once relegated to the status of the unproblematic and obvious, have acceded to a starring role.

Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (1980: 3; emphasis in text)

1. Contemporary African Criticism and the Marginalization of the Reader

The main objective of this study is to attempt to provide a theoretical model of how to establish the reading constituencies in African fiction. To achieve this objective, the study approaches African fiction from the standpoints of *style* and *readerships*. The critical assumption of such an approach is that there is often a symbiotic relationship between narrative technique and intended readership in African fiction. Furthermore, it is also assumed that this relationship is ultimately central to any meaningful criticism of African literature. The critical procedures of the study are, therefore, intertwined: the study at once explores the reasons for the various styles and particular/intended readerships in African literature.

In its attempt to establish the intended readerships of African fiction, it will be seen that this study utilizes insights of various Reception theorists. The relevance of Reception to this thesis must, therefore, be explained right away: Reception is significant to African criticism precisely because it recognizes the main concerns of this study indicated above. This is to say that Reception is crucial to this thesis because it privileges the significance of the relationship between author and audience, text and audience, and it further characterizes each of these aspects as coherent and unified entities which are inseparable from each other. Reception is also relevant to this study because Receptionists often address issues of multiple authors and diverse

audiences and refer to sets of messages intended for different audiences. In this way, the intentional organization of narrative technique on the part of some African writers occasionally yields different audiences in a single text.

It cannot be overemphasised that the terrain of African fiction is now fertile and varied and, as such, it is difficult to choose novels that easily lend themselves for illustration in this study. Be that as it may, the study focuses on what are considered as representative texts such as the African regional novel, texts which examine the African “been-to” character and African political texts. These texts incorporate Chinua Achebe’s novels, those by Onouru Nzekwu, Ayi Kwei Armah, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Ama Ata Aidoo published from the 1950s to the present. In focusing on the styles of these texts one major concern of the study is to demonstrate how narrative technique constructs particular *reading positions*¹ in certain African texts; that is to say that the study seeks to examine the means by which certain African texts construct, to use Anne Cranny-Francis’ (1990) words, “the position assumed by a reader from which the text seems to be coherent and intelligible” (25). Put in other words, this study argues that certain African texts *situate* particular readerships in certain interpretative² ways. There is also another argument related to narrative technique that this study pursues; that confronted with the same text, particular readerships are likely to construct narratives of certain African texts, which may or may not be, in consonance with the narratives that are in fact embedded in those text. The reason for this interesting reading situation is that “our knowledge of things,” as H. Ruthrof (1981) would put it, “is intimately linked with the way in which we are able to encounter and use them” (1). In pursuing these two arguments, a third and last one arises: that it is possible to have more than one readership in a single African text.

It is instructive to note that in order to achieve the above objectives, the study attempts to combine a chronological range and authorial/ textual ideological variety that follows a diachronic³ discussion of the selected texts. As this study then develops its main arguments, it will be seen that this approach adheres to Abiola Irele’s (1971) early important demand that any meaningful criticism of African literature ought to simultaneously “grow with our literature, necessarily *adjusting its concepts*,” while “seeing itself essentially as the exploration of a new territory which provides familiar signposts, but which,” finally, “is none the less new, demanding respect for its integrity and its specificity” (15; emphasis mine). Although such an approach risks conceptual coherence, it is, nevertheless, hoped that this study will succeed in presenting two

important aspects of the African novel that have hitherto not been discussed meaningfully: namely, how African authors conceive of both their work and relationship with their particular societies, and how this relationship has constantly prompted African writers to re-work narrative technique in order to target specific readers in the last half century.

The title of this chapter signifies a shift in African criticism. While much of the criticism of African literature has been in the sociological⁴ mode, especially in its focus on the themes in African literature, the implications of “poetics”⁵ in the title of this chapter suggests a *new* method of interpretation: that in focusing on narrative technique to suggest *how* specific African texts generate their themes, is to provide a fruitful way of discussing both the readerships and themes in the African novel. In this way, the thesis provides a meaningful approach to African literature in that it emphasises that any study of African fiction must, to use Jonathan Culler’s (1980) words, “become a poetics, a study of the conditions of meaning” (49). This is also to say that the “poetics” of African texts implicates the totality of features influencing their style and composition. Put in other words, this thesis proposes that a meaningful study of African literature is to approach it from the point of view of both narrative technique and intended readerships, to view this literature as an institution in the way that Culler provides a definition of literature in general:

Just as sequences of sound have meaning only in relation to the grammar of a language, so literary works may be quite baffling to those with no knowledge of the special conventions of literary discourse, no knowledge of literature as an institution. (49)

According to Culler, “the conventions which make literature possible, are the same whether one adopts the reader’s or the writer’s point of view” (50), and he suggests also that “as a reader oneself, one can perform all the experiments one needs” (51). One critical assumption of this study then is that because African writers have consistently reworked narrative technique for purposes of the intended readership, African criticism itself equally needs to be reworked to meet the demands of the constant shifts in African literature.

In order to put the focus of this thesis into a meaningful perspective, it is necessary that the manner in which the current criticism of African fiction conceives of both narrative technique and readership in the African novel is explored. Using insights from M. H. Abrams, (1953), especially what he designates as “coordinates of art criticism” (4-5), Dan S. Izevbaye (1990) argues that “many critics assume that literature is a unique or privileged form for the representation of reality,

existing in a web of relations that link the literary work to its author and its audience” (133).

Abrams had earlier explained these relations with the use of a triangle of relations in which he indicates the “universe” at the top, the “work” immediately below it, the “artist” on the right, and, finally, the “audience” on the left (6-7). With this in mind, Izevbaye then points out that:

[Abrams’] model has proved enormously successful in contemporary criticism because it is simple and flexible enough to be applied outside its original context as a description of the changing emphasis in the practice of English criticism. (134)

What is relevant to this study is Izevbaye’s conclusion that Abrams’ model “can also serve as a theoretical model for describing a variety of critical approaches ranging from biographical exegesis to formalist and Reception theories” (134).⁶

Although it is arguable that most critics of African fiction often work within the structure of Abrams’ model, as Izevbaye observes, another commentator, Lokangaka Losambe (1996), is amazed with the *substance* of extant African criticism when he states that “[s]ince the publication of ... Jahn’s [1958] *Muntu* ... and Mphahlele’s [1962] *The African Image* ... hardly a year passes without yet another guide being a variety produced on African literature” (xi; emphasis mine). Losambe attributes this literary experience to what he describes, first, as “the growth of African literature both in terms of quantity and quality and,” second, the “new insights that are constantly brought into our understanding of the nature of literature and literary theory” (xi). However, Losambe does not critique these trends from the perspective of readership, a crucial aspect of African literature he earlier discusses in “The African Writer, His African Audience and the Concept of Verisimilitude” in which he takes cognisance of the notion of audience in African literature. In that earlier essay, Losambe (1995) correctly notes that “many factors contribute to the shaping of a work of art before it is presented to the reader as an end product” and also that “[i]mportant among such shadowy but powerful factors are ... the artist’s audience” (69). Losambe’s comments are, therefore, characteristic of much African criticism which merely states the problem but does not explore the solution.

Izevbaye (1979) discusses the importance of the relationship between African literature and its criticism when he points out that it is imperative for critics of African fiction to constantly revise their critical tools to keep abreast with new trends in African literature:

[A] periodic reevaluation of the African novel is necessary in order to develop a lively critical heritage as support for its growth. One function of such reevaluation

would be to shift the recent past for significant contributions to fiction in order to affirm *our continuity with it*, and encourage a redefinition of existing literature in the light of new knowledge about literature and society. (7; emphasis mine)

Izevbaye's apt remarks suggest that African criticism, as it is pegged to the development of the African novel, needs to be constantly reconfigured. To Izevbaye, the terms on which African criticism needs to be re-evaluated must take into account the audience for African literature: "our continuity with it" is a telling phrase indeed.

The issue of the audience of African literature was brought up at the 1983 "Research Priorities in African Literatures Conference" at the Africa Centre in London. In the opening session of the conference devoted to "Directions in Research", participants addressed broad issues bearing upon the theory and practice of research in African literatures. In that session Chinweizu discussed "The Responsibilities of Scholars [and Critics] of African Literature", and alludes to the role of the audience in African fiction:

[African] writers are the cooks; the African audience ... are those who are invited to the feast. Scholars [and critics] come in to help the cooks in the kitchen by preparing insights, seminal remarks or suggestions which literary artists may utilize in deciding what kind of soup to cook for us. (15)

Chinweizu's recognition of the aspect of audience in African fiction and its criticism is important. However, a consideration of his discussion shows that Chinweizu neither explains *how* what he calls "the African audience" is implicated in the theory and practice of African criticism, nor suggests any theory which "[s]cholars [and critics] ... may utilize" to illuminate African literature. In this way Chinweizu only raises the problem, but does not provide a meaningful solution to it. He is wrong, too, to assume that the audience of African literature is exclusively African: the very venue of the conference at which he makes these remarks, and the variety of the participants at the same gathering, should have alerted him to the fact that African literature has a wide audience.

The development of African criticism shows that Western literary theory has always influenced it. This situation in itself is not disabling. This is to say that what seems to have worried most African writers for sometime now is that the principal concern of most critics of African fiction has often been sociologically oriented: they have been concerned with *what* African texts signify, but not with *how* this signification is achieved in the texts. In other words,

most commentators have attempted to explain/ show the extent of the fidelity of African texts to the supposed “reality” of the African experience.

While it is true to say that sociological criticism has its own value, the study points out that sociological theory does not often address issues of narrative technique and readership; that for this reason, this approach can at times be attenuated. For example, S. Iyasere (1972) claims that it was notably J. P. Shelton who, in the 1960s, advocated the preoccupation with sociological insights to discuss African texts because, according to him, the method of finding linkages between real life situations in society and the imaginative products of that society, could be invaluable to African criticism. The supposed value of this method, Shelton explains, would furnish the critic of African fiction with

some understanding of the culture depicted based upon the source other than those furnished within the pieces of the writing, and more importantly, it will help obliterate the major problems of ethnocentrism, of subjectivism, and the avoidance of making stock responses based upon European culture which may not necessarily and probably does not embrace the same values as those of Africa.⁷

Clearly, a critical position such as the sociological mode easily falls into the trap of taking the imaginative reworking of reality in literary works for reality itself, if it is not applied carefully to African texts.

It is worthwhile to point out that while sociological material in some African texts may indeed be significant as “background” information, the way some sociological critics have used such material to discuss both narrative technique and the audience of some African texts is not helpful. Consider the way Oladele Taiwo (1967) evaluates Achebe’s first two novels:

[*No Longer at Ease*] is superior to *Things Fall Apart* in which one had ... the feeling that here was a Nigerian explaining his way of life to Europeans Achebe’s message in *No Longer at Ease* is more up-to-date than in *Things Fall Apart*, or rather it is concerned with urban problems which may be nearer to the interests of most readers. (151)

Taiwo does not elaborate what he means by “most readers” and “the interests” of such readers with respect to Achebe’s two novels. One, then, is left to ask why, in Taiwo’s view, the modern African novel should primarily deal with urban issues but not with rural problems. Furthermore, Taiwo fails to recognise that it is, in fact, narrative technique in *Things Fall Apart* (what Taiwo refers to as “explaining”), which makes *Things Fall Apart* more interesting than another Nigerian novel, Nzekwu’s *Wand of Noble Wood*, which deals with the same theme of culture-clash. Most

importantly, Taiwo does not develop a crucial aspect of narrative technique in *Things Fall Apart*: the novel's interpretative narrator which suggests an intended audience. A careful reading of Achebe's two novels actually shows that although both novels use the traditional omniscient narrator technique, it is in the way in which the narrator in *Things Fall Apart* assumes an interpretative role that distinguishes *Things Fall Apart* from *No Longer at Ease*. The point to make here is that it is in the manner in which the interpretative narrator in *Things Fall Apart* manipulates the intended reader that distinguishes Achebe's first novel from *No Longer at Ease*. In short, Taiwo's problem arises from his lack of knowledge about one of the primary interests of criticism, which, according to Edward Said (1979) is that "the things to look at [in a text] are ... narrative devices ... [and] historical and social circumstances" (21). It is misleading, Said says, to expect in a text "the correctness of the representation, nor its fidelity to some great original" (21).

As another example of how background information may be useful to the criticism of a text, it may indeed be helpful to know the corruption and moral degeneracy which marked the Nigerian political scene between 1964 and 1965 in order to understand the context of Achebe's *A Man of the People*. However, the manner in which W. K. Post (1967) uses this information to analyse Achebe's novel leads to a gross confusion in Post's discussion concerning narrative technique in *A Man of the People*. In fact this confusion eventually leads Post to neglect the vital aspect of the novel -- the target of its satire and, by extension, its intended audience, as this chapter shows.

Post begins correctly by noting that *A Man of the People* is art. However, he proceeds, as follows:

His [Achebe's] own artistic sensitivity, his sense of personal disappointment as a member of the intelligentsia, have possibly made him too cynical about the people in general. He perhaps portrays them as too ready to tolerate corruption provided they get some of the crumbs from the newly rich man's table. Whatever the situation in Achebe's *fictional country*, in the real Nigeria there was great joy when the old regime was overthrown at the beginning of 1966. (xiii; emphasis mine)

As Post himself points out, what is at issue here is Achebe's "fictional country"; and to complain of the pessimistic vision of the former as it contrasts with Post's own vision is to insist on a simplistic "true-to-life realism" which is not in this case consistent with Achebe's vision. It is true that *A Man of the People* does not do what Post seems to have in mind; this is simply because the intentions of the novel are to satirize the civilian government in Nigeria before the army took over. Whatever happened "in the real Nigeria" immediately after this overthrow is not the concern

of Achebe's novel. Post also forgets that realism, as a narrative technique, is not Achebe's sole technique in this novel; there is also comic-satire, as has just been noted, which partly relies on exaggeration. For these reasons, one can see why it is important to agree with Janheinz Jahn (1968) when he points out that "[a]ll purely ... sociological interactions [with a literary text], must remain inadequate for they neglect the aspect [narrative technique] which makes literature what it is" (282).

A consideration of subsequent African criticism that utilizes Western insights still shows that both narrative technique and audience in the African novel have been marginalized. Emmanuel Ngara's (1982) *Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel: A Study of the Language, Art and Context of African Fiction* is one example of a critical study that neglects to explore the audience of African fiction, as it supposedly deals only with narrative technique in African fiction. There is a profound inadequacy in Ngara's study at the all-important juncture where a particular model or framework is tested against specific African texts. In fact Ngara's brand of linguistics and stylistics suffers from a needless commitment to an undefined "Standard English" as some sort of infallible yardstick with which linguistic registers and stylistic manifestations are measured. Ngugi, for instance, is praised because in *A Grain of Wheat*, according to Ngara, he "uses Standard English and uses it well" (97). At the same time, Ngara predictably reduces Gabriel Okara's linguistic experimentation in *The Voice* to this:

The simplicity and un-Englishness of the language is [*sic*] what the *reader* notices first. In the first paragraph, Okara's language sounds like the English of a schoolboy who has not yet mastered the language. (39; emphasis mine)

Ngara does not explain what kind of "reader" is likely to recognise what he thinks are the problems with the English in Okara's text. In fact most sophisticated "reader[s]" will know that prominent authors such as James Joyce and Vladimir Nabokov⁸ have occasionally used English with startling stylistic results in the way Okara does. All one needs to do is to compare the general drift of the "English[es]" of Joyce and Nabokov with Okara's which is claimed to be "school-boyish" while asking *why* these writers write thus. For it is not the sheer instance of seeming "un-English[...]" which matters in the language of the fiction cited but *what* this English *signifies* to the intended readerships in these novels.

The most disconcerting problem with Ngara's type of "Stylistics" is that the model starts its programme already crippled as it is not defined adequately; it does not also demonstrate

familiarity with any significant work already done in the field. Published in 1982, Ngara's work is silent about Stanley Fish's (1980a) "What Is Stylistics and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?". Astonishingly, too, is the absence in Ngara's book of Ferdinand de Saussure's pioneering *Course in General Linguistics*. There is also no indication of the seemingly relevant text, Roger Fowler's *Linguistics and the Novel*, which, according to Ruthrof, "demonstrates that linguistic categories can be applied to the study of the novel ... [and] will become a manageable and fruitful approach to the discussion of literary texts" (11). This shortcoming in Ngara's study is further demonstrated in many instances where Ngara cites lines or passages and merely labels them: "lyrical", "beautiful", "powerful" without showing any in-depth linguistic analysis. A basic work such as Ngara's cannot take these terms for granted. Lastly, it is also surprising that Ngara does not discuss the notion of audience with respect to the African novel when, in fact, the theoretical implications of both Stylistics and its sister discipline, Linguistics, primarily impinge on constituencies such as those of "writer" and "reader", "sender" and "receiver" and "speaker" and "listener".

Three years later, Ngara published another work in which the project of "Art and Ideology" is central. Like Post earlier had problems with Achebe's "artistic sensitivity" in *A Man of the People*, Ngara (1985), in his second study, *Ideology in the African Novel: A Study of the Influence of Marxism on African Writing*, neglects to discuss to what extent African novelists utilize their "art"⁹ and "ideolog[ies]" in order to impact on their intended readers.

In order to appreciate the overall significance of this study, it may, perhaps be worthwhile to examine here a few representative studies which seem to advertise competing modern literary theoretical view points. Sunday Anozie's (1981) *Structural Models and African Poetics: Towards a Pragmatic Theory of Literature*, and Georg Gugelberger's (1985) *Marxism and African Literature* are cases in point. Anozie's study, published earlier than either of Ngara's, shares the linguistic dimension of Ngara's first study, but advocates a structuralist approach to African fiction. Gugelberger's study, published a year later than Ngara's second work, however, shares the Marxist orientation of Ngara's second study. Now, when one examines these studies in the context of the view that most African writers have always insisted that literature has a special place in society, one immediately notices their major shortcomings in the application of their supposed theoretical premises to the interpretation of African texts. To begin with, all the writers this thesis examines consider the novel as a crucial weapon in the armoury of social definitions;

they, for instance, understand literature in the way Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) explains it: that “in its ‘content’ literature reflects the whole of the ideological horizon of which it is part” (17).¹⁰ From the foregoing, there no reason to suppose, as Collin Mercer (1984) says, that structuralism’s methodology cannot do service for “a range of disciplines from anthropology to Mathematics” (44).

Uri Margolin (1978) had earlier good reason to propose that critics should “regard structuralism as a methodological paradigm for hermeneutics in the same way that linguistics was for structural poetics in its turn” (183). To say that structuralism is relevant to “African Poetics,” as Anozie does, then, is really not saying anything profoundly new; but the potential is there for Anozie to make a contribution both to the sponsoring system, structuralism, and the interpretation of African literature. For instance, Jonathan Culler’s (1975) *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* had earlier posed the useful argument that a truly structuralist knowledge of the literary system would have as its object not the structure of a text but the structure of a reader’s interpretative acts. However, although many African writers often refer to their constituencies, critics such as Ngara and Anozie do not say much about the audience of the African novel despite the occasional gestures to what they refer to as “the competent reader”.¹¹

In *Marxism and African Literature* Gugelberger presents what he describes as “[t]he main tendencies of post-independence African criticism” -- “Larsonist critics [*sic*],” “African Eurocentric critics”, and “Bolekeja critics” (11-12). This presentation does not go beyond name-dropping, while the Gugelbergerian “tendencies” turn out to be built around hand-picked critics about whom the word “main” is certainly a misnomer. It is also obvious that Gugelberger’s categorizations are misleading: for example, on “Larsonist [critics],” he says:

Larsony [is what] ... Armah has called [the] phenomenon of European critics who write on African literature and constantly compare it to European literature. Critics such as Larson, Palmer, Roscoe and others. (ii)

It must be a desperate critic who would, indeed, insist on turning a short essay such as Armah’s (1977) “Larsony or Fiction as Criticism of Fiction” with a specific intent --

I [Armah] propose to examine some of the expert pronouncements of ... Larson In my appraisal I shall restrict myself to those pronouncements ... on my work and person. (34)

-- into a "main [tendency] of post-independence African criticism." Worse still, Gugelberger apparently believes that Eustace Palmer is a European. He is not. This error subverts Gugelberger's other "tendency" ("African Euro-centric critics") to which, on his own terms, Palmer should belong.

Marxist theory supposedly influences *Marxism and African Literature*. Although elsewhere Gugelberger (1998) defends the lapses in *Marxism and African Literature*, a reading of the essays in Gugelberger's collection clearly shows that the essays are patently uncertain about their critical and theoretical assumptions. A case in point is Grant Kamenju's "*Petals of Blood* as a Mirror of the African Revolution". To begin with, for any critic at this time to discuss a fictional work as a "mirror" needs to take cognisance of ideological implications of literature, which Kamenju does not explore satisfactorily. It seems that while the African Marxist novelist, Ngugi,¹² is aware of this fact, Kamenju is not. For example, while Ngugi uses the appropriate notion of "image"/ "picture" to discuss *Petals of Blood*, Kamenju uses the ideologically contentious term "truth": according to Kamenju, "Ngugi's novel is a demonstration of *the truth*" (130; emphasis mine); "[t]he novel affirms *the true lesson*." (135; emphasis mine).

Now, it is worth noting that the first part of Ngugi's (1981) *Writers in Politics: A Re-Engagement with Issues in Language* is significantly entitled "War of Images" (emphasis mine). The notion of "image" is striking indeed, for it implicates a creator/ artist and viewer/ audience. For this reason, Ngugi points out that "[a] writer tries to persuade his readers, to make them not only view a certain reality *but also from a certain angle of vision*" (4; emphasis mine). This, then, means that if a mirror produces an image, it is not necessarily an image that is *true* (as Kamenju thinks), but one that is usually *manipulated*, as Ngugi's remarks suggest.

A Marxist critic typically undertakes to explain the literature of any era by revealing the economic, class and ideological determinants of the way an author writes, and to examine the relation of the resulting literary product to the social reality of that time and place. However, the end-result of such a critical undertaking is not necessarily a mirror-image of the era in question. What a Marxist critic usually does is, in fact, exemplified at one point in Ngugi's (1986) *Petals of Blood* when the narrator explains *how* Wanja tells the policeman the activities of both Abdulla and Karega prior to their burning of Wanja's own house. According to the narrator:

And yet as she [Wanja] tried to tell him [the policeman] about that Friday she found that there was quite *a lot to conceal*. She tried to tell him the main facts,

leaving out only intimate details So she edited the story as she went on. After all, a coherent narrative depended on knowing *what details to tell and what to leave out.* (322; emphasis mine)

Wanja in this passage hints at the narratology¹³ of African fiction: she implies the factors which most African writers often take into account in working out appropriate narrative technique. In her own case, the *type* of the intended audience of her narrative/ report -- the police officer/ a dangerous figure to her and her society in general -- dictates/ suggests to Wanja what kind of narrative technique to employ in her report. “[W]hat details to tell,” therefore, implies an audience while “a lot to conceal ... and leave out” suggests narrative technique.

It is important to note that Wanja’s remarks problematise Ngugi’s authorial ideology. Although it is not in the interest of this chapter to offer a general discussion of ideology, a few remarks about the way in which ideology is understood in this study may be apposite. Terry Eagleton (1994) characterizes the fundamental complexities of ideology, as follows:

For most of us nowadays ‘ideology’ has something of a pejorative ring to it, evoking as it does a whole array of negative notions from false consciousness to fanaticism, mental blockage to mystification. In ordinary conversation, to claim that someone is thinking ‘ideologically’ is usually to suggest that their view of things is skewed by a set of rigid preconceptions. If only they were to shuck off this conceptual straitjacket, they might begin to see the world as it truly is But this is not at all how the term ‘ideology’ started life. ‘Ideology’ means, literally, the study or *knowledge of ideas.* (1; emphasis mine)

Brenda Cooper (1980) acknowledges the problem of defining ideology when she says that “[t]here is much inconsistency surrounding this concept [of ideology]”; according to her, the source of the problem may be that “the term often is asked to perform many functions and to cover too many diverse meanings” (66). In the context of Wanja’s remarks, Cooper offers a definition of an author’s ideology that is useful to the study of the texts this thesis examines: “ideology is the primary mediator between [the African] reality and the [African] text” (60). What, then, is interesting in the context of this thesis is to explore *how* African writers such as Achebe, Aidoo, Armah, Ngugi and Nzekwu mediate the realities of their various African societies. This is to say that it is vital for African criticism to establish the types/ forms of narrative technique, or what Kelwyn Sole (1978a: 27) designates as literature’s “different” language, to engage their various intended readerships. Such a critical understanding, this study points out, is meaningful, for it yields a useful distinction between reality and fiction, between fiction and other discourses of human experience such as history and anthropology.

In the context of this study, it is instructive to note that Sole's notion of the "different" language in literature underpins narrative technique. This point is pertinent to a meaningful criticism of African fiction, for it is to say that the task of the critic must not only be to explain the themes in African fiction, as has been the case in the past, but also to *account for* narrative technique in terms of audience-orientation.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the Marxist essays in *Marxism and African Literature* do not adequately explore how narrative technique in African fiction assists to construct the readerships of African literature; the discussions only focus on authorial ideology as if the only concern of most African writers is to implicate their authorial ideologies in their fiction. The problems with Gugelberger's collection of essays could, therefore, be summed up in Sole's (1978b) cogent observation on such studies, which is as follows:

Studies that attempt to deal with connections between political ideology and literature, or with the importance of understanding the class basis of a particular writer in dealing with his work, are few. Methods of criticism emanating from a Western liberal perspective have shown themselves increasingly unable to deal with anything but the banal and repetitive of themes

Literature is by no means a passive reflection of politics or of the economic base of a society. There is at best an asymmetrical relationship between the economic base and elements of the superstructure (which include political and ideological considerations) of a social formation. Each element of the superstructure has its own internal dynamics not easily reducible to an expression of economics -- literature, music and the plastic arts in particular have a high degree of autonomy. A study which tries to explain literature coherently in terms of the ideological and political structures which influence it, would eventually have to seek out the principle which tied particular works to ideology and distanced them from it *What the text is silent on* needs to be considered as well, as a text is always incomplete in an analytical sense and full of conflicted and contradictory meanings. (1-2; emphasis mine)

"What the text is silent on" is critical to a Marxist understanding of the position of the author in literature, for it suggests the nature of the influence writers have on their own work. It is a role, which, in fact, most critics of African literature often acknowledge.

However, although the Marxist criticism of African literature is often preoccupied with, say, both the "class basis of the [African] author" and, therefore, the "political ideology [of African] literature," to borrow Sole's words, it is then surprising that Marxist critics of African literature do not utilize the insights of prominent Marxist critics such as Pierre Macherey and Eagleton whose usual lines of enquiry privilege the author. Catherine Belsey (1980) notes that Macherey,

for instance, is of the view that “[i]n one sense the author determines the nature of the story: he ... decides what happens” (106). In fact Macherey (1978) claims that:

The speech of the book comes from a certain silence, a matter which it endows with form, a ground on which it races a figure. Thus the book is not self-sufficient; it is necessarily accompanied by *a certain absence*, without which it would not exist. This is why it seems useful and legitimate to ask of every production what it tacitly implies, *what it does not say*. (85; emphasis in text)

Understanding Macherey’s view of the author assists to explain why it is unfortunate that Marxist critics of African literature do not use his insights. According to Ann Jefferson and David Robey (1986), Macherey’s view of the author is that of “a producer” and “is not unlike the Formalists’ view of the writer as a craftsman, the user of devices” (177). Indeed in Macherey’s own words, the literary work “is not created by an intention (objective or subjective); it is produced under determinate conditions” (78). Therefore, in his criticism Macherey’s procedure is often to interrogate the inner workings of texts; their symptomatic silences, fissures and factitious ideological closures. The primary production for Macherey, then, is the intra-textual production of meaning and significance. It is for this concern that Macherey has which makes Belsey to point out that Macherey’s notion of the author anticipates that of Roland Barthes in the latter’s emphasis in *S/Z* on the production of the text and on writing as a practice using codes, some of which may come from other texts. “Macherey anticipates Barthes,” Belsey explains, “in demonstrating that *contradiction* is a condition of narrative” (106; emphasis mine).

It is arguable that the reason why the Marxist criticism of African literature does not utilize the insights of Marxists critics such Macherey is what David Attwell (1984) describes as the influence of the “British legacy” in African criticism, and B. Aschcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin (1989) rehearse as “Anglophone and Social Function Theory” (125-32). Attwell identifies the history of this criticism, as follows:

This is the Anglophone criticism ... produced *in Africa itself*. (Specifically, it is produced in concentrations of academic literary culture in Anglophone sub-Saharan Africa). This interpretative community is distinguished from the ‘international’ communities because it is involved in the task of cultural self-definition: through its engagement with local literature, it seeks to build systems of meaning which are ideologically rooted in indigenous, post-colonial circumstances. (80; emphasis in text)

Attwell identifies what he considers to be the two basic concerns of this criticism as “contradictory pulls” -- “one to the social reference of [African] literature, ... [while the other] to the literary quality of the work” (82), and, then, concludes that “[m]ost notable here are the hybrid concepts advanced by ... Irele (‘sociological imagination’) ... and ... Iyasere (‘cultural formalism’ [82; emphasis mine]).¹⁵

The critical procedures of this study, it must be pointed out, acknowledge the significance of the concerns of both “sociological imagination” and “cultural formalism”; from Irele’s perspective this study recognises the significance of African writers as living individuals who actively respond/ react to social/ political/ economic vicissitudes in their immediate surroundings, while from Iyasere’s criticism this study appreciates Iyasere’s insistence on form in African fiction.¹⁶ In fact the critical procedures of this study show that it is almost impossible to separate the two positions in African fiction, for the African writer’s vision of African society is mediated through narrative technique in African fiction.

Perhaps it is fair to say that the problem of the “British legacy” that Attwell outlines is compounded by another dimension of African criticism; this is the aspect of what Daniel R. Schwarz (1991) describes as “the dilemma of Anglo-American novel criticism,” which has its source in the way “literature has been read and taught in England and America” (602) for the past half a century. Schwarz problematises this criticism when he says that it is the question of “how to focus on technique without sacrificing subject-matter” (82).¹⁷ Now, it is trite but true that the “interpretative community” which, according to Attwell, is a part of the “concentrations of academic literary culture in Anglophone sub-Saharan Africa” (82) has also often been exposed to this “dilemma of Anglo-American novel criticism” that Schwarz explains above. In this way, it is, therefore, true to say that African criticism is still open to an ever-increasing demand for renewal, to fresh insights to meet the equally changing ways in which African writers work out narrative technique. This space in African criticism seems to have paved the way for an emerging form of criticism that both Schwarz and Attwell do not focus on, but should be acknowledged as a meaningful way of reconciling in African criticism the two “contradictory pulls” of the “British legacy” Attwell identifies, and the “dilemma of ... how to focus on narrative technique without sacrificing subject-matter,” as Schwarz explains. Most importantly, this burgeoning approach focuses on a writer’s own comments to discuss the author’s work

It is, perhaps, Phaniel A. Egejuru (1978) whose work is the first study to approach the African novel from the standpoint of the comments of African writers on their work. From the observations that African writers have made on their work, Egejuru seems to identify the reasons why, in her view, most African authors have chosen to use the novel and to write for particular audiences:

By choosing the novel rather than the theatre ... the African writer announces his preferred audience -- the bourgeoisie, composed of European[s] ... and the educated African elite. This choice eliminates the African masses, most of who do not understand the foreign languages and are not familiar with the novel genre. (15)

While Egejuru's study provides a wealth of illuminating comments that African writers have made on their work, the "[c]ritical [a]pproach to African [l]iterature" it is supposed to provide does not readily show itself -- *how to identify the readerships*, whether they are "the educated African elite" and "European[s]," or not, that most African writers claim they write for.

This study argues that in addition to the comments African writers make on their work, the other viable approach to African works in order to establish *how* "the African writer announces his preferred audience" is through a study of *narrative technique* in the works. Furthermore, while it is true that the choice of a foreign language must, *ipso facto*, exclude those who cannot understand it, most African writers choose the novel genre, as this chapter shows, on account of other factors, such as historical ones, than Egejuru allows for.

It must be pointed out that in its critical procedures, this emerging form of the criticism of African fiction that employs the authors' comments has its roots both in the "British legacy" and in "Anglo-American novel criticism". The point of departure of this method, nevertheless, is its insistence that an African text cannot be discussed meaningfully without taking into account the author's own comments. Put differently, this criticism points out that in an attempt to criticize African fiction, the critic needs not just to examine African texts in themselves; rather, the critic must bring to the texts in question what the writers of those particular works say about them. It follows, therefore, that to talk about an African text without taking into account what the author says about it is to neglect the intellectual/ imaginative life-source of that work, as Ngugi (1972) notes when he spells out the different roles which fiction and the essay play in the revelation of a writer's mind in the following:

In a novel the writer is totally immersed in a world of imagination which is other than his conscious self. At his most intense and creative the writer is transfigured,

he is possessed, he becomes a medium. In the essay the writer can be more direct, didactic, polemical, or he merely states his beliefs and faith: his conscious self is here more at work. Nevertheless the boundaries of his imagination are limited by the writer's beliefs, interests, and experience in life, by where in fact he stands in the world of social relations. This must be part of the reason that readers are curious about a writer's opinion on almost everything under the sun A writer is thus forced either by the public or the needs of his craft to define his beliefs, attitudes and outlook in the more argumentative form of the essay. (xv)

As Ngugi observes, the essay is an important outlet for a writer's ideas; but, equally important, are the less neatly organized or articulated commentaries in newspapers and journals, as well as in the spoken forms -- lectures, addresses, interviews and casual remarks.

Throughout this study, then, it will be seen that the comments of most African writers will often be used to support the study's main arguments about the significance of narrative technique and readerships in the African novel. However, in addition to taking into account the observations of African writers on their intended reading constituencies, the study also brings to bear on its criticism of the selected African texts what the Receptionist Umberto Eco (1979) identifies as a crucial aspect of any meaningful criticism: "[t]he [r]ole of the [r]eader" in fiction, which he defines as "the *cooperative* role of the addressee in interpreting messages" (vii; emphasis mine).

2. Postcolonial Literary Theory, the African Writer and the Novel

This study argues that the African novel is a dynamic, complex and varied text that responds to equally a variety of immediate dynamic, complex cultural and historical conditions. This is why M. K. Booker (1998) rightly points out that although “African art is still art, ... it is also true that the immediacy of the cultural and political problems addressed by postcolonial writing” indeed “gives that literature a relationship to reality that seems ... direct and urgent” (4). From such observations, this study, therefore, reads postcoloniality in the same way as it is explained in the anthology by P. Williams and L. Chrisman (1993) in which, as Gail Fincham (1995) puts it, there is “a postcoloniality that is responsive to cultural and historical difference” and in a “a sense postcolonial theories of subjectivity are at last moving beyond the simple binarisms of opposition and resistance” (224, 226). This view of both postcoloniality and the African novel is pertinent to this study because the African writer often understands *novel writing* as a community’s expression of its hopes and anxieties, its failures and achievements. In discussing how post-colonial literary theory then relates to a study of the intended audience and narrative technique in specific African texts, this section of the thesis only attempts to indicate discursively the force of the debate around the usefulness of postcolonial literary theory and practice.

For instance, if Frederic Jameson (1986), for one, views “all third-world texts” as “necessarily” national allegories (69), Homi K. Bhabha speaks of an ambivalence in colonial discourse that is captured within postcolonial texts in the form of “mimicry”.¹⁸ It is, however, contentious as it is limiting to treat African texts simply as national allegories or reflections of colonial experience. Although one would agree with Bhabha that there is, often, an “ambivalent” element of mimicry embedded in colonial discourse and reflected/ transgressed in/ by post-colonial texts, it is, nevertheless, arguable that some African texts -- including the ones this study examines -- decisively move beyond “camouflage” and beyond being “almost the same, but not quite.”¹⁹ Indeed many African texts present the cohabitation of a multiplicity of contradictions that cannot be contained only in an “ambivalent”, mimetic economy. This is to say that African texts can be read as representation that is much more than just “mimetic” and/ or oppositional, or continually producing a slippage.²⁰ The interest of this study, therefore, lies not with the constant fracturing and undermining of colonialist discourse but, rather, with *how* African texts offer

alternative scripts that subvert internal systems of power, texts whose gaze²¹ is not necessarily directed towards the colonial text.

Just as Williams and Chrisman, according to Fincham, reject “the notion of a continuous postcoloniality ... [as] ‘an unbroken history of automatic, effortless resistance by the colonised’” (224), Ashcroft, *et al.* in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures* add that:

The idea of ‘postcolonial literary theory’ emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of postcolonial writing Postcolonial theory has proceeded from the need to address this different practice. Indigenous theories have developed to accommodate the differences within the various cultural traditions as well as the desire to describe in a comparative way the features shared across those traditions. (11)

While the need for a postcolonial literary theory is undoubted, the difficult issue becomes one of “developing” theories that in themselves do not reflect Eurocentric tendencies. If they are produced, such theories should neither position African texts only in opposition to the centre (for example, Salman Rushdie’s statement on the back cover of *The Empire Writes Back* that “the Empire writes back to the Centre”), nor posit false notions of the universal.

Arun Mukherjee (1990) questions “the totalizations of both the postcolonialists and the post-modernists that end up assimilating and homogenizing non-Western texts within a Eurocentric cultural economy” (1-2). The problem with such totalizations, as some critics argue, is that the term “postcolonial” ends up being a monolithic term that ignores historical specificity and the vital differences between the experiences of colonization, past and present, among both white settlers and non-white postcolonials (Appiah 1991, McClintock 1992, Shohat 1992).

Vijah Mishra and Bob Hodge (1991) argue that such homogenisation “is clearly aimed at making the diverse forms of the postcolonial available as a single object on the curriculum of the centre” (401), while Stephen Slemon (1990) maintains that the centre/ periphery dichotomies end up “privileging the kind of postcolonial writing which takes resistance to colonialism as its primary objective” (35).²² What all this means then is that an undifferentiated concept of post-colonialism and postcolonial theory not only robs the so-called postcolonials of their differences but also ignores the differences in narrative technique and intended readerships in their literatures.

It is important to emphasise this point because African writers often show uneasiness towards postcolonial literary theory. Take, for example, Aidoo’s (1991) impatience with the discourse of

postcoloniality. According to her, “colonialism has not been ‘post’-ed anywhere” (152). This is, indeed, an acerbic remark, which, says S. Gikandi (1996), is likely to “provide[...] opponents of postcolonial theory with their most dramatic epigraph” (14). However, Aidoo’s position is clear:

Applied to Africa ... and some parts of the world, ‘postcolonial’ is not only a fiction, but a pernicious fiction, a cover-up of a dangerous period in our people’s lives. For unlike ‘neo-colonial’, for instance, ‘postcolonial’ posits a notion of *something finished*. (And ‘post’ definitely is not ‘ante’). (152; emphasis in text)

The effects of such a claim among literary commentators in the former colonies are easy to see.

This is precisely because, according to Gikandi, of the following:

[F]or people who live the practical effects of colonialism, imprisoned in its decaying infrastructure and incomplete post-mortem, it is hard to make a case for any significant temporal shift from an imperial past, especially when its ideologies appear to have been legitimated by decolonisation. If postcoloniality has been defined as the transcendence of imperial structures and their histories, such a definition is obviously contradicted by the everyday experiences and memories of the people in the ex-colonies. (14-15)

Yet, “the assumption that the lives and experiences of people in so-called Third World countries are wretched because they are perpetual victims of their colonial past similarly,” Gikandi rightly adds, “needs to be questioned” (15). For whether decolonisation is considered as a successful or an arrested factor, commentators such as Anthony K Appiah (1992) and Biodun Jeyifo (1990) argue that one cannot deny the power of the social and cultural projects that have sought to transcend the imperial legacy and the “states of mind,” to use Jeyifo’s term, they have generated. “If such ‘states of mind’ seem hard to recognize,” one needs to agree with Gikandi, “it is because even as ex-colonial subjects reject the culture of colonialism, they also refuse to be contained within the discourse of official nationalism” (15).²³

One of the most compelling reasons for a postcolonial theory, then, may be the desire, among the formerly colonized peoples themselves, for historiographies and cultural instruments that might help demythologise the ideology of nationalism -- especially the claim that the nation-state in Africa, for instance, represents a political and interpretative moment in which colonialism is finally transcended. In this way, it is then arguable that the postcolonial paradigm is most useful as a strategy for re-reading the convergence of structural continuity in the face of temporal disruption, of understanding entrenched memories in the midst of reconfigured desires. Therefore,

postcoloniality is a term that explains a state of transition and cultural instability as, for instance, when Gayatri C. Spivak (1993) says that:

[T]he political claims that are most urgent in decolonised space are tacitly recognised as coded within the legacy of imperialism: nationhood, constitutionality, citizenship, democracy, even *culturalism*. (60; emphasis mine)

Now, it is important to emphasise that this study takes novel *writing* as an interactive process that enhances culturalism. This is to say that writing is in itself an aspect of *culture*, and, at the same time, contributes to culture in the way Raymond Williams (1981: 87-118) explains writing as one element in the “means of cultural production,” as follows:

Writing as a cultural technique is wholly dependent on ... [both] *producers* ... [and] *receivers* It is then not surprising that for a very long period the most difficult problems in the social relations of cultural practice revolved around the question of literacy. (93-4; emphasis mine)

As it is, Williams recognises the part and function of “receivers” in the equation of literacy; that writing in itself has no *function* if it does not take cognisance of the quality of its own *reception*. What is crucial to this study (as will be seen in Chapter V) is, therefore, to explore how this particular legacy of imperialism -- the novel genre -- *survives* in Africa. This is to say that the study concerns itself with how African writers in post-independence Africa have appropriated the novel as an aspect of Western cultural practice.

It is Achebe (1975) who first recognised and defended the potential of the novel in Africa when he declared that “[t]his form of fiction has seized the imagination of many African writers and they will continue to use it according to their differing abilities” (54). In the context of the novel as genre, commentators point out some of the advantages that the novel generally enjoys compared to other genres. Culler argues that the canvas of the novel is usually a world of semiotics; it is “the creation and organization of signs not simply in order to produce meaning but in order to produce a world charged with meaning” (189). In the context of the African literature, Gikandi (1991a) explains that symbols and signs of culture, history and politics, which always allow for multiple interpretations, dominate the African novel. For instance, in *Things Fall Apart*, he points out that the signs and symbols of culture are marshalled to serve two purposes; first, “signs of everyday life” (greetings, chalk drawings, food, etc.) are intended to signal the text’s particularised reception especially in so far as it implicates “the Ibo people as a community with its own sense of order and disorder and unknown occult zones” (22). In Gikandi’s view, “[t]he

need to show the colonized culture as unknowable is particularly important” (22). The reason for this is Gikandi here agrees with Bhabha) “because colonial power and its attendant economy of representation” (22) as Bhabha (1986) explains, “produces the colonized as a fixed reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible” (156). Lastly, in Africa, Gikandi says that “the novel as genre allows the author to produce a semiotic machine that displaces hegemonic ideologies and creates alternative systems of meaning” (22).

From the foregoing, it can be argued that most of the fundamental reasons for the flowering of the novel as a genre in Africa (and indeed elsewhere) would seem then to rest on Nick Visser’s (1978: 103) claim that the significance of the novel as genre can be fruitfully discussed not by defining it but by examining the *causes* which will in turn illuminate the *uses* to which the novel is put. This view, in the context of the African novel looks forward to that of Ngugi (1986), who avers that the critical question regarding the African novel “is not that of the racial, national and class origins of the novel but that of its development and the *uses* to which it is continually put” (69; emphasis mine).

It is significant to point out that the various uses to which the novel is usually put arise from two aspects of the novel genre that are attractive to most writers: the canvass and language of this genre. Henry James (1960) describes the novel as “the most independent, most elastic, and most prodigious of literary forms” (15), while Andre Brink (1998) notes the novel’s amorphous canvas, and metaphoric as well as symbolic language of the novel. Brink is particularly fascinated with “the compass [of the novel’s] involvement with language” (18).²⁴

Probably due to the totality of these advantages the novel enjoys, Timothy Brennan (1990) makes the claim that the emergence of the novel as a genre “accompanied the rise of nations by objectifying the ‘one, yet many’ of national life, and by mimicking the structure of the nation, a clearly bordered jumble of languages and styles” (8). He further develops this proposition with his apt notion of “the national longing for form” in postcolonial fiction when he contrasts the novel with the epic, as follows:

But, whereas it was a feature of epic never to be addressed to or for one’s contemporaries, the novel (on the contrary) directed itself to an ‘open-ended present’. In its hands, ‘tradition’ became what Habsbawm calls a ‘usable past’, and the evocation of deep, sacred origins -- instead of furthering unquestioning, ritualistic reaffirmations of a people (as in epic) -- becomes a contemporary, practical means of *creating* a people. (1990: 50; emphasis in text)

The notion of “the national longing for form” is useful indeed in discussions of the African novel when it is further made forceful by the idea of “creat[ion].” In fact the notion implicates a need, a desire for a particularly *imaginative* life-giving process: it heightens the reasons why most African writers have consequently taken liberties with the facilities of the novel, as outlined above, to explore not only *what is* but also to suggest *what could/ should/ ought to be* in their various societies.

Why most African writers then choose the novel genre could also be accounted for by other factors such as historical ones, as this chapter shows. M. M. Mahood (1977) argues as follows:

It would appear that the novel of the colonial experience needs for its creation a certain kind of *moment* [I]ts appearance is aided, not by the build-up of the past in the present, but rather by a repudiation of the immediate past. The novelist is a delicate barometer of the winds of change. (183; emphasis in text)

The aspect of the “moment” in postcolonial fiction is precisely what Gikandi recognises in Achebe. According to him, “Achebe’s pronouncements on literature, like his fiction are troubled by questions about the impulses and circumstances which lead to the development of a particular mode of writing” (10).²⁵ One such problematic is the lack of representation in what Franz Fanon (1968) describes as “the settler’s space” (38). This awareness, it must be noted, propelled the African writer to seek an alternative narrative, a narrative which sought not only to install a cultural history but also to mark a terrain with which the writer could identify. Achebe’s (1975) experience illustrates the point when he avers that:

I [Achebe] hold, however, and have held from the very moment I began to write that earnestness *is* appropriate to my situation. Why? I suppose because I have a deep-seated need to alter things within that situation, to find for myself a little more room than has been allowed me in the world. (14; emphasis in text)

When Achebe “began to write” in the 1950s, his initial feeling must have been that of an “exile”²⁶ and, as such, he felt a desperate need “for ... a little more room than ha[d] been allowed ... [him].” It is for reasons such as these that Said speaks of nationalism *vis-à-vis* exile because, according to him:

Nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture and customs; and by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages.²⁷

Therefore, the African writer, exiled by the colonial culture in his homeland, finds narrative to be a critical instrument of reinventing a new community of language and culture. As Appiah notes,

an African literature was closely linked to the need by the first generations of African writers to invent an African literary tradition:

We see the formation of a counter-hegemonic discourse and the possibility of a counter-hegemonic pedagogy as the decolonised subject people write about themselves, now, as the subject of a literature of their own.²⁸

To the African writer, then, what Gikandi (1991a) describes as “a negative consciousness -- knowledge about its absence or loss ... of a tradition as a kind of privilege” (14-15) -- motivates the desire for an African narrative. Significantly, these remarks make it easy to understand why Fardous Azim (1993) writes that “[t]he novel, as the discourse of the master, occupies a somewhat anomalous position -- its history is one of struggle with and against that master” (10).

3. The Relevance of Reception Theory to African Criticism: Privileging the Reader

This study shows that the dynamism of the African novel arises from the fact that this text responds to a wide range of vicissitudes; that the African novel is a communal text -- “[n]o man however great can win judgement against all the people,” says Achebe (1975: 99) -- that responds to a variety of social, cultural and political conditions in postcolonial Africa. For this reason, the study argues that the intended readerships in African fiction are also varied and complex and, as such, it should be clear to understand why the study further points out that it is now incumbent upon critics of African fiction to suggest/ employ an equally varied and dynamic critical method to examine narrative technique and intended audience in the African novel.

This study makes a two-pronged attempt to cover important gaps in African criticism. First, the study seeks to provide an alternative critical model to current African criticism, which it designates as *intentional criticism*.²⁹ This fresh approach to postcolonial African fiction recognises the existence of the African writer’s *intended readerships* that are often evidenced either in narrative technique, or in a writer’s own comments. J. Hawthorn (1994) notes the value of a writer’s observations on that writer’s own work, as follows:

[A]n author’s comment in a letter that ... [his] work of literature was written to be read by a particular person or group of people can be used as evidence substantiating a case for a particular intended reader[ship]. (166)³⁰

Secondly, the study offers Reception as a supporting paradigm to intentional criticism. Indeed Reception is apposite to intentional criticism because it would appear that the concerns of these two approaches are similar. In fact, what this thesis appropriates from Reception are those insights which assist only in identifying the variety of ways in which a text constructs specific readers, and how particular readers both impact on narrative technique, and also construct their own different narratives which may, or may not be, in consonance with the one already embedded in the text.

In all this, one guiding principle in the choice of the insights from Reception this study uses in its discussion of the African novel is Appiah’s (1984) caution that:

[W]e should not expect the transfer of a method to a new set of texts to lead to exactly the same results [I]ndeed, this would surely show that there was something wrong with the method. (145)

The important point here is that, as Appiah puts it, “[i]t is not necessary to show that African literature is ... the same as European [/Western] literature in order to show that it can be treated with the same tools” (145).

It is Susan R. Suleiman (1980) who first recognised the critical impact of reader-oriented criticism with the following remarks:

The vitality of audience-oriented criticism depends precisely on the realization that various dimensions of analysis or interpretation are possible, and that a combination of approaches is not a negative eclecticism but a positive necessity. (7)

Raman Selden (1988) also notes the variety of reader-oriented approaches when he explains that “[t]he range of approaches within reader-response criticism is so great that it is difficult to make generalizations about its overall significance” (190). However, to both Selden and Suleiman, this cluster of approaches in reader-oriented criticism is not a fault but a fruitful dimension because it has now brought the role of the reader in criticism to the fore. Selden, for instance, argues that “one can at least [now] say ... [that the variety of reader-oriented criticism] has made it difficult to talk about the ‘meaning’ of the text without taking into account the reader’s contribution to it” (190). It is “difficult” indeed to neglect *nowadays* the insights of Reception, for compared to most criticism, the reader-response approach is the most assiduous. As John Sutherland (1991) claims:

Of all critical styles in current practice, reader-response is the most strenuous, requiring as it does an extra-ordinary rapid oscillation between theoretical model and the *infinitely historical instants of literary experience across time and space*. (822; emphasis mine)

Belsey applauds this new position of the reader in critical practice. According to her, the “interest in the reader is *liberating*, a rejection of authorial tyranny in favour of the participation of readers in the production of a plurality of meanings” (29; emphasis mine). In the context of this study, the interest in the reader is “liberating” for African criticism because it forcefully brings to the fore the intentions of African writers; it provides meaningful answers to the critical ideological question of *why* African and *for whom* authors write.

The variety of reader-oriented criticism seems to follow two distinct paths: there is the American trend, on the one hand, while on the other, there is the Continental Drift. Suleiman notes this point when he explains that “one may safely affirm that the preoccupation with audience ... has become central to American and Continental theory and criticism” (6), which

seems to have resulted in “a multiplicity of crisscrossing, often divergent tracks that cover a vast area of the critical landscape in a pattern whose complexity dismays the brave and confounds the faint heart” (6).³¹ Jane P. Tompkins (1980) also notes the complexity and range of reader-oriented criticism, as follows:

Reader-response criticism is not a conceptually unified critical position, but a term that has come to be associated with the work of critics who use the words *reader*, *the reading process* and *response* to mark out an area of investigation ... Reader-response critics would argue that a ... [novel] cannot be understood apart from its results. Its ‘*effects*,’ psychological and otherwise, are *essential to any accurate description of its meaning*, since that meaning has no effective existence outside its realization. (ix; emphasis mine)³²

It is Robert C. Holub (1984), however, who simplifies the orientation of reader-response criticism. He distinguishes the basic differences between Reception and reader-response criticism, and also explains how these two institutions relate to each other. Holub further identifies who he thinks are the major proponents of the two approaches, as follows:

‘[R]eception theory’ refers ... to a general shift in concern from the author and the work to the text and the reader. It is used ... as an umbrella term and encompasses both Jauss’ and Iser’s projects as well as empirical research and the traditional preoccupation with influences ... Reader-response criticism, like Reception ... is an umbrella term ... [which also] refers to a general shift in attention from the author of the work to the text-reader pole. (xii)³³

The major differences between Reception and reader-response criticism that Holub highlights are as follows: first, there is the fact that the theorists of reader-response criticism “are not participating in any critical movement, and ... are apparently responding with their methods to quite different predecessors and circumstances” (xiii). In fact, Holub continues:

Reader-response critics are spread across the world, teaching at various institutions; they do not meet on any regular basis, nor do they publish in the same journals or attend the same conferences. (xiii)

This, then, according to Holub, means that “[i]f reader-response criticism has become a critical force ... it is by virtue of the ingenuity of labelling rather than any commonality of effort” (xiii).³⁴

As a result of this study’s particular focus in this regard, the thesis makes use of specific proponents of Reception and reader-response theory who are otherwise paradigmatically dissimilar. These will include those who propound psychological theories of reading (Bloom and Holland), performative theories (Fish), theories which examine narratological foci and choices

(Riffaterre), as well as critics such as Iser and Jauss, who have been associated with what is termed Reception Theory.

It is, therefore, quite clear why the critical procedures of this study sway towards the insights of both Reception and reader-response. First, the concern with both the text and reader that the two drifts privilege is, indeed, pertinent to this study. For as this thesis also acknowledges this concern, it will be seen that the critical concerns of this study provide a meaningful departure from much of the author/ influence-oriented African criticism, which is often in the sociological mode. Secondly, the fact that most African writers are increasingly becoming conscious of narrative technique and intended readerships in their work, clearly necessitates an equally self-reflexive and dynamic approach to discuss the intended audience and narrative technique in the African novel.

To reiterate: it has already been noted that this study employs insights particularly from a variety of Reception/ reader-oriented critics. It has also been noted that the study also utilizes the comments of both African writers and critics on the tripartite relationship of writer, work and intended readership. Such an approach is indeed meaningful, for as O. Ogungbesan (1979) explains:

African writers ... do not believe that they should abdicate their ethical role by eliminating themselves, and therefore the question of responsibility to their readers from their books. They value *the relation of the writer to reader* and take very ... seriously their moral obligation to their *audience*. (1; emphasis mine)

As can be seen, notions such as “text” and “reader” are critical in postcolonial fiction and are, therefore, essential in African criticism. These terms are essential to African criticism precisely because they heighten the significance of “the relation of writer to reader,” as Ogungbesan explains, and also because the concept of *recipient* is increasingly becoming an integral part of the definition of the *literariness* of the work itself. For this reason, this study takes cognisance of Said’s injunction that in discussing postcolonial texts, what is important “is to analyse not ... [their] content, but ... [their] form, not what is said so much as *how* it is said, by whom, where, and *for whom*” (emphasis mine).³⁵

4. Theorizing the Narrator, Text and Intended Readership

This study suggests that in order to meaningfully examine the relation between author,³⁶ text, and intended readership, a fresh poetics of interpretation of the African novel needs to be explored; that there is a need for an interpretation of African fiction which focuses, with equal weight, on both narrative technique and intended readerships in the African novel. For this reason, it is felt that the notions of narrator, text and intended readership need to be problematised. These concepts need to be complicated and, then, simplified because they are often misused in most critical studies of African literature. For instance, although the aspects of narrator and point of view are significant features of an author's narrative technique, they, however, should not be confused with the author, although the relationship between them varies.

First, it is significant to observe that there are different types of narrators and, as such, the narrator is a device the author uses in a particular text. Gerald Prince (1982) notes that the narrator is part of the "collection of signs" in a narrative, "the one who speaks" (7) and, as such, the narrator is only a component, an aspect of the text. Secondly, because the author produces the text, it follows that the narrator is also a product of the author. Thus, according to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1983), "the narrator can only be defined circularly as the narrative 'voice' or 'speaker' of a text" (87). At the other end of the communication line there are what Rimmon-Kenan notes as the *narratee* and the *real* reader. The narratee, according to him, "is the agent which is at the very least implicitly addressed by the narrator" and, as such, "[a] narratee of this kind is always implied, even when the narrator becomes his own narratee" (89).

However, what should be relevant to this study is how Rimmon-Kenan makes a distinction between the "real" reader and what he describes as "a theoretical construct, implied or encoded in the text"; that is the distinction between *historical* readers and readers "representing the integration of data and the interpretative process 'invited' by the text" (119). For the purposes of this study, it is understood that "real" readers are historical/ empirical readers, for they invite sociological/ empirical readings, as Holub describes this mode of "actual [R]eception research" (136), in which "real" readerships become the focus. The procedures of this approach, according to Holub, were intended to resolve the ramifications of the notion of the *horizon of expectations*, which Hans R. Jauss (1982) defines as follows:

The coherence of literature as an event is primarily mediated in the horizon of expectations of *the literary experience of contemporary and later readers*,

critics, and author. Whether it is possible to comprehend and represent the history of literature in its unique historicity depends on whether this horizon of expectations can be objectified. (122; emphasis mine)³⁷

It is instructive to note that by the “horizon of expectations,” Jausss designates the shared assumptions which can be attributed to a given generation of readers. In this way, the notion is trans-subjective, and is detectable through textual strategies (genre, literary allusion, the nature of fiction and poetic language) which confirm, modify, subvert or ironize the expectations of readers.

While the study of real/ historical/ empirical readers and empirical readings can have important implications for literary criticism, as Norman Holland (1975) shows, the point is that the concept of the real reader arises perhaps more from the sociology of literature than from literary criticism.³⁸ Indeed, Eagleton’s (1983) proposition that the author’s “tactics and assumptions may not be mutually coherent: a text may offer several mutually conflicting or contradictory ‘subject positions’ from which to be read” (120) raises a pertinent problem, which should alert critics to the important realisation that a writer’s *actual* readership need not correspond completely to the *intended* one. In particular, confirmation that one literary work can generate a range of different reading experiences over time, between cultures or groups (or within them), and even for the same individual, leads necessarily to the question of the status and authority of these different reading experiences.³⁹ From the foregoing, it is crucial to clarify the usage of terms such as narrator, text, author and intended readership because the terms are frequently problematic.

Take, for example, the aspect of *point of view*⁴⁰ which is often used interchangeably with narrator. According to Geoffrey N. Leech and Michael H. Short (1981), this is one aspect of the fictional world which has been “extensively discussed by literary critics” (384). Thus, because point of view in a text is usually associated with the narrator, Rimmon-Kenan explains that:

The narrative level to which the narrator belongs, the extent of his participation in the story, the degree of perceptibility of his role, and finally his reliability, are crucial factors in the reader’s understanding of and attitudes to the story. (4)

There is, therefore, a thin line between *point of view* and the narrator because both “signs” of the narrative refer to a particular *voice*, angle of *vision* or *perspective* from which a literary work is told. This means that the narrator affects *how* the author reports information, narrates action, describes characters, settings, objects and emotions, or even interprets or judges these elements. In this way, Seymour Chatman (1987) and Susan Snaider Lanser (1981) are, respectively, right

when they point out that “point of view is the physical or *ideological situation* ... to which narrative events stand in relation” (153; emphasis mine), and that it is, in fact, the totality of “particular ways of reflecting and *communicating ideology*” (246; emphasis mine).

Ian Maclean (1986) says that:

All literary theories have to account for meaning, whether as that which is communicated directly from author to reader ... or that which is inherent in the words of the text ... or that which arises from its narrative structure. (122)

The differences that exist in literary theories, however, lie in emphasis on concepts such as the text and reader. In fact in the amalgam of insights that constitute Reception, there are also differences in emphasis concerning the same concepts. In Holub’s study of Reception, for instance, there is the crucial chapter “Problems and Perspectives” (147-63) in which one finds sections such as “[t]he stability of the text” (148-150), “[t]he rise of the reader” (152-53), and “[t]he disappearing text” (150-52). In “[t]he stability of the text”, Holub makes distinctions, for example, between Jauss’ and Iser’s conceptions of the text. Thus in analysing *reading*, reader-oriented critics seem to make considerable use of one crucial concept that encompasses three ways in which a writer can anticipate a reader’s response. This concept is that of the “horizon of expectations,” which, according to Jauss (1982), suggests the following three ways in which a reader responds to a text:

For the specific disposition toward a particular work that the author anticipates from the audience can also be arrived at, even if explicit signals are lacking, through generally presupposed factors: first, through familiar norms or the immanent poetics of the genre; second, through the implicit relationships to familiar works of the literary-historical surroundings; and third, through the opposition between fiction and reality, between the poetic and the practical function of language which is always available to the reflective reader during the reading as a possibility of comparison. The third factor includes the possibility that the reader of a new work can perceive it within the narrower horizon of literary expectations, as well as within the wider horizon of experience of life. (24)

From Jauss’ point of view, all these elements may then fuse into a single if complex tradition which a text accumulates as it becomes well-known, a tradition with which its readerships have to contend or grapple with as they read and respond to it. A well-known text, in other words, raises more specific expectations for readers than one that has accrued no such tradition. (The implication of the last-quoted sentence above, it seems, is that readerships of an *old* text do *not*



He, then, concludes this section by bringing in Jausss once more because to Jausss, says Holub, the reader has significantly become the “ ‘arbiter ... of a new literary history of literature’ ” (153).

Although Holub devotes the third section solely to Fish’s work which is, according to him, “perhaps the best illustration of ... theoretical anti-textualism” (150), it must be remembered that Fish (1980a) essentially says that “it is interpretative communities, rather than the text or the reader that produces meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features” (14). As he puts the case for interpretation, “[n]o longer is the critic the humble servant of texts whose glories exist independently of anything he might do” (368). However, although Holub says that in one sense Fish’s anti-textualism posits that “the text contributes nothing to interpretation” because “everything is dependent on what the reader brings to it” (151), Holub, nevertheless, raises the following theoretical questions:

To the questions: what does the reader then read? Or what does the critic interpret? Fish has no answer. But he feels that no one else could answer these questions either, since any attempt to establish an objective essence independent of the reader, even if they were black marks on a white page, would already be made from a position inside of an interpretative community. The text, in short, disappears at this meta-critical level because Fish considers any statement about it to be informed by prior conventions of interpretation. (151)

Another commentator who is concerned with Fish’s notions of the text and “informed reader” is Robert Scholes (1984), who echoes the matters Holub raises. In the essay “Who Cares About the Text?”, Scholes provides a persuasive critique of Fish’s “interpretative community” and concludes that, in fact, “all competent interpreters ... [including] ... Barthes ... [and] ... Derrida ... have attended to ... [the text], whether they like it or not” (80). According to him:

Who cares about the text? We all do. But some of us are ashamed to say so, lest we lose membership privileges in our exclusive and *fashionable* interpretative communities. (180; emphasis mine)

It is instructive to note that the reader can construct a narrative; that it is not always the case that only the text constructs its intended audience, as most Receptionists think. Thus, according to Ruthrof, “two fundamentally different transformations are performed when we read a fictional text”:

The one, a propositional transformation which is analytical and inter-subjective, producing meanings not unlike those of definitions, ... the other, a concretising transformation which is inter-subjective to some degree, but to a certain extent also personal. The former is necessary for us to make sense of a novel as a shared code, *the latter allows us to understand the novel in terms of a shared coded experience*. (13; emphasis mine)

For this reason, this study argues that nearly all the African texts this study examines actually allow the reader to perform the critical task of constructing the narratives in the texts.

In the context of this study, perhaps the definition of a text that suits the African novel is the one that Jauss (1978) provides, as follows:

A literary work is not an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period. It is not a monument that monologically reveals its timeless essence. It is much more like an orchestration that strikes ever new resonances among its readers and that frees the text from the material of the words and brings it to a contemporary existence. (21)

Jauss' point is that a text does not exist only in and by itself. The, existence of the text, Jauss insists, requires an intervention that comes from outside the text. This observation is pertinent to African⁴² literary studies, for it is also arguable that the text, to some, extent, determines the *quality* of this intervention, as will be seen in the subsequent chapters of this study.

It is critical to emphasise that Jauss' definition of a literary work could, indeed, be applicable to discussions of the African novel, for he recognises the tripartite relationship of author, text and intended readership.⁴³ For this reason, Jauss provides a useful starting point in the manner in which Reception, as Inge Crosman (1980) puts it, explains "how the audience is *inscribed in the work*, and to the reading strategies laid out for the reader who has 'entered' the text" (402; emphasis in text). Iser's position, however, is contrary to that of both Ngugi and Jauss; it is, in fact, contrary to that of the African writers this study examines. In the section "Textuality and the Reader's Response" in which Holub contrasts Jauss and Iser, Holub notes that Iser "is concerned primarily with the individual text and how readers relate to it" (83) and, as such, adds Holub, "[w]hat has interested Iser from the outset is the question of how and under what conditions a text has meaning for a reader" (83). As it is, says Holub, "[a]lthough ... [Iser] does not exclude social and historical factors, they are clearly subordinated to or incorporated in more textual considerations" (83). Here, Iser is already at odds with most African writers to whom social and historical factors are paramount to any considerations of the readership of the African novel, as Ogunbesan notes on page 30 of this thesis. On the other hand, Jauss differs from Iser because, according to Holub, the latter "is most often interested in issues of a broad social and historical nature" (83) and that Jauss' "examination of the history of aesthetic experience ... is developed in a grand historical sweep in which individual works have chiefly an illustrative function" (83). One can begin to see why Jauss is more attractive to this study than Iser.⁴⁴

It has already been noted that African writers often discuss their work in relation to their intended readerships. This is precisely what Jauss (1982) means when he explains that “the coherence of literature as an event is primarily mediated in the horizon of expectations of the literary experience of ... readers ... and author” (22). However, to say that narrative technique assists to define a writer’s intended readership is also to suggest that an intended readership is the same as the “inscribed reader” that Hawthorn defines as “the reader whose characteristics are actually there to be discovered in the text itself, waiting for the actual reader to slip on like a suit of clothes” (166).⁴⁵ For these reasons, this study explains that the African writers it examines have always developed narrative technique for specific target readerships, and that they have also commented on the institutions of audiences. It is, therefore, upon this assumption that this thesis structures its main arguments about narrative technique and readerships in African fiction.

The first chapter of this study provides the trajectory of the thesis: as has been shown, it begins with a critique of existing African criticism in as much as it does not adequately deal with the issue of audience. In arguing that the intended readership of specific African texts is integral to the texts’ criticism, the chapter is, therefore, suggesting the relevance of Reception (a method in which this study is partly anchored) to the study of African fiction.

Chapter II takes up once again the inadequate treatment of the aspect of audience in African criticism with a contestation of the popular dichotomy of “inside”/ African and “outside”/ Western readerships in current criticism of African regional texts such as Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Onuora Nzekwu’s *Wand of Noble Wood*. The main argument in Chapter II is that it is more fruitful to discuss the elasticity of the notion of *multiple* readerships in African regional texts, rather than the commonplace and narrow duality of the “inside”/ “outside” readerships. Indeed it will be seen that this study prefers to use the duality of “national”⁴⁶ and “international” readerships as a substitute for the “inside”/ “outside” dichotomy since the “national”/ “international” duality provides a meaningful interpretation of multiple readerships. For this reason, the basis for the arguments in Chapter II is what Leech and Short say about how narrative technique in a single text may suggest several readerships:

For all published texts ... there is usually one addresser but a large number of addressees, the vast majority of whom the writer has never met. Literature is thus a kind of discourse where the writer can assume relatively little about the receiver of his message or the context in which it will be received. (258)

The “addresser”/ narrator and “addressee”/ intended readership(s) relationship is also discussed in Chapter II. The critical point to make here is that while *Things Fall Apart* employs the “extradiegetic”⁴⁷ narrator, *Wand of Noble Wood* relies on a persona,⁴⁸ who could be explained in terms of the implied author of the novel. The difference in point of view in the two regional texts, the chapter argues, has disastrous consequences on the narration of Nzekwu’s novel. Fish’s notion of the “interpretative community”⁴⁹ or “informed reader[s]” is also employed to identify one of the readerships in African regional fiction. In using the notion of the “interpretative community”, it is argued that apart from having this sophisticated readership, African regional fiction also has a casual⁵⁰ readership.

It is important to emphasise that the main concern in Chapter II is two-fold: first, the chapter attempts to show that it is with the African regional novel that current African criticism begins to show some of its weaknesses. Secondly, and in tandem, the chapter aims at showing that current African criticism does not sufficiently discuss the notion of readership. The point here is that the critics who often use the commonplace duality of “inside”/ “outside” readerships to discuss the intended readership in African regional fiction such as *Things Fall Apart* and *Wand of Noble Wood* rarely explain adequately what they mean by that duality. Indeed even the implications of the exotic material in African regional novels such as *Wand of Noble Wood* has also raised problems with the same critics. For instance, commentators often claim that such material is intended for what P. Young (1972) describes as the “popular”⁵¹ readership.

Chapter III examines how narration is problematised in African texts that explore the “been to” character as theme. This particular African text, the chapter points out, relies heavily on symbolism⁵² to interrogate the thematic ramifications of this character in African fiction. To begin with, the chapter examines how in Armah’s *Why Are We So Blest?* the main characters are apportioned segments (that are different narrative genres) to narrate their own stories about similar and very often the same events. To rationalise this form of narration, the chapter suggests the notion of schismatic⁵³ narrators. The main argument in Chapter III is thus that from this particular way of narrating in *Why Are We So Blest?*, this particular text in African literature becomes a critique⁵⁴ of the novel as genre, a process Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy* takes up by merging different genres of literature in one single text. The result of this writing in African literature, the chapter points out, is African metafiction.⁵⁵

Although Michael Riffaterre's (1978) "superreader"⁵⁶ is usually associated with poetry, it is suggested in Chapter III that the expectations Riffaterre requires of this particular readership are usually similar to those that the African metanovel has for its intended audience. For example, the aspect of irony,⁵⁷ which is employed in *Why Are We So Blest?* requires a reader (the super-reader in this case) who is able, according to Boris Uspensky (1973), to understand that "[i]rony occurs when we speak from one point of view, but make an evaluation from another point of view"; that "thus, for irony the non-occurrence of point of view ... is a necessary requirement" in order to be effective (103).

Chapter IV suggests that the superreading that is required of the African metanovel is also desirable for African political texts such as Achebe's *A Man of the People* and Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*. For example, just as Armah employs irony in *Why Are We So Blest?*, it is argued in Chapter IV that Achebe also often employs irony to enhance the effectiveness of the first-person narrator technique in *A Man of the People*. The interest of Chapter IV in *Petals of Blood* is in the way Ngugi deploys what this study designates as the *informational dialogue* and *multiple consciousnesses* techniques. In the case of the latter method, it will be seen that the technique deceptively seems to have the characteristics of the first-person narrator technique, which Achebe deploys in *A Man of the People*. However, it is, in fact, through the informational dialogue technique that much of the story in Ngugi's novel is narrated. The result of these two narrative methods is that *Petals of Blood* is at once a text which has several points of view that are subordinated almost completely to authorial ideology.

It may be necessary to point out here that because the first-person narrator in *A Man of the People*, and the multiple consciousnesses and informational dialogue techniques in *Petals of Blood* imply *told* narratives, these two texts could be assumed to have both *listening* and *reading* audiences/ readerships. For this reason, the concepts of "audience" and "readership[s]" are often used interchangeably in Chapter IV.

Chapter V takes up the notion of the African writer's constant search for appropriate narrative technique again in African political fiction. It is suggested in that chapter that one result of this search is recourse to African oral culture as site⁵⁸ for narrative technique in African political texts such as Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* and Ngugi's *Matigari*. What is interesting in these two texts is that, first, in borrowing from orature, narration becomes problematised in both *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari*; the chapter points out that there is a deliberate effort

on the part of Armah and Ngugi to engage in the difficult task of merging aspects of *telling as performance* (with the support of audience enhancing the narrator/ performer and audience interaction) with those of *writing*. The result of this process, the chapter argues, is always difficult to define. Indeed, although this process in which oral forms are merged with novel-writing results in what could be described as “speakerly”⁵⁹ texts, the actualisation of this resultant text still requires *reading*. For this reason the terms reader and audience are used interchangeably in Chapter V. Secondly, although Armah and Ngugi insist that they are writing for the ordinary African readership in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari* the fact that the plots of their two novels rely on the quest⁶⁰ motif which is available in much of African orature, and, indeed in some Western oral traditions, their claim is, therefore, contestable indeed. Therefore, Chapter V brings the thesis full-circle: it takes up the issue of the scanty treatment of the readership in the African novel in African criticism that was dealt with earlier in the first chapter of the study. In fact, Chapter V further problematises the notion of readership in African fiction. The next chapter to which this study now turns begins to explore both the intentions African writers eschew about narrative technique, and the various intended readerships of the African regional novel.

NOTES

1. Cranny-Francis explains that this notion assists in understanding how an audience is constructed by a literary text. In this regard, it is also useful to take note of two related concepts: reading *as* a woman and reading *like* a woman, which Keitel explains:

‘Reading as a woman’ rests on the (tacit) assumption that gender is the decisive factor in all human activity: women *are* different from men, therefore, they *read* differently -- reading is seen to be grounded in biology. Its second assumption is that there must be an obvious and *viable* continuity between all female experience.

...

For women to read like ‘like a woman’ requires an intentional and voluntary act of ‘unlearning’, an act of ‘defamiliarization’ with their gender roles. (371, 372; emphasis in text)

2. This study understands *interpretation* to mean the way in which commentators/ readers/ critics negotiate the “meaning” and “significance” of a text. It is understood that this is precisely what Hirsch (1967) means in the following:

Meaning is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable. (8; emphasis in text)

It is critical to understand that in Hirsch’s formulation the meaning of a text does not change with time; it is thus the proper object of understanding and interpretation, validated by consideration of all the relevant evidence. The significance of the same text, however, does change according to its relationships and the age in which it is read. Verbal meaning, argues Hirsch, is determinate, while significance is boundless (57). In the context of the African novel, for a text to have “meaning” and “significance” there must be a meeting, a sharing of, the social, cultural and historical visions that both the African writer and his intended readerships have.

3. “A diachronic study or analysis,” says Hawthorn (1994), “concerns itself with the evolution and change over time of that which is studied” (39). What this study does, therefore, is to explore how over a long period of time African writers have sought different styles to target specific/ different audiences.

4. This study uses “sociology” in literature in the way Bradbury (1971) explains it:

Literature can be regarded as primarily an activity of mind, a creative and self-conscious enterprise -- though one that is socially formed in the sense that the writer is part of the current of human thought, shares the language, attitudes and tones of voice of his fellows, and expresses values that come from a discernible context in a society, nation, a period But it is also possible to regard literature as being subject to much larger forces -- as the iceberg top of deep mythologies archetypically present in man or at least in men in such a society at such a time. Perhaps what a sociological viewpoint will most invite is for us to see literature as an ‘institution’ -- *an institution around which traditions, customs and patterns of behaviour have clustered.* (xx; emphasis mine)

5. “Poetics” is used in this study as an alternative to literary criticism; it is used to emphasise the significance of narrative technique in the study of African texts. The point is that while there is now a sufficient body of African criticism that is anchored in the sociology, cultural and political contexts of African societies, there still remains a lot of work to be done on the style of the African novel. Poetics is, therefore, used here in the way Hrushovski explains it as “the systematic study of literature as literature,” and also raises questions such as “[w]hat is the system of a particular ...[writer’s] ‘art’ or ‘language’? How is a story made? What are the specific aspects of works of literature? How are they constituted?” (xv).

6. Izevbaye (1990) adds that:

Much African ... criticism has been practised according to the assumptions implied in Abrams’ coordinates, although alternative sets of assumptions have been proposed by, for example, radical critics who view the literary work in relation to other products of human culture and to the economic roots of these relationships. (134)

7. Cited in Iyasere, 1972: 7. Iyasere also notes that around the same time, Boniface Chukwukere claimed that:

A fair and balanced criticism of ... African novels, with the sole reference to those that deal with the general theme of the conflict between traditions and modern values, demands a lot of sociological ... insights on the part of the critic.

8. Most sophisticated readers will, in fact, know that Joyce and Nabokov, two of the best known prose stylists in the Euro-American canon, readily come to mind. In the “Circe”



distinction separates those language rules native speakers of a language have internalised, and which enable them to generate and understand grammatically correct sentences (competence), from the actual generation of particular sentences by such a speaker (performance). Competence, according to Chomsky, also enables a native speaker to recognise whether or not a particular sentence is or is not grammatically well-formed. In literary criticism the distinction is employed to draw an analogy between the internalised rules or conventions which enable competent readers to read and understand literary works. It seems that this analogy has the virtue of reminding readers/ critics/ commentators that there is a difference between literacy and the ability satisfactorily to read and to respond to literary works, but it has some shortcomings too. First, commentators explain that whereas Chomsky's notion of *competence* is mainly concerned with the *generation* of correct sentences, the posited literary competence has often been concerned mainly or exclusively with the *reading/ conception* of literary works. Secondly, they claim that literary competence seems to be culturally rather than biologically planted in the human individual (according to Hawthorn, "there is no literary equivalent to Chomsky's genetically transmitted 'Language Acquisition Device'" [25]). And, thirdly, commentators further suggest that literary competence is not universally present in adult human beings. However, Culler uses the term "literary competence" -- to mean that institutionally acquired ability of readers to read texts as literature and to make judgment as to what constitutes an acceptable interpretation of a particular work. According to him:

To read a text as literature is not to make one's mind a *tabula rasa* and approach it without preconceptions; one must bring to it an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse which tells one what to look for.

Anyone lacking this knowledge, anyone wholly unacquainted with literature and unfamiliar with the conventions by which fictions are read, would, for example, be quite baffled if presented with a poem. His knowledge of the language would enable him to understand the phrases and sentences, but he would not know, quite literally, what to *make* of this strange concatenation of phrases. He would be unable to read it *as* literature -- as we say with emphasis to those who would use literary works for other purposes -- because he lacks the complex 'literary competence' which enables others to proceed. He has not internalised the 'grammar' of literature which would permit him to convert linguistic sentences into literary structures and meanings. (113-14; emphasis in text)

The problem here is that it is not clarified as to which institutions produce what competences and whose power enforces a particular reading competence.

12. Recalling the launch of *Petals of Blood* in Nairobi in 1977, Ngugi (1981) uses the concept of “image” to discuss the novel’s implication in Kenyan politics, as follows:

My [Ngugi’s] pursuit of literature which I then thought was fiction had brought me full circle to the facts of economics, that is, to matters of what and how we produce, what we eat, wear and shelter under Looking back to the launching of *Petals of Blood* ... I can now see that its grim *picture* of postcolonial Africa belongs more to the nineties and the twenty-first century than it did to the seventies. (89, 93; emphasis mine)

Belsey also adds another important dimension to this problem:

The claim that a literary form reflects the world is simply tautological. If by ‘the world’ we understand the world experience, the world differentiated by language, then the claim that realism reflects the world means that realism reflects the world constructed in language. This is a tautology. (46)

13. Coste explains that although “Todorov coined the term ‘narratology’ to designate the study of narrative” ((ix), it is Prince who popularised it using a combination “of complimentary definitions” (15). In Prince’s *Narratology*, one definition that is relevant to the concerns of this study is the one which states that “[n]arratology is the study of *the form and functioning of narrative*” (4; emphasis mine).
14. Although Eagleton (1986) is not immediately concerned with the institution of audience in the following, what he says about the task of criticism is instructive, for it implicates the audience:

Criticism ... does not site itself in the space as the text itself, allowing it to to speak or completing what it leaves unsaid. On the contrary it installs itself in the text’s very incompleteness in order to *theorize* that lack of plenitude -- to explain the ideological necessity of its ‘not said’, its constitutive silences that which it can show but not say. It is these silences which the critic must make speak. (15; emphasis in text)

Meaningful criticism, Eagleton insists, “explains”; it “must make” the “silences” of a text “speak”.

15. Attwell begins his argument, as follows:

One of the dominant concerns of African criticism ... is the question of how ... 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 aesthetic 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, a concern borne out of historical factors That these two opposing pulls ... are felt as deep and abiding contradictions is best proved by attempts which have been made to map out a 'middle ground' and thereby to reconcile them. (82)

16. While Gikandi (1987) does not accept Iyasere's approach, he, nevertheless, seems to agree with Irele's view. According to him:

I [Gikandi does not] agree with Iyasere's contention that that our critics have 'become overly concerned with the socio-cultural traditional aspects of the works and have used this information as the basis for evaluation without considering how these elements function' [This critical school ...] tend[s] to ignore the complex relationship between life, reality and experience in the African novel. Hence the disdain for either the explication of themes, or the socio-cultural aspects of our literature, and the negation of what ... Irele calls 'human life consciousness' in our literature. (ix)

However, a careful reading of Gikandi's own criticism shows that he does not depart much from Iyasere's insistence on form. For instance, Gikandi claims that he often "approache[s] the African novel *primarily through its narrative method* in the belief that narrative is the essence of African literature" (x; emphasis mine).

17. Schwarz problematises this criticism when he says that it is the question of "how to focus on technique without sacrificing subject-matter" (82), adding that:

Much of the novel criticism of this century has been trying to resolve these actors into an aesthetic. Given that novels seem to create imagined worlds with distinct time, space and causality that mime that of the real world, it seems as if subject-matter ought not to be ignored. But given that novels are, like other literary forms, works of art composed of words, we cannot ignore technique. (602)

18. Cited in Nfah-Abbenyi, 18.

19. Ibid.

20. Commentators suggest that *slippage* seems to be an anglicising of the French *glissement*. Crapanzano explains that in Jacques Lacan's work, it is applied to that distortion that takes place between the dream and the account given of it by the (woken) dreamer, a distortion which is "a sliding, a *glissement* of the signified under the signifier, the concept under its acoustic image" (145). Hawthorn adds that, used loosely, the term refers to "the (normally unconscious) redefinition of terms or commitments in the course of an argument, often as a result of ideological pressure" (193).

21. Hawthorn explains that the concept of *gaze* is an important element in Lacan's "theories concerning the formation of subjectivity" (83); that it "has been more utilized in film than literary criticism,"

and especially by feminist critics who have used it to explore the element of desired (but perhaps denied) power in the voyeuristic male utilization of the gaze in the cinema. Various feminist critics have pointed out that in 'classic' Hollywood films the gaze is very much in the possession of men, thus depriving women of power and of significant subjectivity. Women are to be looked at, not to look; their alienation from the gaze is an aspect of their passivization and reification. (82)

The term is used in this study not only in the context of Ngugi's (1993: 2-11) notion of "moving the centre," of how postcolonial African texts *look at*, and, then, interrogate colonial fiction, but also in terms of how African fiction *questions* the social, cultural, historical and political as well as the intellectual and economic vicissitudes of African societies.

22. Mukherjee also notes that:

When postcolonial theory constructs its centre-periphery discourse, it obliterates the fact that postcolonial societies also have their own internal centres and peripheries, their own dominants and marginals When it focuses only on those texts that 'subvert' and 'resist' the colonizer, it overlooks a large number of texts that speak about these matters [of race, class, gender, ethnicity, language, narrative technique and audience]. (6)

23. Jeyifo provides a useful discussion of the notion of "arrested decolonisation," while Appiah makes a fascinating examination of the "altered states" of the postcolonial state in Africa in Chapter 8 of *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*.

24. Brink's point is apt because it impinges on both narrative technique and readership in the genre of the short story genre, as follows:

Any short story also engages with language: but the novel has to *sustain* this engagement, and complicate and amplify and vary and interrogate and reinvent it at every turn, for a considerable duration. As a result, what ... [the reader] comes up with after immersing ... in a novel, may perhaps more compellingly display the possible gains (and also the cost) of the enterprise. (18; emphasis in text)

25. Gikandi (1991a) adds that:

[I]n every novel Achebe has written to date, what we know about Ibo or Nigerian culture is less important than *how* we know it; Achebe's narratives seek to create the initial situation in which the African problematic developed and to express the conditions in which knowledge about phenomena is produced. Rather than assume that experience is original and primary, Achebe calls attention to its existence as an effect on *language* and *narrative strategies*. (ii; emphasis mine)

26. The notion of "exile" is used here in the way that Gurr (1981) describes it as "the cultural exile of those African ... writers who are wrenched from their home culture by metropolitan-oriented education and the adoption of a European language" (161).

27. Cited in Gikandi, 1991a: 14.

28. Ibid.

29. A careful reading of African fiction shows that the so-called "intentional fallacy" does not apply to many African writers, especially the authors this study examines. In their essay "The Intentional Fallacy", the American New Critics Wimsatt and Beardsley argue against the view that poetry expresses the author's experience and intention:

The poem is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge. (5)

According to this view, if the author comes into the poem (for the purposes of this study,

let it be the novel) at all, only does so “by an act of biographical inference” (5) since the novel is self-sufficient without him. The poem is like “a machine” -- it works “through its meaning” and meaning inheres in words, since language is in public ownership. Thus in criticism, another American New Critic, Lubbock, claims that the main concern is, as follows:

The business of criticism in the matter of fiction seems clear at any rate. There is nothing more that can be said about a novel until we have fastened up the question of *its making* and explore it *to some purpose*. (272; emphasis mine)

While it is true, for the purposes of this study, to say that Lubbock’s “its making” refers to narrative technique, one would have thought that “to some purpose” would be pushed further to go beyond the text itself; it would suggest the inclusion of the intended readership in a text. However, from the above American account one finds in African criticism formalist studies such as Iyasere’s (1972) formalist doctoral thesis, “The Rhetoric of African Fiction”, in which the comments of African authors on their own work are marginalized. About Achebe’s comments on his fiction, for instance, Iyasere says that they “reveal[...]” Achebe’s own “pre-occupation with the socio-political role of the novelist rather than with the *art* of the novel” (2: emphasis mine). The thrust of Iyasere’s thesis looks back to the now familiar figure in literary criticism on both sides of the Atlantic: what Wimsatt and Beardsley describe as the poem/ text “out there”, an object, a “verbal icon”, the “meaning expressed by the poem [/ text] itself” (87), fixed eternally as “the words on the page.” The difficulty, to begin with, is that no such object, a novel with a single fixed or univocal meaning, exists. Secondly, any literary work constantly changes its meanings as it is read and re-read. For these reasons, as Belsey clearly shows, New criticism threw out the author out of the front door only to sneak him in round the back. The point being made here is that the author’s intention is always needed to fix in place, to guarantee, a univocal meaning for “the words on the page,” even if in the American emphasis this guarantee was available only at a remove. What, nevertheless, survives from New Criticism, according to Belsey, is “a kind of intentionalism, a quest for what it *appeared* the author had had in mind on the evidence of the text itself” (16: emphasis in text). It appears that Wimsatt and Beardsley had left open this loophole: “[i]f the poet succeeded in it,” they say, “then the poem itself shows what he was trying to do” (4). On this basis it becomes possible to distinguish, as Booth (1961) does, the “implied author”, the author implied by the novel,

from the actual historical author. And on this basis it becomes possible to equate them again by treating the “implied author” as a mask worn by the historical author. Booth introduces the term “implied author” by saying that this is how the historical author “creates ... an implied version of ‘himself’” (70). Thus re-routed, as this study points out, the novel can once again be fixed in place as expression of the author’s experience and intention, and read in terms of personality and experience.

30. What this study suggests, to use Hawthorn’s terms, is that it is more fruitful for the critic of African literature to explore narrative technique/ “intra-textual” evidence to justify the “extra-textual” (166) assertions African writers make about their intended readerships.

31. It is important to add that this range and variety of institutions of reader-oriented criticism ultimately lends itself to a complexity, which Suleiman explains, as follows:

[O]ne encounters a major difficulty in citing names or examples. Even a partial list of American critics most closely associated with this mode must include names as apparently incompatible, for theoretical reasons, as Jonathan Culler and Norman Holland, Stanley Fish and Wayne C. Booth, E. D. Hirsch, Jr. and J. Hillis Miller, Walter J. Ong and Paul de Man; if one completes the list by French and German additions -- Roland Barthes, Gerard Genette, Jacques Derrida, Tzvetan Todorov, H R. Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, to name only the most eminent -- one fully realizes what one is against. (6)

32. In reader-oriented criticism Tompkins notes the “effects” that are “essential to ... [the] meaning” (ix) of a text, which could be explained in terms of one strong point about the theory: it draws eclectically from Psychology, elements of aesthetics, Philosophy, and Phenomenology.

33. It is instructive to note that the translators of Stierle’s “The Reading of Fictional Texts” (Stierle is a German Receptionist whose essay Suleiman and Crosman discuss), suggest that the German term *Rezeption* as used by those known as “[R]eception theorists,” “refers to the activity of reading, the construction of meaning, and the reader’s response to what he is reading” (Stierle, 83).

34. In contrast, “Reception,” according to Holub, “must be understood as a more cohesive,

conscious, and collective undertaking” with the following history:

In the largest sense it is a reaction to social, intellectual, and literary developments in West Germany during the late 1960s [I]t emerged as a group effort on both institutional and critical levels, involving a productive exchange of ideas among advocates. Moreover, many adherents to this critical movement are associated with the University of Constance [T]he core group at least contains many of the scholars who have contributed most to the orientation of West German literary theory Finally, [R]eception ... may be separated from reader-response criticism on the basis of the lack of mutual influence The similarities in general critical perspective between reader-response criticism and Reception ... are ultimately too abstract for a merging. (xiii-xiv)

35. Cited in Gikandi, 1991a: 12.

36. The concept of “author” is now problematised with the implications of Barthes’ “The Death of the Author” and Foucault’s “What Is An Author?”. Thus Eco (1984) says that “the author should die once he has finished writing,” according to him, “[s]o that not to trouble the path of the text” (7). In this study, the author is Chatman’s (147-51) “real” or “career” author by which he denotes that sense of a personality or human presence which readers construct from the historical author’s (that is, the author as “real person”) works.

37. It is also fair to say that Jauss means the shared set of assumptions between the writer and the writer’s own generation of readerships, or with successive institutions of audiences. Put differently, the “horizon of expectations” is, as de Man explains, “the historical consciousness of a given period” (xii).

38. Holub explains that in the former Germany Democratic Republic:

The reason for this turn to empirical Reception ... seems to be connected with a perceived deficiency in the theories emanating from the Constance School Jauss and Iser were often taken to task for their lack of sociological grounding with respect to the reader. One of the ways to correct this failing, many felt, was to undertake analyses of the ‘real’ reader. If this was done, it was reasoned, the abstractions of the ‘implied reader’ or ‘horizon of expectations’ could be avoided. (135)

This study is not concerned particularly with surveys/ counts of historical/ empirical readerships of the African novel in various geographical parts of Africa/ the world.

39. For this reason Hawthorn asks that:

If there is an optimal reader is there also an optimal reading, or is it a characteristic of major literature that it can generate a succession of new reading experiences as the individual reader or his ... culture changes? It has to be said that [the] study of empirical readings is at a very early stage; ... Holland's *5 Readers Reading* ... contained interesting material, but it could more accurately have been entitled *5 Readers Reading What they Remembered*. (168)

40. Abrams (1988) explains that:

Point of view signifies the way a story is told -- the mode or perspective established by an author by means of which the reader is presented with the characters, actions, setting and events which constitute the narrative in a work of fiction. The question of point of view has always been a practical concern of the novelist, and there have been scattered observations on the matter in critical writings since the emergence of the modern novel in the eighteenth century. (144-5)

It may be significant to add that other trends in communication have impacted on the way literary theoreticians have understood point of view. Notably, commentators point out that in 1948 the American electronic engineer, Claude Shannon, published two essays in which he proposed statistical ways of measuring the information-value of a *message*. They claim that part of his argument includes a diagrammatic model of the communication process, which has been extremely influential. They also further explain that as these essays were published in 1949 in book-form with an additional essay by Warren Weaver, the model has become known as the Shannon and Weaver model.

It would appear, then, that the Shannon and Weaver model of communication has had significant implications for narrative theory. In particular, commentators explain that the development of semiotics has given it a wider circulation than its creators had probably intended or anticipated. For example, it is claimed that the influence of the Shannon and Weaver model can almost certainly be detected in the influential passage in Jakobson's "Linguistics and Poetics" in which he attempts to break linguistic communication into its component parts: addresser, message, addressee, context, code and contact, as follows:

The *addresser* sends a *message* to the *addressee*. To be operative the message requires a *context* referred to ('referent' in another, somewhat ambiguous, nomenclature), sizeable by the addressee, and either verbal or capable of being

verbalized; a *code* fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and addressee ...; and, finally a *contact*, a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication. (353; emphasis in text)

With respect to the above passage Sharpe makes the acid comment that banality does not preclude falsehood; that Jakobson's ignoring of the role played by interpretation in the literary arts is fundamental to what is wrong with his terminology (15). It certainly seems possible to claim that the role of interpretation in the understanding of literature makes this process rather different from the transmission of quantifiable information undertaken by the electronic engineer. The electronic engineer wants his "message" to reach its "destination" in unchanged form: the poet/ novelist -- even according to the procedures of this study's intentional criticism -- does not want merely to recreate in the mind of the intended reader exactly what occurred in his mind during the composition of the work. It is probably not irrelevant in this regard to note that the word *message* has generally been used in a pejorative sense in discussions of literature. Perhaps a more successful adaptation of terms which probably originate with Shannon and Weaver could be found in recent narrative theory, as has already been suggested. Here a more schematic analysis of what in traditional terms used to be called *point of view* has proved to be genuinely illuminating, and in this context terms such as *addresser* and *addressee* serve a useful and generally non-reductive function.

It is instructive to note here that Genette (1980) makes a useful contribution to narrative theory as he draws attention to the importance of the distinction between *who sees* and *who speaks* (30; emphasis mine). In this terminology the distinction is expressed in terms of the opposition between *mood* and *voice*; that the category of mood gathers together the problems of *distance* which American critics such as Booth have traditionally discussed in terms of the opposition between *telling* and *showing*. *Voice*, in contrast, Genette reserves to describe the way in which the *narrative situation*, along with *narrator* and his *audience*, is implicated in the narrative (29-31). To summarize: mood operates at the level of connections between *story* and narrative, while *voice* designates connections both between narrating and narrative, and narration and story (32).

41. To these reader categories, Rimmon-Kenan adds " 'the Actual Reader' (Van Dijk) ...

and the 'Encoded Reader' (Brooke-Rose)',” and then explains that “[a]n analysis of the similarities and differences among the concepts underlying this plethora of appellations would take ... [one] beyond the specificity of narrative fiction” (118-19).

42. Ngugi (1986) says that:

The reception of a given work of art is part of the work itself; or rather the reception (or consumption!) of the work completes the whole creative process involving that particular artistic object. (82)

In a related context, Msimang provides an interesting discussion of the screening of *Shaka Zulu* on South African Television. Using what are clearly insights from Reception, especially Jauss', he attempts to assess *Shaka's* “impact on the television audience,” while focussing “on how the producers represented its historical and cultural context.” As Msimang's discussion develops, one notices that he privileges the viewer/ addressee, as follows:

In our era ... the structuralist approach has been modified or superseded by post-structuralism which has shifted the focus from the text to the reader/ viewer. As early as 1960 Jakobson, in his communication model emphasised the importance of the reader/ viewer in decoding the message encoded by the author. Jakobson's communication theory is founded `on six tenets. These are: Addresser; Message; Addressee; Context; Code and Contract. Accordingly, a contemporary critic should take cognisance of the context of a work of art as well as the addressee who can be very subjective in his response or reaction to the message sent to him by the Addresser, i.e. *the addressee has his own horizon of expectations*. (238; emphasis mine)

43. Consider also the way in which Ngugi (1997) reflects on *Petals of Blood* several years after its launch:

Looking back to the launch of *Petals of Blood* in that July of 1977, I [Ngugi] can now see that its grim picture of postcolonial Africa belongs more to the nineties and the twenty-first century than it did to the seventies. Hopefully the resistance envisaged in the narrative also belongs to the twenty-first century and the hopes I then expressed for petals of revolutionary love will come about in the coming century: for Kenya, Africa and the world. (93)

Ngugi's view is that a text could mean different things at different times to different readers. Significantly, this view is similar to Jauss' (1982), which accounts for such differences; he gives the reasons for them, as follows:

In the triangle of author, work and public, the last is no passive part, no chain of

mere reactions, but rather itself an energy formative of history. The historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its addressees. For it is only through the process of mediation that the work enters into the horizon-of-experience of a continuity in which the perpetual inversion occurs from simple Reception to critical understanding, from passive to active Reception, from recognized aesthetic norms to a new production that surpasses them.
(19)

44. Stein provides a meaningful critique of Iser. In particular, he contests, first, Iser's notion of the "text ... as an event" and, second, his idea that "reading" is a "process" which, according to Iser, "assumes patterns of interaction, communication, adaptation and survival" primarily on the part of the reader (214-15).
45. Prince's (1980) "narratee" could also be used to explain the intended readership of the African texts this study examines. What is useful about the narratee, according to Prince, is that "narratees are distinct from real ... readers" and that "they ... often differ from each other" (9-10). Prince also makes the point that "the portrait of a narratee emerges above all from the narrative addressed to him" (12). Eco's (1981) "model reader" is also apposite here when he says that:

To make his text communicative, the author has to assume that the ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by his possible reader (Model Reader) supposedly able to deal ... [interpretatively] with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them. (7)

This may be taken to imply that the "model reader" is external to the text, but later in the same chapter of his book, Eco makes it clear that for him the concept is more intra-textual and that the model reader is thus also to be understood as being inscribed in the text:

In other words, the Model Reader is a textually established set of felicity conditions ... to be met in order to have a macro-speech act (such as a text is) fully actualised. (11)

Eco acknowledges the notion of "felicity conditions" from Speech Act Theory, especially Austin's insights. According to Hawthorn, in Speech Act Theory:

[T]he conventions underlying successful conversation are known as appropriateness conditions or felicity conditions ... and together are taken to constitute the co-operative principle ... that governs conversation in ideal situations. (196)

In narrative theory (and in the context of this study) felicity conditions would mean the social, political, and cultural horizons that both the author and intended reader might share.

46. *Nation* implicates ethno-sociological ramifications. For this reason, this study understands the concept in the way that Anderson defines it as “an imagined political community -- imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (outside it are ‘alien Others,’ inside there is a demand for total allegiance). He further explains that the nation “[i]s *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (13; emphasis in text). What is instructive here is that what brings a nation together are matters such as religion, culture and customs, which, according to Anderson, what he describes as a “halo of disinterestedness” (13). In this way, this study points out that in the African context, the pluralization of religions and break-up of dynastic empires and nation states, the nation has emerged as the ultimate ideological community for most people, and the one with the strongest imagined sense of timelessness, naturalness and disinterestedness. It is instructive to add that what Gerard says in the following about nationalism is also apposite here:

Modern *nationalism* is closely linked with language. It is rooted in a sense of belonging to an in-group whose members can understand one another because they speak the same language. Its basic premise is that *the nation is made up of all the people who speak the same language* and that each nation thus defined is entitled to political independence On the whole, however, whether the borders of the political entity (the state) coincide with *the organic linguistic limits of any particular human group* (the nation), the literary activity of a society in its own language provides an index to its collective self-esteem, its sense of its own dignity and the intensity of its aspiration to self-determination. (16; emphasis mine)

For the purposes of this study, the *national* readership, then, would constitute readers who belong to the same linguistic/ cultural human group, while the *international* one implicates readers outside this human group. Thus in a related context, Mpe earlier employs this distinction to explore the multiple interpretations of the South African regional novel, Plaatje’s *Mhudi*, a text which, according to Couzens, “in many ways remarkably foreshadows in some of its themes ... *Things Fall Apart*.” He further adds that “just as Achebe does in the later novel, so Plaatje portrays a traditional society at a crucial stage of transition” (7).

47. According to Genette, the “extradiegetic” narrator is often superior to the story he tells or “above” it. However, the narrators who participate in the presented story as characters (Odili in *A Man of the People* and Peter Obiese in *Wand of Noble Wood* are cases in point) Genette describes as “intradiegetic”. Rimmon-Kenan provides a useful interpretation of the the extradiegetic narrator when he argues for his significance, as follows:

[E]xtradiegetic narrators ... are in no sense participants in the stories they narrate It is precisely their being absent from the story and their higher authority in relation to it that confers on such narrators the quality which has often been called ‘omniscience’. ‘Omniscience’ is perhaps an exaggerated term, especially for modern extradiegetic narrators. Nevertheless, the characteristics connoted by it are still relevant, namely: familiarity, in principle, with the characters’ innermost thoughts and feelings; knowledge of the past, present and future; presence in locations where characters are supposed to be unaccompanied ... and knowledge of what happens in several places at the same time. (95)

48. Booth (1983) problematizes the *persona* when he states that:

None of our terms for various aspects of the narrator is quite accurate: ‘[p]ersona,’ ‘mask,’ and ‘narrator’ are sometimes used, but they more commonly refer to the speaker in the work who is after all only one of the elements created by the implied author and who may be separated from him by large ironies. (73)

49. Hawthorn (1994) explains that “British critics have sometimes adopted ... [Fish’s (1980b)] term and modified it to *interpretative* communities so as to conform to more usual British English usage” (98; emphasis in text). As this study shows, this British English spelling is, therefore, used throughout. It is instructive to mention that Fish’s notion is bound up with a related concept of the *interpretative strategy*:

[I]t is interpretative communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produces meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features. Interpretative communities are made up of those who share interpretative strategies not for reading but for writing texts, for constituting their properties. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way round. (14)

Klancher says that Fish’s contribution to reader-response criticism could be located at the time when there was “a conceptual crisis in the formalist category of the ‘reader’ of a literary text.” Put in other words, the rise of reader-response criticism was

a way of admitting that the interpretation of an isolated literary text had always depended on a tacitly 'ideal' reader protected from historical contingency and ideological pressure. And once made explicit, the 'implied' or 'ideal' reader of reader-response theory soon revealed his complicity in a hidden bargain: the significance of being attributed to the 'response' of the reader 'in' the text was in fact being tacitly attributed to the institutional audience of literary critics who assented to such a reading 'of' the text. This contradiction was most entertainingly exposed by ... Fish, who, cannily argued ... that every reading ... is collectively determined by the 'interpretative community' to which the academic interpreter belongs. This key move from 'reader' to 'audience' had far-reaching implications that Fish curtailed, however, by insisting that professional socialization decisively separates academic readers from all other kinds. (881)

It may be worth noting that Fish's "interpretative community"/ "informed reader[s]" is similar to Jauss' (1982: 44) "experienced" readership.

50. Achebe (1975) makes a useful point about the casual readership of his work in his letter to Tai Solarin, who had earlier attacked Achebe's defence of the Africa writer's use of the English language. According to him:

My [Achebe's] novels are not only in English but in sixteen major languages around the world. And the number is increasing. I am quite confident that if Nigeria decided tomorrow to install Hausa as the national language my books would immediately be translated into it. (87)

51. Critics who employ this concept to discuss this particular readership in the African regional novel do not define it. Williams (1983b) explains that the etymology of "popular" has to do with "belonging to the people," but that in the historical shifts towards the widespread modern usage of "well-liked" there has been a pejorative streak relating to the implication the word carries of "setting out to gain favour" (198). It is, therefore, arguable that Young thinks Nzekwu in *Wand of Noble Wood* deliberately "set[s] out to" make Ibo/ African culture "gain favour" to non-Ibo/ inter-national readerships; that in his novel Nzekwu wants Ibo/ African culture to be "well-liked" by non-Ibo/ international readerships as a valid social and historical experience.

52. Abrams (1988) provides a useful explanation of a symbol, as follows:

A symbol, in the broadest sense, is equivalent to a *sign* -- that is, anything which signifies something else; in this sense all words are symbols. In

discussing literature, however, the term symbol is applied only to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in turn signifies something, or has a range of reference, beyond itself. Some symbols are 'conventional' or 'public' ... [while] others are 'private' or 'personal'. (184; emphasis in text)

53. This term is used to explain what Scholes and Kellogg describe as the "divided protagonist" who experiences decline and fall (261). The way Solo and Modin, for instance, narrate their stories is a clear illustration of the divided narrator. As the narrators experience decline and fall, so does the narrative itself breakdown, and, consequently, Armah's novel.

54. It is instructive to note that *Why Are We So Blest?* and *Our Sister Killjoy* share similarities with what Alter describes as "self-conscious novel[s]":

A self-conscious novel is one that systematically flaunts its own condition of artifice and that by so doing probes into a problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality A fully self-conscious novel is one in which from beginning to end, through the style, the handling of narrative viewpoint, the names and words imposed on the characters, the patterning of the narration, the nature of the characters and what befalls them, there is consistent effort to convey to *us* a sense of the fictional world as an authorial construct set up against a background of literary tradition and convention. (x-xiii; emphasis mine)

Why Are We So Blest? and *Our Sister Killjoy* are, therefore, examined as such because they are, as Alter would say, "a testing of the ontological status of the fiction." The superreader is "asked to watch how [Armah and Aidoo] make[...] ... [their] novel[s], what is involved technically and theoretically in the making" (x-xiii).

55. Metafiction, metanarrative and metanovel, according to Patricia Waugh, "takes fictionality as a theme to be explored" (18). These concepts, says Hawthorn, are derived from "meta-language", which, according to him, is:

Technically ... any language used to describe or refer to another language: 'a language about language' This has a bearing on literature and literary criticism precisely because both exploit this resource However, literature can itself serve as its own language, as in *metafiction*. One consequence of this is that the play of *levels* in a literary work can be very complex. (116; emphasis in text)

Commentators credit Gass with the invention of the term, which he defines as "fiction ...

[that] draws attention to itself as artefact to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (25). It is also instructive to note here what Waugh says about metafiction; according to her, “metafiction sets up an opposition to ... the language of the realistic novel” (11) and the view of reality it sustains. Waugh’s assertion of the political nature of metafiction is a counter-argument to the assertion that such fiction is solipsistic and apolitical. Jablon also points out that:

Critics of ... [metafiction] argue that raising questions about the nature of reality pre-supposes an apolitical stance. They also believe that questions about the effectiveness of language as a vehicle for communication and questions about the relationship between sign and signified, *langue* and *parole*, are unalterably linked to fatalism. Advocates and practitioners of metafiction have defended their work against such accusations by pointing to experimental writing or unrealistic fiction as a challenge to the reality from which such fictions issue. This has been especially true, it would seem, for black African-American writers, who are often viewed as neglecting their social responsibility for non-realistic fiction. (180)

A study of *Why Are We So Blest?* and *Our Sister Killjoy* as metafiction, however, performs what Hawthorne would call “an important function in making *our* awareness of the specificity and interrelations of different narrative levels much sharper” (116; emphasis mine). Note that Hawthorne’s “our” (and Alter’s “us” in note 44) implies the notion of the “superreader”, as Chapter III of this study shows. Perhaps it is also significant to point out that Lotman’s notion of the “artistic text” could be relevant in discussions of narrative technique and intended readership in the African metanovel. Uspensky defines the main qualities of this text, as follows:

[T]he structure of the artistic text may be described by various points of view ... and by investigating the relations between these points of view (their concurrence and non-concurrence and the possible shifts from one point of view to another, which in turn are connected with the study of the *function* of the different points of view in the text). (5; emphasis in text)

The reader of this particular text, as one of the translators of Lotman’s study, Vroon, explains, is “the trained receiver” (v).

56. It may be useful to point out that this study takes the totality of Culler’s “Ideal Reader”, Eco’s “Model Reader”, Fish’s “interpretative community”/ “Informed Reader” and

Riffaterre's "superreader" to mean one and the same readership. It is usually such readerships who are able to engage the act of "superreading," which Riffaterre discusses, as follows:

It ... explores the act [of reading] more thoroughly by performing it over and over again. It has the enormous advantage of following exactly the normal reading process, of perceiving the ... [text] as its ... [narrative] shape dictates, along the ... [narrative], starting at the beginning ...; it has the advantage of screening pertinent structures and only pertinent structures. (38)

This form of reading, Riffaterre points out, is a facility of readers such as "critics ... and students [of literature]" (38). Jauss (1982) further explains this reading competence when he says that this type of readership

is not only equipped with the sum total of literary historical knowledge available today, but also is capable of consciously registering every aesthetic impression and referring it back to the text's structure of effect [In short, this is the] reader with the educational horizon of our contemporary present. (144)

It seems that a lot could be said about the reading competence of the superreader in African metafiction. Uspensky points out that this reading competence enables the superreader to "enter into the very perception of the work ... as ... its necessary constituent"; that the superreader, according to him, "is not outside the artistic event" (48). Fish's (1980b) notion of the "informed reader" (who belongs to the "interpretative community") is also worth quoting:

The informed reader is someone who (1) is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built up; (2) is in full possession of the 'semantic knowledge that a mature ... listener brings to his task of comprehension,' including the knowledge (that is, the experience, both as producer and comprehender) of lexical sets, collocation probabilities, idioms, professional and other dialects, and so on; and (3) has *literary* competence. That is, he is sufficiently experienced as a reader to have internalised the properties of local discourses, including everything from the most local of devices (figures of speech, and so on) to whole genres. (48; emphasis in text)

In this way, it is possible to see why Jauss (1980) argues that the role of the superreader is, indeed, far-reaching:

The role of this ... reader should presuppose that one is experienced in one's association with ... [texts], ... [that one has] the capacity occasionally to wonder during the course of the reading, and to express this wonder in the form of questions. (144)

It is instructive to note that in his discussion, Jauss is aware of Riffaterre's superreader,

and he also delineates what he thinks, in fact, are the qualities of the superreader, which are that the

'superreader' ... is not only equipped with the sum total of literary historical knowledge available today, but is also capable of consciously registering every aesthetic impression and referring it back to the text's structure of effect [He is a] reader with the educational horizon of our contemporary society. (144)

The way in which Fish interchangeably uses "listener" and "reader" is relevant to the intended readerships of both *A Man of the People* and *Petals of Blood* (as will be seen in Chapter IV of this study), for in these two political texts the narrators seem to be primarily *telling* their stories. The notion of the "superaudience" (borrowed from Yawah who, in discussing specific texts from Franco-phone Africa, uses Uspensky's insights) is, therefore, used in Chapter IV because it is rather neutral (it encompasses both listeners and readers). In this study, the concept of "superreader" is used in a wide-ranging sense, that is, to refer to (a) the sophisticated and sympathetic reader constituted in and by the literary text; (b) particularly sophisticated critics and readers outside the text, who have commented insightfully on the novels; and (c) occasionally, to other "insider" readers who have detailed specific knowledge of the conditions described in the novels, for contingent reasons.

57. It is significant to note that irony always belongs to the author. Gikandi (1987) describes the relationship of irony with the author as the "badge of ... [the author's] detachment from the world" he describes (74). Thus one commentator remarks that:

Great irony is itself a cultural event of the first order of importance for it already implicitly contains a perspective which allows for evaluation. That is to say, irony, which has as its object the cultural patterns and traditional institutions, has a positionality which places it 'outside' of these patterns and institutions, which through ironic juxtaposition brings a new evaluational perspective. (Cited in Gikandi, 114)

58. Hawthorn (1994) says that this is "[a] word that has accrued a particular polemic force in recent years," and adds that:

[T]o describe something as *site* has become a favoured way of giving (sometimes exclusive) precedence to external determining forces while playing down or denying the self-initiation of movement and development. (191; emphasis mine)

The word is used in this study to mean a self-initiated source of other narrative material, an inspiration to rework the novel as genre with material from African oral traditions.

59. Gates, Jr. suggests this term. According to him, “[s]peakerly texts ... privilege the representation of the speaking ... voice, of what the Russian Formalists called *skaz* and which [Zora Neale] Hurston and [Ishmeal] Reed have called ‘an oral book, a talking book’” (296). Interestingly, when Gates, Jr. uses the expression “speakerly text,” he seems to emphasise the centrality of speaking in the Russian genre *skaz* and in an “ ‘oral book, a talking book.’” In addition, it must also be noted that “speakerly” recalls, because it is meant to be contradistinguished from, Barthes’ (1990) “writerly”/ “readerly” texts. In the context of this study, Barthes’ terms are interesting in as much as they implicate the reader; how the intended audience is engaged/ involved in the production of meaning/ in text-making. Barthes distinguishes between his coinages the *lisible* (the readerly) and the *scriptible* (the writerly), that is, between traditional literary works such as the classical novel, with their reliance upon conventions shared by the writer and the reader and their resultant fixity or closure of meaning, and “modernist” texts which violate conventions and thus force the reader to work to produce meaning(s) which is (are) inevitably other than final or “correct.” Therefore, according to him:

The writerly is perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. (5; emphasis in text)

Readerly texts, in contrast, are products rather than productions, and they make up the enormous mass of world literature. This, then, means that the positive term, according to Barthes, is the *scriptable* because value is now attributed to production rather than reproduction or representation. In the context of this study, this is interesting because *scriptable* suggests that the text is no longer a thing on its own; rather, it is a process which involves reader participation in text/ meaning production as an essential part of the activity of the text.

60. The quest narrative/ tale is usually a specific form of oral narrative, and conforms to a particular structure: the hero often has to leave security/ home and travels to confront a social danger; he defeats the danger, which is often a monster. After killing the monster, the

hero then makes a cloak of skin and wears it. Cranny-Francis (10, 11) discusses the quest narrative as a literary form which is, according to her, basically linear, and in which temporal sequence is taken to signify material causation. She sees it as being the dominant structure in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western writing, a structure which carries a particular ideological and political charge, for it privileges linear sequence rather than, say, seasonal cycles, and thus underwrites dominant discourses in various cultures. It is instructive, however, to note that, according to some commentators, there are significant differences in the way in which heroes and heroines engage in the quest in traditional Western narrative. For example, the hero is often active in his quest, overcoming difficulties and is aided by helpers, whereas the heroine is passive (is usually the object of quest), has to endure suffering and humiliation, and rather than overcoming the world, has to learn to adapt to its demands (as these are mediated by men) (Duggan 1975, Scholes and Kellogg 1966, Stolz and Shannon 1976). What is useful to note with regard to *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari* is what Cranny-Francis describes as the “political and ideological charge” of the quest narrative/ tale/ novel/ text. For it is crucial to read these two African quest political novels/ texts as fully charged with an ideology that is undergirded by what Scheub (1975), in another context, would describe as “a need for an ideal ... [and] ordered society” (84).

CHAPTER II

MULTIPLE READERSHIPS IN THE AFRICAN REGIONAL NOVEL: CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART* AND ONUORA NZEKWU'S *WAND OF NOBLE WOOD*

I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past -- with all its imperfections -- was not one long night of savagery. Chinua Achebe (1975: 45)

Wand of Noble Wood is one of the most outstanding examples of African novels in which the author makes it obvious that he is writing for a non-African ... [readership]. P. A. Egejuru (1978: 157)

1. The Rise of the African Regional Novel

The pre-modifier *multiple* in the title of this chapter is used to signal the contestation of the commonly used, but vague dichotomy of the "inside" (African) and "outside" (Western) readerships in the criticism of the African regional novel. The argument here is that this duality does not go far enough to suggest the multiplicity of the intentions of African regionalists such as Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* and Onuora Nzekwu in *Wand of Noble Wood*. In fact, the chapter suggests that it would be fruitful to look at the intentions of African regional texts such as *Things Fall Apart* and *Wand of Noble Wood* from the axes of *national* and *international* concerns, which Achebe and Nzekwu eschew. In this way, a meaningful criticism of African regional fiction that seeks to discuss the readerships in *Things Fall Apart* and *Wand of Noble Wood* must, therefore, first, complicate the notion of readership and, then, secondly, modify it.

In contemporary African criticism *Things Fall Apart* often marks the beginnings of "modern" African fiction. Indeed most critics usually ignore Amos Tutuola probably because his work is not written in the realist¹ mode, in which Achebe's novel is. For this reason *Things Fall Apart* is often taken as the benchmark of the modern African novel, as Gerald Moore (1980) explains:

The appearance of *Things Fall Apart* in 1958 won for its author a position of eminence in African literature which for a long time led to his being elevated above his fellows, in his own and the succeeding generations. The book was quickly recognized as a classic and tended to be used as a yardstick with which

to measure the many Anglophone novels, Nigerian and others, that followed it. It was, indeed, the first African novel of real weight and substance to appear in English. (123)

Lewis Nkosi (1981) makes a similar point when he says that in the way *Things Fall Apart* reconstructs the past, Achebe “blazed a trail large enough to be followed by other [African] writers” (33). To Nkosi, Achebe’s handling of the English language is so innovative that he, in fact, “[s]et an example which has influenced many younger [African] writers” (53). The trail that Achebe had set with *Things Fall Apart* has produced a particular variety of African texts that this study categorizes as the African *regional*² novel, to which *Wand of Noble Wood* belongs.

In her short study Phyllis Bentley (1941) defines the *regional* novel, as follows:

The regional novel is the national novel carried to one degree further of sub-division; it is a novel which, concentrating on a particular region of a nation, depicts the life of that region in such a way that the reader is conscious of the characteristics which are unique to that region and differentiates it from others in the common mother-land. (7; emphasis mine)

Notice that Bentley recognises both the significance of narrative technique and the intended readership in the regional novel; the prospective writer of the regional text, according to Bentley, must write “in such a way” that gives a clear impression of the intentions of the novel. And, often, as Bentley says, the intentions of the regional novel are directed towards the expectations of the readership: “the reader must be conscious,” says Bentley, “of the characteristics unique to that region” (7).

British proponents of the “regional” novel (such as Bentley and Raymond Williams) always scrutinise “regions” smaller than Britain in their studies. In contradistinction to this, B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin (1989), in discussing what they describe as “regional” and “national” literatures, point out that the former is usually bigger than the latter. First, they explain that while there is a difference between national and regional literatures, the distinction, however, may be problematic. According to them, “[t]he first postcolonial society to develop a ‘national’ literature was the USA” (16), and that:

[A]s the extensive literature of the USA developed different characteristics from that of Britain and established its right to be considered independently, the concept of national literary differences ‘within’ English writing became established. (16-17)

As it happened, according to them, “[t]he eventual consequence of this has been that ‘newer’ literatures from countries such as Nigeria ... could also be discussed as discrete national formations” (17) because “[t]heir literatures could be considered in relation to the social and political history of each country, and could be read as a source of important images of national identity” (17). Secondly, to distinguish national from regional literatures, Ashcroft *et al.* point out that one needs to note that “[l]arger geographical models which cross the boundaries of language, nationality, or race ... generate the concept of a *regional* literature” (17; emphasis in text).

Raymond Williams (1983a) also recognises the intentions of a writer as paramount in the regional novel. According to him:

Certain places are ‘regions’ with a recognized or provincial character while certain places are not [C]ertain novels are ‘regional’ in the sense that *they tell us* primarily, or solely, about such places and the life lived in them rather than about any more general life. (229; emphasis mine)

To *inform* the readership -- “they tell us” -- about both the *specificity* of locale (“such places”) -- whether these locales be defined intra- or transnationally -- and the *distinctiveness* of culture/traditions peculiar to such locales (“the life lived in them”), is, therefore, the intention of the regional novel, says Williams.

However, in the context of the African regional novel, there has been great debate about *what* this genre is supposed to “tell ... [the readership].” Put differently, the debate has often been about both the “intelligibility” of African literature, and the demand for the recognition of the “Africanness” of African literature, as well as the rejection of universal readings of African texts. Yet, the cultural and political implications of these issues have often been disturbing, as African critics and writers quickly pointed out. According to these African critics and writers, intelligibility in practice meant the continuance of Euro-American standards, values and forms, and its praise testified to the refusal of a non-local readership to come to terms with the need to understand the work from within its own cultural context. Achebe (1975) sums up the feeling of the time, as follows:

I [Achebe] should like the word *universal* banned altogether from discussions of African literature until such a time as people cease to use it as a synonym for the narrow, self-preserving parochialism of Europe. (9; emphasis in text)

In view of the problems pertaining to the relevance of universalism in African literature, perhaps the best way to negotiate the issue is to follow Brenda Cooper’s (1992b) thinking in her

chapter "Their Class Is Not Exhaustive of What They Are: The Historical and the Universal in Fiction" (110-141). In this discussion of what is part of a larger project concerning the enterprise of "[e]valuating African [w]riting", Cooper begins by acknowledging her debt to Norman Geras' study of Leo Trotsky's work, especially its *literariness*. From Geras, Cooper claims to have borrowed the notion of the "truth in the round" which, according to her, is what Geras admires in Trotsky. In her interpretation of Geras, Cooper says that "[t]he suggestion that the literariness of Trotsky's writing is its rounded understanding can be used to pinpoint the knowledge appropriate to good fiction" (18). Cooper then applies this formula to African fiction. Her procedure should certainly assist the critic of African literature to examine universalism with regard to both narrative technique and readership in African fiction:

Fiction exhibiting rounded truth often portrays relations between the historical, the social and the trans-historical. I [Cooper] ... argue that fiction is *truthful* only if it represents the complexity of this relationship in a way that does not collapse both aspects. This distinguishes my position from the classical bourgeois one which tends to privilege the universal at the expense of the particular, or to explain the particular in terms of the universal. (110; emphasis mine)

Cooper's notion of "truth" in fiction implicates both narrative technique and intended readership. In fact, in the context of the criticism of the African regional novel, it would seem that Cooper's position is incontrovertible, for in providing meaningful criticism of African regional fiction such as *Things Fall Apart* and *Wand of Noble Wood*, the critic needs to identify the extent of the complexity of what Cooper rightly describes as the "relations between the historical, the social and trans-historical" in these texts. This is pertinent because Achebe and Nzekwu strive to present in these two novels the "rounded truth" in their society. Such criticism can only be provided, this chapter argues, by paying attention particularly to narrative technique and intended readerships in both *Things Fall Apart* and *Wand of Noble Wood*.

It may appear at first sight not fruitful to compare *Things Fall Apart* with *Wand of Noble Wood*. However, when read closely, the two texts offer interesting points of comparison and contrast. Oladele Taiwo (1967) compares Achebe and Nzekwu as two West African writers whose "backgrounds and inspiration are the same" (49), while O. R. Dathorne (1976) suggests that "[Nzekwu's novel] take[s] us back to the world of Achebe" (88). However, these comparisons cannot be taken very far, for in *Things Fall Apart* there is a meaningful demonstration of Achebe's grasp of narrative technique, while in *Wand of Noble Wood* there is not much indication to show that Nzekwu is in control of the story-line. This is to say that in

Achebe's novel the narrator knows his function, and employs it to maximum effect, while in Nzekwu's novel the narrator does not know his limitations, as this chapter shows.

The way critics have discussed the readership of the African regional novel for a long time now is not fruitful. Take C. L. Innes' (1990) emphasis on how narrative technique in *Things Fall Apart* impacts on the intended readership in Achebe's novel:

Achebe is Africa's most widely read novelist and the first novelist to be taken seriously by both African and European readers. His ... [*Things Fall Apart*] ... [has] profoundly influenced his readers' understanding of Africans and their lives. (1)

Innes raises two contestable points: first, she indicates that there is more than one readership in *Things Fall Apart* -- the "African" and "European"/ Western readerships. In this way, Innes is, in fact, in line with the criticism of the African regional novel that often discusses what is commonly described as the *inside* and *outside* readerships in African fiction.

It is significant to state that the criticism that focuses on the African/ Western readerships in African fiction does not take cognisance of the fact that there are in these wide institutions of readerships other sub-categories. In fact one major criticism of this theory is that when it states this duality of readerships, it is not incisive enough in substantiating what the African/ Western readerships mean. Consider, again, Innes' comments on *Things Fall Apart*: although Innes generally makes useful observations on Achebe's text, he fails to prove *how Things Fall Apart* has both African and Western readerships. Yet, for Innes to show this, he will need to read Achebe's novel as a text which exhibits features of what Ashcroft *et al.* describe as "cross-cultural" (2, 36-7). "Such writing," they say, "is, in effect, an ethnography of the writer's own culture" and, as such, it is characteristic of "[t]he postcolonial writer ... whose gaze is turned in two directions" (61; emphasis mine). Still, in order to appreciate how cross-cultural texts such as *Things Fall Apart* construct their supposed dual readerships, the critics of the African/ Western readership theory need to focus on what Ashcroft *et al.* describe as narrative "[s]trategies of appropriation in postcolonial writing" (59-77), for according to them:

Parenthetical translations of individual words, for example, 'he took him into his *obi* (hut)', are the most obvious and most common authorial intrusion in cross-cultural texts. Although not limited to cross-cultural texts such glosses foreground the continual reality of *cultural distance*. (61; emphasis mine)

"[C]ultural distance" is often the space between the *inside* writer (such as Achebe in this case) and *outside* readers (such as the Western readership), which the text (*Things Fall Apart*) may take into account. As this chapter then shows, glossing is a common narrative technique in the

African regional novel as it foregrounds both the non-African reader and some categories in the African readership as the “Other”.³ Innes does not situate *Things Fall Apart* in postcolonial writing and, as such, his comments about the categories of the readership in Achebe’s novel may not be useful.

To continue, Innes’ failure to show *how* the novel constructs the two readerships he claims for *Things Fall Apart*, leads to yet another problem: there is no indication in Innes’ discussion to explain *how* he knows that these two readerships “have ... [been] *profoundly influenced* ... [in their understanding of] Africans and their lives” (1; emphasis mine). Innes cannot show the source of the influence and its profundity because his method is limited to mere descriptions of what a text is claimed to do; it does not encourage the analysis of how the text achieves its intentions. If Innes has to show this, he probably would need to do two things; first, he would require to examine narrative technique in Achebe’s novel, and, secondly, he would need to rely on the insights of Receptionists, especially Stanley Fish’s (1980c) “Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics” in which, according to Robert Holub (1984: 151), Fish “shifts the onus of interpretation squarely on to the reader” (151). For to Fish, Catherine Belsey (1980) says, reading is both a “process” and “an activity” and the “important question to ask of a text is what it *does*” (32; emphasis in text). This “process”/ “activity” leads to another crucial idea in Fish’s thinking – that of *conversion*.⁴

It is worth noting that Fish’s notion of “conversion” is similar to Achebe’s (1975: 45) of *teaching* as a primary duty of the African regionalist. The concept of the African *novelist as teacher*, it must be emphasised, is important in Achebe’s view of the role/ function of modern African fiction in postcolonial Africa, for Achebe (1992) further explains it, as follows:

A good teacher never prescribes; he *draws out*. Education is a drawing out of what is there, leading out ... [and] helping the pupil to discover ... to explore. (47; emphasis in text)

Innes does not investigate Achebe’s essential literary programme and, as such, what he means by African and European readers will have to include real or empirical readers, as well as the various abstract readers whose characters Achebe may not have pre-determined. To show this, Innes would, again, have to engage in what was described in the previous chapter of this study as empirical Reception (30).

Perhaps it is important to emphasise that this study explains the *intended* readership of a text as the one that is usually *assumed* and *pre-determined* by the author, and that the author’s pre-determination of such a readership is often suggested in narrative technique. Thus it would have

been more fruitful, as a starting point, for Innes to explore narrative technique in Achebe's novel, for as A. Nichols (1991) suggests:

A wide range of literary concerns is ... accessible through *Things Fall Apart*: questions of narrative structure, the analysis of genre, the role of dialogue and description, ... [and] *the function of the narrator*. (57; emphasis mine)

It is, indeed, because of the meaningful "function of the narrator" in Achebe's novel that makes *Things Fall Apart* a more successful novel than *Wand of Noble Wood*. It is for this reason, too, that Williams praises Achebe's novel:

What is impressive about *Things Fall Apart* is that as in some English novels of rural change, as late as Hardy, the internal tensions of the society *are made clear*, so that *we can understand* the modes of the penetration which would in any case, in its process of expansion, have come. (Emphasis mine)⁵

Williams' remarks implicate an intended readership; the narrator wants the story of Achebe's novel to be "made clear" and "underst[oo]d" to a readership that may not be familiar with *what happened* to the world of the novel; he wants the intended readership to appreciate how Achebe's novel "portrays," to use Cooper's words, the "relations between the historical, the social and the trans-historical" in Ibo society towards the end of the nineteenth-century. The point, in tandem, then, is that the narrator's aims and objectives in *Things Fall Apart* are *informational*. For this reason, Williams' "we" in the above quotation, then, needs further comment: the "we" implicates a plurality of readerships that is distanced in both time and space from the *past* world of the Ibo community that underwent the cataclysmic cultural and social change the novel seeks to revivify, as this chapter shows.

The readerships that one may identify in regionalist fiction such as *Things Fall Apart* and *Wand of Noble Wood* are likely to be wide. Indeed, they could be grouped in two categories, as follows: to one camp belong the Ibo readership itself and the non-Ibo/ Nigerian one. These two readerships constitute the *national* readership. To the other camp belong the non-Nigerian/ African readership and the non-African one, which constitute the *international* readership. However, straddling these two broad categories of readerships are also two equally wide groups -- Fish's "interpretative community"/ "informed reader[s]" and the casual readership. In suggesting such a wide spectrum of readerships for the African regional text, the assumption is that African regional novels have "loaded" messages indeed.

Take Achebe's (1992) remark to Anthony Appiah that:

I [Achebe] am an Ibo writer, because this is my basic culture; Nigerian, African and a writer ... no, black first, then a writer. Each of these identities does call

for a certain kind of commitment on my part. I must see what it is to be black -- and this means being sufficiently intelligent to know how the world is moving and how black people fare in the world. This is what it means to be black. Or an African -- the same: what does Africa mean to the world? When you see an African what does it mean to a white man? (116)⁶

Now, narrative technique in *Things Fall Apart*, as this chapter shows, demonstrates Kole Omotoso's (1996) claim that Achebe's role as a writer in the Nigerian context has always been that of an individual within the Ibo ethnic nationality and as a "speaker[...] and griot[...] for the Ibos" (xiv; emphasis mine). Yet, Achebe's own claim above problematises his identity and the way he negotiates it in his work. In fact, his claim is an attempt to break down the various dimensions of his commitment as a writer. Thus in a text such as *Things Fall Apart* Achebe expresses the desire to define, in symbolic terms, Ibo culture, Nigerian and African life-styles not necessarily only "to the [outside] world" or to the "white man." What, in fact, Achebe attempts to do in *Things Fall Apart* is to define, and, then, revivify Ibo culture both to the Ibo/ African and the non-Ibo African; he also tries to define African life-styles to the non-African. These, then, are critical concerns that any meaningful criticism of *Things Fall Apart* must address; such criticism must seek to identify both the readerships in Achebe's novel and the specific issues that Achebe's novel seeks to do with each of the readerships.

Throughout this study it will be seen that the readerships in the texts this study examines are subsumed under the themes in the texts themselves. Thus in discussing the readerships in African texts, the study argues that it is more fruitful to examine both narrative technique and the thematic concerns in African fiction. In this way, this chapter suggests that the most meaningful starting point to define the multiple readerships in both *Things Fall Apart* and *Wand of Noble Wood* is to examine in these two texts the use of what Jacques Derrida (1987) and Susan S. Lanser (1981) describe as a "textual graft" (153) and an "extra-fictional structure" (125), respectively. According to Derrida, "textual graft[s]" are items in the "principal or capital text," such as an epigraph, which enhance the theme of the text in question, while Lanser points out that because an epigraph brings "extra" information to a text, it is, therefore, like titles and prefaces, able to "bring a particular theme to the foreground" (125). For this reason, Derrida explains that it is critical that "readers [should] understand the functioning of ... epigraphs, and in what way ... these are sometimes more important than the ... text" (153).

It is significant to emphasise that both Achebe and Nzekwu are familiar with Western literature.⁷ Achebe, for instance, is familiar with it because, according to him, at university "[he]

was taught the same kind of literature that British people were taught.”⁸ From these remarks, one begins to see the *international* dimension of the readership in *Things Fall Apart*. It is, to begin with, any readers that are familiar with Yeats’ notion of the cycles in social history who can meaningfully relate Yeats’ idea to what Achebe describes as “the message of the disaster”⁹ in some African regional novels such as *Things Fall Apart*. This is to say that in quoting from Yeats and Aristophanes, Achebe and Nzekwu, respectively, are, in fact, to use Lanser’s words again, attempting “to indicate a tie between ... [their] text[s] and ... [particular] literary tradition[s]” as well as “communicat[ing] an image to a particular audience” (125). This particular audience/readership, in the case of both *Things Fall Apart* and *Wand of Noble Wood*, must be readerships that are familiar with Yeats and Aristophanes.

Perhaps it is significant to point out that one group of this international readership must be Fish’s “interpretative community”/ “informed reader[s]”. This is, in fact, the readership that is able to explain the extent of the validity of Eustace Palmer’s (1979) claim that “Achebe was ... stimulated into writing *Things Fall Apart* by the picture of Nigerian life,” which is, according to Palmer, “presented in ... *Mister Johnson*, and it will be much easier to see the influence of Dickens, Ridder haggard ... [and] Conrad on ... Achebe[’s novel] than that of the oral tale” (84). For this reason, it is important to note that in the case of *Things Fall Apart*, the interpretative community comprises two categories of readerships -- the Ibo and non-Ibo readerships. To the group of the non-Ibo informed readers belong the Sierra Leonean Palmer, the Yoruba/ Nigerian Omotoso,¹⁰ the Kenyan S. Gikandi,¹¹ Williams, Nichols and Innes, while the Ibo readership includes the Ibo/ Nigerian B. Obumelu.¹² These, indeed, are also the readers who are likely to fruitfully examine in Achebe’s novel the treatment of what Williams, as has already been pointed out, calls “the modes of the penetration [of colonialism and Western culture in Umuofia].” Achebe’s novel, then, has a wide readership: it has an inclusive readership because it deals with what the author considers to be a weighty theme:

I [Achebe] would be ... satisfied if my novels (especially the ones set in the past) [such as *Things Fall Apart*] did no more than *teach* my readers that their past -- with all its imperfections -- was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them. (1975: 45; emphasis mine)¹³

One important readership in *Things Fall Apart* which the advocates of the inside/ outside readerships rarely examine, but Achebe himself insists upon, especially with respect to the notion of *teaching*, is the youth. According to Achebe (1975), these readers are “either in school

or college ... [and] many of them look at me [Achebe] as a kind of [their] *teacher*" (42; emphasis mine). This readership must, indeed, be the African youth, and to it could belong the young letter-writer from northern Nigeria (probably a Hausa) who told Achebe (1975) that *Things Fall Apart* "serve[s] as advice to the *young*" (42-3; emphasis mine).

It is significant to emphasise that the African youth are a critical aspect in Achebe's literary programme, for Achebe puts a high premium on them: "[w]e [African regionalists] have to work with some hope that there is *a new generation, a group of survivors* who have learned something from the disaster" (emphasis mine).¹⁴ However, to this category of the African youth, there is also a non-African youth readership such as the two American schoolchildren who wrote to Achebe (1988) what he calls "touching letters" about *Things Fall Apart*, with one of them claiming "happ[iness] to learn about the customs and superstitions of an African tribe" (1). This comment could only come from the "Other"/ American readership for the following reasons Achebe (1988) gives:

In America ... you are dealing with students who are ... [in] a tradition where Africa is not really like anywhere else they know: Africa in literature, Africa in newspapers, Africa in the sermons preached in churches is really the Other Place. It is the Africa of *Heart of Darkness*: there are no real people ..., only *forces* operating; and people don't speak any language you can understand, they just grunt, too busy jumping up and down in a frenzy. (56; emphasis in text)

Any meaningful criticism of Achebe's regional fiction must, then, emphasise the non-African youth readership. Achebe (1991) himself implicitly make this point when he reiterates the "Otherness"/ particularity of cultural identities; he does this when he claims that a point which is "fundamental and essential to the appreciation of African issues by Americans" is that "Africans are people in the same way that Americans, Europeans, Asians and others are People" (21). It is, therefore, the responsibility of the African regionalist, Achebe (1988) emphasises, "to familiarize" this non-African readership "with Africa, make them think that this is a place of *people*" (56; emphasis in text).

Finally, it must be noted that there is another readership in *Things Fall Apart* the theorists of the inside/ outside readerships rarely explain -- the casual readership. Significantly, this readership also includes Africans and Westerners. For instance, casual readerships in *Things Fall Apart* could include non-Ibo Nigerians and other Africans because of the exigencies of publishing, translations and bookselling as was explained in Chapter I of this study. These, in fact, are the *actual* readers in Achebe's novel, who may include Westerners such as the old white

man at the University of Massachusetts who, according to Achebe (1988: ix-x), expressed ignorance about both African history and literature and, then, thought it wise “ ‘to find out’ ” (1) about Africa probably through the reading of African regional novels such as *Things Fall Apart*. As can be seen, multiple readerships in the African regional novel cannot be explained through a rule-of-thumb breakdown of only the inside/ outside readers as the theorists of the African/ Western dichotomy claim.

It was explained in Chapter I of this study that it is the colonial experience that gave the modern African novel its impetus. Indeed, it will be seen that the first fruits of this impetus were manifested in the advent of the African regional novel. David Carroll (1980) explains the significance of narrative technique in the African regional novel when he points out that, after reading colonialist novels such as *Heart of Darkness* in which one finds “Africa ... with its impenetrable forests, throbbing drums ... a landscape without figures, an Africa without Africans” (2), one is relieved to find in African regional novels “the figures missing from the earlier landscape and following a way of life which does not need any questioning” (12).

According to him:

The appearance in the 1950s of novels written by Africans and set in Africa was not, of course, an isolated phenomenon. The emancipation of Africa from its literary stereotype is inseparable from the much larger movement towards African independence which extends beyond politics to all aspects of culture and society. One of its most exciting aspects has been the rediscovery of Africa’s past, the breakthrough in historical studies which is gradually creating order out of the confused remnants of the great African empires. (12)

One could stretch Carroll’s time frame from his 1950s to include the 1960s: in this way, one may argue that *Wand of Noble Wood* should be included here, for it is also equally engaged in “[the] most exciting” prospect of “the rediscovery of Africa’s past” (12). For example, Oladele Taiwo (1967) makes the same point when he notes that Nzekwu’s novel is “about Nigerian [Ibo] tribal society and ... [the author] seeks to glorify this environment” (51). He further attempts to make his point forceful by focussing on the novel’s narrative technique when he says that *Wand of Noble Wood* is “packed with ‘anthropological’ details such as may be required and enjoyed by a foreigner who is not familiar with the Nigerian background of his stories” (61). However, a careful consideration of Taiwo’s comments on *Wand of Noble Wood* shows that Taiwo’s observations are not incisive. First, Taiwo neither explains *why* a “foreign” reader “may ... require” the “ ‘anthropological’ details” in Nzekwu’s text, nor indicates *why* such material should be *enjoyable* to the same readership. Secondly, he neither explains the extent/ *quality* of

this enjoyment, nor suggests *how* he knows that such details are usually enjoyable to a “foreign” readership. In fact, a careful reading of *Wand of Noble Wood* shows, as this chapter does, that the “ ‘anthropological’ details” in Nzekwu’s novel are likely to be tedious (not enjoyable) to both national and international readerships. Indeed readers are likely to find that the manner in which the novel provides such information often impedes the story line. Taiwo cannot provide such judicious criticism precisely because his premises lack the requisite theoretical anchorage.

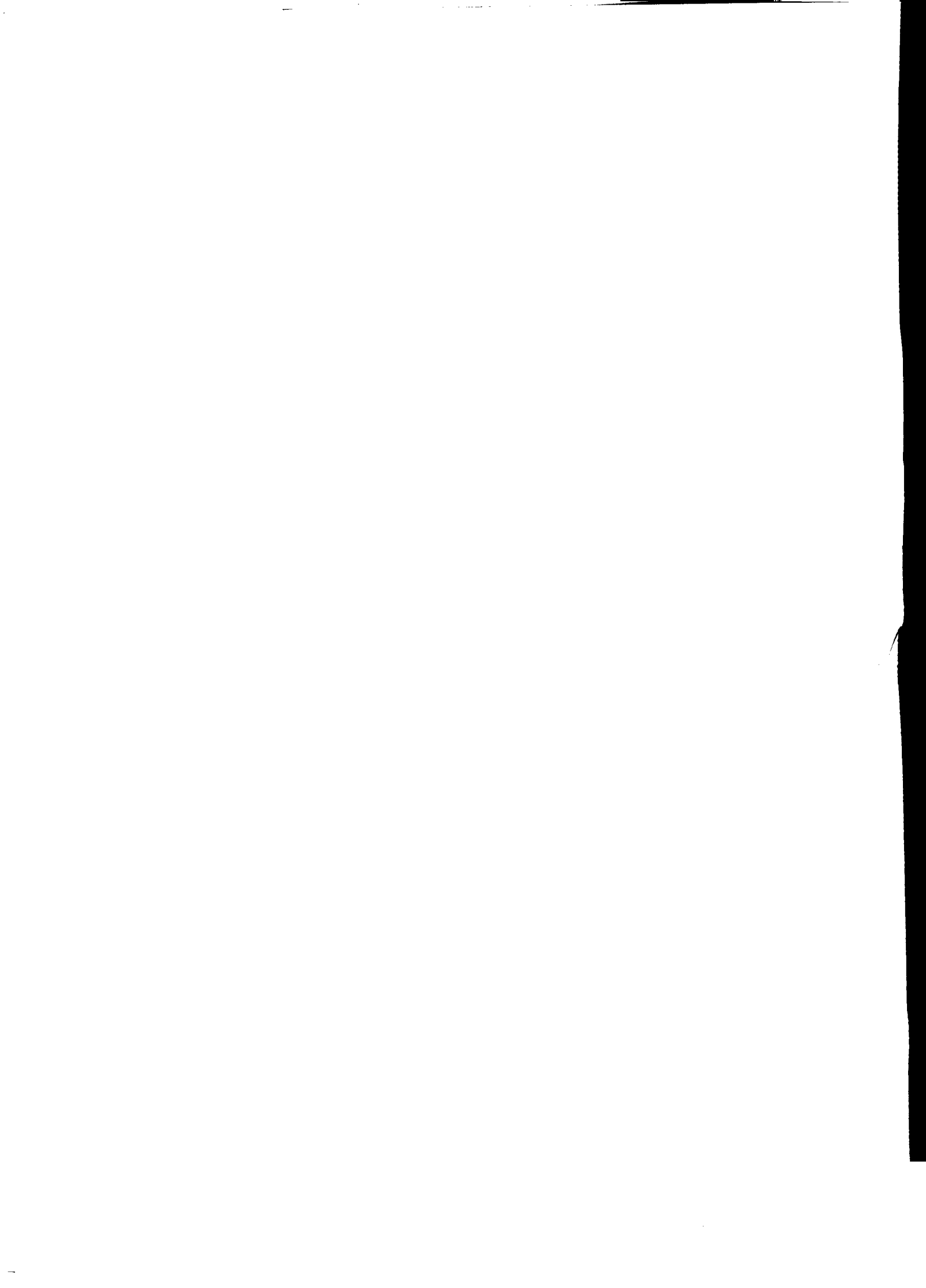
If there is an African novel in which the study of semiotics is useful, it is in the African regional novel because, as Gikandi (1991a) says, this kind of novel “allows the author to produce a semiotic machine that displaces hegemonic ideologies and creates alternative systems of meaning” (22). As it is, the African regionalist’s desire for these alternative systems of signification is usually seen in terms of the historical dimension of the African regional novel, as Nkosi points out:

‘To make the past present, to bring the distant near.’ It seems a modest enough task: it is what we have come to expect of any novelist with *a pronounced sense of history*: ‘to invest’, as Macaulay would put it, ‘with the reality of human flesh and blood beings whom we are too much inclined to consider as personified qualities in an allegory’. In defining *the duties of the historical novelist which were once those of a historian*, the English essayist uses a language which would surely find immediate emotional responses from those of our [African] writers haunted by the African past and who are trying to develop strategies for ‘bringing the distant near’. (30; emphasis mine)

There is nothing wrong, Michael Green (1997) says, with the African regional novel to discuss historical subjects:

The fact is that historical fiction makes different demands in relation to history writing in different contexts. What distinguishes these categories, after all, is institutionalised practice, not formal essences; which is not to say the distinction does not exist, only that it can at times be reassessed. (15)

A distinction, however, *does* exist between “fiction” and “history” and should be re-assessed in terms of Kelwyn Sole’s (1978a) argument that “[l]iterature ... speak[s] a different language to that of history” (27). This difference in the two languages lies in the fact that the language of history, for example, implicates the dialectical links between the past and the present and, possibly, even problematises the future; it encodes, according to Williams (1983b), “organized knowledge of the past” that is also “connected not only to the present but also to the future” (146-7). It is, therefore, critical for the African regionalist to bear in mind this distinction otherwise African fiction will experience what J. M. Coetzee (1988) describes as the



2. *Things Fall Apart*: Point of View as Authority

Achebe has said that he has the tendency to write historical fiction when he claims that he “is presenting *a total world and a total life* as it is lived in that world” (emphasis mine). According to him:

I [Achebe] am writing about my people *in the past and in the present*, and I have to create for them the world in which they move and have their being. (Emphasis mine)¹⁵

“[I]n the past and in the present” implicates a process, a connectedness and continuity of events that ultimately suggest a wide canvas indeed. Achebe is referring to a critical -- and necessary -- dimension of the genre of the *historical* novel that Georg Lukacs (1981) explains when he states that in this genre, “the ultimate principles ... flow from ... [one] aim: the portrayal of *a total context of social life*, be it present or past, in narrative form” (290; emphasis mine).¹⁶ Achebe’s achievement in this regard in *Things Fall Apart* begins to be realized in the way this first novel skilfully deploys its point of view in its use of the extradiegetic narrator. This narrator suits Achebe’s notion of *teaching* because he is, as Gerard Genette (1972) would say, “above”, or “superior” to the story he tells (255-6).

Take the *function* of the extradiegetic narrator in *Things Fall Apart* in the following passage:

Okonkwo was *well known* throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. *As a young man of eighteen he had brought honour to his village* by throwing Amalinze the Cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten, from Umuofia to Mbaino. He was called the Cat because his back would never touch the earth. It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight which the old man agreed was *one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights*.

The drums beat and the flutes sang and the spectators held their breath. Amalinze was a wily craftsman, but Okonkwo was slippery as a fish in water. Every nerve and every muscle stood out on their backs and their thighs, and one almost heard them stretching to breaking point. In the end Okonkwo threw the Cat.

That was many years ago He [Okonkwo] breathed heavily, and it was said that when he slept, his wives and children in their outer houses could hear him breathe. (Emphasis mine)¹⁷

Commentators frequently use this passage as the starting point for their discussions of the themes in Achebe’s novel. They, however, do not discuss fully how the passage suggests the point of view in *Things Fall Apart*. The issue here is that it is, in fact, in this passage that the perspective of the novel actually begins to emerge, and that the point of view of this narrator is usually

couched in a language that resembles that of the elderly characters in *Things Fall Apart*. For instance, if one has to focus on the linguistic qualities of the passage, one is likely to notice what Palmer detects in the language of the entire novel which, according to him, is “grandeur and rhythmic beauty” (75); it is the language of “Africans,” he says, “speaking and living in a genuinely ... African rural situation” (76).¹⁸

Gikandi (1991a) also notes how the narrative voice of the passage from *Things Fall Apart* quoted earlier is critical. According to him, the narrator in that passage “adopts an algebraic strategy”; that is, narrative technique in this passage, according to him, is representative of that of the whole novel. He rightly explains that in that passage the “event is a dynamic moment, but nothing about it is exotic or out of place” (27). With this device (“algebraic strategy”), Gikandi adds that Achebe, therefore, makes “a strategic decision ... to move his novel away from the phantasmal images of Africa in colonialist fiction and rhetoric” (27). What Gikandi glosses over, however, is the quality of the narrator that makes him *easily win* the confidence of the reader. In fact it is this facility the narrator has which also suggests the readership in Achebe’s novel.

For instance, this narrator seems to have a fine memory: he can remember and recount incidents that happened “many years ago.” He has the confidence to believe that he knows what the villagers in all “the nine villages and even beyond” know: “Okonkwo was well known throughout” that stretch of land, he says. The narrator also knows each and every detail of all the nine villages. He is so familiar with the nine villages that he is aware of the rumours about Okonkwo’s behaviour: “*it was said* that when he [Okonkwo] slept, his wives and children in their out-houses could hear him breathe” (emphasis mine). More significantly, the narrator seems to be older than Okonkwo, but of the same age with Amalinze. For these reasons, Innes argues that the narrative voice in *Things Fall Apart* is itself a sort of amalgam of traditional Ibo voices, in contrast to modern Western expectations that the narrator of a story will be a distinct individual (32). In this way, one could say that this narrator has over-whelming authority over the narrative. Significantly, it is then not surprising that this narrator easily creates the impression that he has a vision that covers both the past and present. Even when he seems to project Okonkwo’s future -- “Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things” (*TFA* 6) -- it is easy for the reader to agree with the narrator and, then, look forward to the dramatization in the narrative of the “great things” in Okonkwo’s life for which he “was clearly cut out.” Carroll is, therefore, right to describe this narrator, as follows:

The novel [*Things Fall Apart*] is narrated in the third person, but there is no

suggestion of an omniscient observer scrutinizing and analysing the customs and habits of this Ibo community. The voice is that of a wise and sympathetic elder of the tribe who has witnessed time and time again the cycle of the seasons and the accompanying rituals in the villages. This measured tone of voice implants in the reader's mind the sense of order, perspective and harmony whose later destruction is most poignant. (31)

This is the narrative strategy -- without "a style heavy with adjectives and paradox" -- with which Achebe wants to create a narrative space both for himself and for his readership, and Gikandi describes as "a celebration of the Ibo ... [point of view]" (33). Significantly, too, this Ibo point of view has a longstanding history indeed. Consider the episode in Chapter Four of *Things Fall Apart* where there is a "kindred meeting." At this meeting Okonkwo demonstrates his "brusqueness" in dealing with "less successful men." In the course of the deliberations, Okonkwo disrupts Osugo who had "no titles" with the remark that "[t]his meeting is for men." Okonkwo reacts "[w]ithout looking at ... [Osugo]" and an old man then rebukes Okonkwo, arguing that "[l]ooking at the king's mouth ... one would think he never sucked at his mother's breast." After this reprimand the narrator says that:

Everybody ... took sides with Osugo when Okonkwo called him a woman. The oldest man present said sternly that those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble
But it was really not true that Okonkwo's palm-kernels had been cracked for him by a benevolent spirit. He had cracked them himself. Anyone who knew his grim struggle against poverty and misfortune could not say he had been lucky. If a man deserved his success, that man was Okonkwo. At an early age he had achieved fame as the greatest wrestler in all the land. That was not luck. At the most one could say that his *chi* or personal god was good. But the Ibo people have a proverb that when a man says yes, his *chi* says yes also. And not only his *chi* but his clan too, because it judged a man by the work of his hands. (19; emphasis mine)

This passage has two perspectives on Okonkwo: first, there is the "the old man[']s" who rebukes Okonkwo for disregarding other men who had been less fortunate. Secondly, there is the point of view which contradicts the old man's viewpoint, stating that Okonkwo had not been lucky; this is the perspective of the extradiegetic narrator, from which the intended readership is required to construct the narrative in *Things Fall Apart*. This is, in fact, the point of view that has the most authority in the novel. According to this point of view, Okonkwo had struggled to acquire his wealth, and, as such, he certainly deserved his status.

It is significant to emphasize that in *Things Fall Apart* the extradiegetic narrator has the most authority in Achebe's novel. This is true because he seems to have followed the rising graph of

Okonkwo's life "from an early age"; he is also familiar with both the history and lore of Umuofia and that of all the other villages wherever the Ibo people may be: "the Ibo people," says the extradiegetic narrator, "have a proverb that when a man says yes, his *chi* says yes also." Clearly, this point of view is the one through which the story of *Things Fall Apart* is communicated to the novel's readership, thereby "contesting", as Gikandi puts it, "the representation of the African in the novels of Conrad and Cary who have the propensity to represent the continent as either a blank space or a monstrous presence" (27). The need to do this in the African regional novel, Gikandi argues, arises from the fact that colonialist fiction "represses the African character, subjectivity, history and representation" (27). For this reason, the aims and objectives of African regional fiction such as *Things Fall Apart* reside in bringing back these repressed aspects of Africa to the fore so that they ultimately constitute "the key ingredients in the reconstruction of African cultures" (27).

Commentators have complained about the references to *chi* in *Things Fall Apart* as inundating the narration with anthropological details. To be sure, Achebe explains some concepts of traditional Ibo culture in *Things Fall Apart*; he explains, for instance, the *osu* motif, some aspects of *chi*, and the marriage system. It is, nevertheless, important to mention that these "explanations" are largely in keeping with the overall technique and the structure of the novel itself, and provide necessary information for either the advancement of the plot or the delineation of character. In fact one of the vital narrative aspects of *Things Fall Apart* is Achebe's artistic ingenuity in explaining these traditional motifs within a representational mode and, then, incorporating them into a successful whole. The point to note is that the extradiegetic narrator in *Things Fall Apart* does not interrupt the narration to explain in an elaborate fashion the socio-cultural or anthropological significance of *chi*; the flow and rhythm of the narration is neither dislocated nor impaired. The narrator brings in the notion of *chi* only as it directly relates to the presentation of Okonkwo and the control he manifests over his actions. The inclusion of the proverb -- "when a man says yes, his *chi* says yes also" in the passage quoted earlier from *Things Fall Apart* -- adds qualification and emphasis to the idea already introduced and clarifies for the reader the relationship of Okonkwo to things and the people outside himself, including his own personal guardian spirit. The inclusion of *chi* is subsumed under and aids the elaboration of Okonkwo's character. In other words, the narrator introduces the notion of *chi* in order to make a specific point about and advance the reader's understanding of Okonkwo.

It has already been noted that *Things Fall Apart* contests colonialist fiction and, as such, the primary focus of the extradiegetic narrator in Achebe's novel is *teaching*. One useful illustration of this intention is the following passage in *Things Fall Apart*:

The Feast of the New Yam was approaching and Umuofia was in a festival mood. It was an occasion for giving thanks to Ani, the earth goddess and the source of all festivity

The Feast ... was held *every year* before the harvest begun New yams could not be eaten until some had first been offered to ... [the ancestral spirits of the clan]. Men and women, young and old, *looked forward to* the ... festival because it began the season of plenty -- the new year. On the last night before the festival, yams of the previous year were all disposed of by those who still had them. The new year must begin with tasty, fresh yams and not the shrivelled and fibrous crop of the previous year. All cooking-pots, calabashes and wooden bowls were thoroughly washed, especially the wooden mortar in which yam was pounded. Yam *foo-foo* and vegetable soup was the chief food in the celebration. So much of it was cooked *The story was always told of a wealthy man who sat before his guests a mound of foo-foo so high that those who sat on one side could not see what was happening on the other*

The New Yam Festival was thus an occasion for joy throughout Umuofia. And every man whose arm was strong, as the Ibo say, was expected to invite large numbers of guests from far and wide. (26; emphasis mine)

This passage serves as a good illustration of what A. R. JanMohamed (1983) describes as Achebe's attempt in *Things Fall Apart* "to preserve through a judicious use of language, imagery, and plot, a permanent image of the concrete totality of a vanishing oral culture" (273). The theme in the above passage (as that in the others from Achebe's novel already discussed in this chapter) is the contestation of colonialist historiography, which claims that Africans have neither a history nor philosophy. It is, therefore, significant for the intended reader in Achebe's novel to understand that to contest this lopsided historiography, Achebe takes the Feast of the Yam among the Ibo as one of what Jonathan Culler (1975) would describe as a "sign" that does not invest Ibo culture only with "meaning" but also one that makes Ibo culture "a world *charged with meaning*" (185; emphasis mine). It is, in fact, one "sign," among many in *Things Fall Apart*, as has already been suggested. Yet, the style of the above passage is also striking: first, note the use of the noun phrase "every year" which designates the perennial or cyclic recurrence of this event. This feast has taken place before, it is taking place "this year" (or now -- at the time of the narration by the extradiegetic narrator), and will certainly take place in subsequent years. As such, the community will always "look forward to the festival." Secondly, this feast has never been an ordinary occasion; it is so special that both extra-ordinary and memorable incidents can

also happen during this festival -- a "story was always told of a wealthy man who sat before his guests a mound of *foo-foo* so high that those who sat on one side could not see what was happening on the other" -- which accentuate the vitality of this society. Finally, this is an occasion that illustrates the fact that the Ibo people of Umuofia have a clear philosophy that explains the relationship between the community and a supreme deity. The feast, the extradiegetic narrator emphasises, "was an occasion for giving thanks to Ani the earth goddess and the source of all fertility."

Notice, too, the extradiegetic narrator's attitude towards the Feast of the New Yam: first, he begins by effacing his own individuality from the narration and, consequently, his subjectivity also. In this way, the intentions of the narrative become clear: to create a "living" community, as it is, of "[m]en and women, young and old" who cherished their life-style and revered their traditions. What initially seemed a long and clumsy digression in the story may now be seen to have a necessary function in establishing the kind of "reality" of the story being told, the kind of accent the intended reader is required to accord the story. For this reason, Carroll points out the significance of a passage such as this in *Things Fall Apart* with respect to both narrative technique and intended readerships. According to him, "[t]he most impressive achievement of *Things Fall Apart* ... is the *vivid picture* it provides of Ibo society at the end of the nineteenth century" (30; emphasis mine). Yet, it must be emphasised that it is Achebe who wittingly manipulates the *angle of vision* which produces this *particular* "vivid picture" of Africa. He deliberately does so in order to produce a picture that contradicts the one that is commonplace in colonialist fiction and historiography. Herein, then, lies the essence of the literary programme of African regional fiction such as *Things Fall Apart*.

Carroll's notion of a "vivid picture" of the Ibo community in *Things Fall Apart* needs further comment; it needs further attention because it suggests a *liveliness* in the world of *Things Fall Apart* that has led some critics to argue that such a style is advantageous particularly to the international readership. Nkosi, too, points out that Achebe's narrative technique in *Things Fall Apart* is persuasive particularly to the readership which, according to him, "has never set foot in West Africa" (30). Although Nkosi neither demonstrates *why* such a style should be more appealing *only* to the international readership, nor show *how* he knows the "fact," the force of the point of view and intentions of the following scene that shows the arrival of the ancestral spirit or *egwugwu* in Achebe's novel would indeed seem to support Nkosi's argument. Notice in the

passage how the extradiegetic narrator paints the reaction of the people, especially that of the women and children:

And then the *egwugwu* appeared. The women and children *set up a great shout and took to their heels. It was instinctive.* A woman fled as soon as an *egwugwu* came in sight. And when, as on that day, nine of the greatest masked spirits in the clan came out together it was *a terrifying spectacle.* Even Mgbago took to her heels and had to be restrained by her brothers.

Each of the nine *egwugwu* represented a village of the clan. Their leader was called Evil Forest. *Smoke poured out of his head.* The nine villages of Umuofia had grown out of the nine sons of the first father of the clan. Evil Forest represented the village of Umueru, or the children of Eru, who was the eldest of the nine sons.

“Umuofia kwenu!” shouted the leading *egwugwu*, *pushing the air with his raffia arms.* The elders of the clan replied,

“Yaa!”

“Umuofia kwenu!”

“Yaa!”

Evil Forest then *thrust the pointed end of his rattling staff into the earth.* And it began to shake and rattle, like something agitating with a metallic life. He took the first of the empty stools and the eight other *egwugwu* began to *sit in order of seniority after him.* (63; emphasis mine)

Observe the pictorial impression most of the verbal denotations in the passage creates: first, there is the dramatic appearance of the *egwugwu*, which is introduced by “[a]nd then.” After that, there is the immediate response of *fear* in the women and children. Then the focus shifts onto Evil Forest to emphasise the *supernatural* qualities of the *egwugwu*. For instance, “[s]moke poured out of ... [Evil Forest’s] head.” After that there are the formal greetings which, because this is a formal occasion, Evil Forest begins. Yet, again, Evil Forest shows his special/ otherworldly importance as he “pushe[s] the air with his raffia arms.” And, yet, again, since this is an important ritual, custom must be adhered to. For this reason, only the elders reply to Evil Forest’s greeting, who ends the greetings in character -- “[he] thrust the pointed end of his rattling staff into the earth.” The formality does not end here: when the *egwugwu* sit, it is Evil Forest who takes “the first of the empty stools and the eight other *egwugwu* began to sit in order of seniority after him.” This, then, is indeed “a terrifying spectacle,” especially to the women and children. That is why, as the extradiegetic narrator explains, “Mgbago had to be restrained by her brothers.” Notice also that the reaction of the women and children to the arrival of the *egwugwu* seems already to be in their psyche. Thus their response to the *egwugwu* is at once natural and spontaneous; it is an “instinctive” one. Clearly, this scene, like the one quoted earlier, provides what Carroll describes as a “measured tone of voice [which] implants in the reader’s mind a

sense of order, perspective and harmony” in this society “whose later destruction is most poignant.” For this reason, Carroll adds that it is more meaningful to understand and approach the story of *Things Fall Apart* “from the inside, from the point of view of the major characters” (31).

It is significant to note that in the above passage there is also the important aspect of time, the illusion that the events are happening *now*. Using what commentators describe as the “historical present” (Chatman 1978: 62-84, Genette 1980: 77-182), the achievement of the extradiagetic narrator is his creation of *immediacy*. Consider the verb phrases in the preterite form in the following: “the *egwugwu* *appeared*,” “women and children *sent up*,” “Mgbago *took to* her heels,” “[s]moke *poured out*,” “Evil Forest then *thrust* the pointed end of his *rattling* staff.” These verbs certainly have a force, which assists the intended reader to view the event in close proximity in both time and space to him.¹⁹

From the foregoing, it is arguable that the achievement of Achebe’s novel is the way in which a range of appropriate narrative strategies are deployed in the novel to assist the reader to accept the extradiagetic narrator’s point of view of the Ibo community; to assist the reader *to see* that the Ibo people have customs and traditions that have a valid history. In this way, *Things Fall Apart* largely succeeds in the way it creates a *living* Ibo society of a distant past.

The writing of regional novels such as *Things Fall Apart* was intended, argues Gikandi, to offer “narrative[s] of liberation which derive ... [their] power from the tradition ... [they] seek ... to reject, revise, or appropriate and set in a different direction” (25). For this reason, “the tradition which ... [a regional text such as *Things Fall Apart*] seeks to reject, revise, or appropriate” belongs to what Achebe (1975) describes as the “*appalling* novels about Africa including ... *Mister Johnson*” (70; emphasis mine). To put it in another way, Achebe suggests that the best way to subvert the ideology of colonialist texts was for the African writer himself to write back: “the story ... we had to tell *could not be told for us* by anyone else no matter how gifted or well-intentioned” (70; emphasis mine).²⁰

In *Things Fall Apart* the cultural history of the Ibo that Achebe wishes to “[re]-create” for his intended readership is best illustrated in scenes such as the Feast of the New Yam, the arrival of the *egwugwu* and the one in which Okonkwo accidentally kills Ezeudu’s son. It is interesting to note that while the death of Ezeudu’s son is so critical both to the development of the plot and themes in Achebe’s novel, commentators have failed to understand its implications in the story-

line in *Things Fall Apart*. This event, which, as this chapter shows, represents the Ibo code of crime and punishment, finely concludes Part One of Achebe's novel, as follows:

The drums and the dancing began again and reached fever-heat. Darkness was around the corner, and the burial was near. Guns fired the salute and the canon rent the sky. And then from the centre of the delirious fury came a cry of agony and shouts of horror. It was as if a spell had been cast. All was silent. In the centre of the crowd a boy lay in a pool of blood. It was the dead man's sixteen-year-old son, who with his brothers and half-brothers had been dancing the traditional farewell to their father. *Okonkwo's gun had exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the boy's heart*. The confusion that followed was without parallel in the traditions of Umuofia. Violent deaths were frequent, but nothing like this had ever happened. The only course open to Okonkwo was to flee the clan. It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land. The crime was of two kinds, male and female. Okonkwo had committed the female, because it had been inadvertent. He could return to the clan after seven years. (86-7; emphasis mine)

Judith Gleason (1965) is one commentator who misunderstands this passage when she attempts to explain both the cause and effect of Okonkwo's crime, as follows:

The final offence is really the beginning of the retribution. Okonkwo, seemingly no longer in control of his own actions, *fires wildly* in the night at the funeral rites of Ezeudu, the very elder who had warned him not to lay a hand on Ikemefuna. While it is the custom to fire at funerals, Okonkwo *inadvertently kills* the honoured dead man's sixteen-year-old son, and for this he is banished from his clan for seven years. (90; emphasis mine)

Gleason correctly identifies the nature of the crime, which is Okonkwo's "inadvertent[...] kill[ing]" of Ezeudu's son; she fails, nevertheless, to notice the cause of the crime. She fails, too, to identify the function of this episode in the plot in *Things Fall Apart*.

It is significant to explain right away that Gleason makes these comments on a critical episode in the novel because (like the other scenes already referred to in this chapter) this episode is intended to show *how* this particular society conducts its affairs -- both public and private. In the case of this particular incident, the novel's intention is to show the core of the Ibo *justice system* of Umuofia. The episode demonstrates, for instance, a longstanding custom and a description of particular crimes and their commensurate forms of punishment. However, Gleason misinterprets both the immediate intentions of the narrative, and the significance of the episode when he claims that Okonkwo fires "wildly" during the funeral ceremony. Okonkwo's intentions to attend the funeral are clear, for he wants to abide by his traditions. The novel, nevertheless, does not say whether or not Okonkwo fired his gun.

What happens to Okonkwo's gun, it must be emphasised, is an *accident* because "Okonkwo's gun had *exploded* and a piece of iron had pierced the boy's heart" (emphasis mine). This is to say that Okonkwo's gun had literally blown apart into pieces. The extradiagetic narrator, as already noted, does not say that Okonkwo himself participated in the "firing," although other people fired and Okonkwo had a gun. Indeed, it is quite possible for a powder-loaded gun to explode without being fired.²¹ The point, then, this episode attempts to make is to direct the reader to the irony of fate, of situation, and not to any fatal flaw of character. Gleason's misinterpretation of the episode would seem, therefore, to derive from her tendency to paraphrase -phrase texts and give attention only to those elements which she considers truly reflective of the customs of village society. In paraphrasing, she summarizes only the largest and most conspicuous elements. This lack of attention to detail in an effort to establish what she sees as a general truth about the society results in her failing to perceive that generality may not always account for the particular information given. In fact, because Gleason emphasises what she views as the "custom of firing guns," she, therefore, assumes that Okonkwo, like the others, is following the custom. And, yet, as the narrative develops, it will be seen that Okonkwo does not always follow the customs of Umuofia, often with tragic consequences. Furthermore, Gleason assumes that what is true of the group as a whole is likewise true of Okonkwo. What Gleason has done here is merely to apply wrongly the description of the "frenzy" and the "delirious fury" to Okonkwo in particular. To assume that Okonkwo was firing "wildly" and was "no longer in control of his own actions" is to miss the significance and function of the entire episode, which is to illustrate the rigidity of the traditional code of the Ibo people as presented in the novel. This rigidity does not allow for questions of mitigating circumstances, nor any degrees of right and wrong, and the relationship of cause to effect. Even though the code includes penalties for "masculine" and "feminine" crimes and Okonkwo's is the lesser, the judgement of exile is thus too harsh, as Obierika's query implies: "why should a man suffer so grievously for *an offence he had committed inadvertently?*" (29; emphasis mine)

3. *Wand of Noble Wood*: Problems of Narrative Information

At the beginning of *Wand of Noble Wood* the narrator's point of view is given in the first-person, as follows:

I [Peter Obiese] had come to Green Grove for two reasons. *One was to pay homage to the Obi of Ado, the natural ruler of my people* and a divine king, in whose honour a dance had been organized. The other was that *I was seeking an interview with him for a feature article I was doing on him for my paper, the Nigeria Life.* (Emphasis mine)²²

This passage introduces two key aspects of point of view in *Wand of Noble Wood*. First, there is Peter's attitude towards his own Ibo culture: he seems to be a traditionalist, a conservative who is keen to keep his people's customs and traditions -- Peter comes to Green Grove "to pay homage to the ... ruler of ... [his] people." Whatever Peter then says in the story must be influenced by his adherence to, and vision of, the culture of the Ibo people as given in Nzekwu's novel. Secondly, Peter is a journalist: he works for the *Nigeria Life*, "a quarterly magazine with a *bias* for [African] traditional cultural life" (29; emphasis mine). In fact Peter also comes to Green Grove for "an interview" with the Obi of Ani. What then is also significant to note with Peter's profession in relation to *Wand of Noble Wood* are two critical things: first, the style of journalism is likely to determine/ influence the choice of the content and narrative technique in Peter's story/ writing. Secondly, and in tandem, since the style and content of journalism are often *deliberately* tailored towards a *particular* audience, and for *specific* effects, such journalistic demands are also likely to determine/ influence the choice of the audience in Peter's story/ writing and the *kind/ quality* of effects of such content and narrative technique on the intended audience of Peter's story/ writing.

In order to explain the implications of journalism in *Wand of Noble Wood*, it is significant to note what David Crystal and Derek Davy (1969) describe as the "central function" of newspaper reporting. This function of journalism, they say, is primarily "to *inform* ... [readers] whose constitution ... [the newspaper is] fairly clear about" (173-4; emphasis in text). Roger Fowler (1991) aptly describes this process as being one in which "the journalist ... collects facts, reports them objectively ... in a language which is designed to be unambiguous, undistorting and *agreeable to readers*" (1; emphasis mine). These, then, are the critical criteria which this study employs to discuss the achievement of Nzekwu's novel with respect to narrative technique and intended readership.

However, it must be stressed that a discourse that is often “agreeable to [its] readers” must needs be, say more about the narrator/ writer, the content of the discourse and the readership in that discourse. For this reason, it becomes almost impossible for a journalist to maintain the aspect of “objectivity” that Fowler insists on.²³ It is, in fact, on account of the extent to which Peter fails to maintain an objective point of view that narrative technique in *Wand of Noble Wood* has grave problems, as this chapter shows.

It has already been noted that Peter presents himself as a traditionalist; that he upholds and cherishes his Ibo customs and traditions. Furthermore, it has also been noted that Peter’s magazine, the *Nigeria Life*, has a *bias* for African traditions and customs. Related to Peter’s attitude towards his Ibo customs and traditions, and the influence of his profession as a journalist on the content and narrative technique in *Wand of Noble Wood*, is the likely subject-matter of the magazines the other main characters in *Wand of Noble Wood* work for. According to the narrator, “Reginald Menu ... [is] a reporter on *The African Daily Guide*” (26), while Nora Zake ... [is] a West Indian ... [and] the *African Standard*’s woman editor” (31). Significantly, then, while the ideology of Peter’s magazine is explained, the ideologies of the magazines Reginald and Nora work for are not. The reason for this “silence” is precisely because the interest of *Wand of Noble Wood* is at once Peter’s conservative attitude to Ibo culture, and the ideology of the magazine he works for, which reinforces it. This is to say that because Peter is the narrator/ participant in Nzekwu’s novel, the ideology of Peter’s paper is the same as that of *Wand of Noble Wood*. This is to argue that to read the *Nigeria Life* is to read *Wand of Noble Wood*, and vice versa.

The “silence” which the novel has about the ideologies of the papers Reg and Nora work for, it must be emphasised, is important to narrative technique in *Wand of Noble Wood*. Note, for instance, that although Nora is an expatriate in Nigeria, the source of her training in African affairs, a quality which she should certainly have to qualify as editor of the *African Standard*, is not explained. Indeed because Nora’s training in African affairs is not explained, her presence in the novel should, therefore, be interrogated. Yet Nora’s presence in Nzekwu’s novel, as this chapter shows, is, in fact, a deliberate narrative ploy worked out to channel Peter’s socio-anthropological information. On the thematic level it is also crucial to note that the profession of journalism Peter, Reg and Nora have already suggests the attitude of all these characters towards African culture, traditions and customs, for as journalists, all three characters belong to the social class that commentators such as Sole (1978a) describe as the “‘new’ petty-bourgeoisie” (3),

which is highly *urbanized*.²⁴ To be sure, Peter claims that his uncle, “Old Adobe ... had brought ... [him] up ‘properly’, in keeping with ... [their] traditional standards” (*WONW* 9). However, through the process of urbanization, it is also true that the tendencies of the class to which he belongs (the petty-bourgeoisie) would have marred his vision and attitude towards Ibo culture, traditions and customs. For as Sole points out, the petty-bourgeoisie have the tendency for “attraction to the idea of ‘social advancement’ ” (3). It is, therefore, at the level of the contradictions in Peter’s vision of life that *Wand of Noble Wood* begins to have problems with regard to the veracity of the narrator’s point of view.

It has already been noted in this study that the language of literature is different from that of other discourses of human experience. For example, it has been shown that the languages of both literature and history can never be similar. In this way a narrator in a work of fiction that has the tendency to straddle between history and literature risks producing a stumbling story-line. Take the following passage in *Wand of Noble Wood* in which Peter explains a royal visit among the Ibo people:

It was not the first time, contrary to popular traditional practice, that he [the Obi] had left his palace and gone out of town. In the previous year he had travelled to *our* Regional Headquarters to join in welcoming the Queen and the Duke, who were touring the country. It was, however, the first time, since his accession twenty-four years ago, that ... [the Obi] had travelled westwards across the River Naija [*sic*] which in 1857 had brought the first agents of modern civilization to *our* town. It was also the first time in the history of *my* people that he was sleeping outside his palace, away from the twenty square miles which made up his small but influential kingdom.

...
I [Peter] *thought of the impending interview with him, the questions I should ask and the best way of asking them.* I wondered what would be the most appropriate way to greet him Should it be the traditional method -- kneeling on all fours, touching the ground with my forehead and at the same time calling out ‘Igwe’? Should it be a low bow, beginning at waistline, accompanied by ‘Good evening, Your Highness’? Or should I merely doff my hat? The doffing of hat roused thoughts of the strictest traditions of *my* people, which were deep-rooted in my own mind despite my Catholic upbringing. These traditions had been crammed into me by my uncle, Adobe. (8-9; emphasis mine)

The narration in this passage is representative of that in many passages in Nzekwu’s novel; often there are no meaningful linkages between the events that are narrated. For example, while the focus of the second paragraph in the above passage seems to be Peter’s “impending interview” with the Obi and his concern about the quality/ phrasing of “the questions ... [he] should ask,” that of the first one is history. That while the interest of the second is the “present,” to borrow

Williams' (1983b: 146-7) term, that of the first is the distant past. Be that as it may, there is no reasonable explanation that links the much earlier royal visit to this part of Nigeria and Peter's current visit to the Obi. In fact, most critical to Peter's narration is the extent of the necessity of the "historical" details,²⁵ such as "the River Ni[ger] had brought the first agents of civilization to ... [their] town ... [in 1857]." Significantly, though, the historical detail suggest another type of the interpretative community -- the informed reader that may be interested in systematic information about both the past and the present of the Ibo people in Nzekwu's novel -- the information does not advance the plot in *Wand of Noble Wood*. The critical point here is that the historical details in *Wand of Noble Wood* are not, as Lukacs (1970) would say, "artistic[ally] necessary" to "the total process" (43) of the story that is written essentially in the realist mode. What this historical material does, in fact, is to suggest that *Wand of Noble Wood* belongs to the genre of the historical novel, which is often interested in the dialectical process of social change over a considerable period of time. Yet, as O. R. Dathorne (1974) explains, the interest of *Wand of Noble Wood* is primarily Ibo/ African "tribal marriage and ceremonies" (88). In fact, the outline of Nzekwu's novel is only a tragic love-story with local colour. It says little about the process of the colonial history of the Ibo people since the time they came into contact with what Peter describes as the "first agents of modern civilization." It is these missing links in the narration that make *Wand of Noble Wood* a wobbly novel indeed.

The meeting between Peter and Nora is also another case in point. The meeting is so predictable that the intended reader feels it is only contrived for thematic purposes. Note that before Peter introduces Reginald to Nora, there is a hint that when they eventually meet Nora, they will discuss Peter's status as a bachelor, for Reginald seems to be sensitive about how Nora will react to a discussion on Ibo marriage customs. For this reason, Reginald warns his friend that although both of them have always understood the reasons Peter gives for being single, when they meet Nora, he "can't see a West Indian having much truck with the sort of traditional reasons ... [Peter] give[s] ... for not marrying" (*WONW* 31). And, as expected, when they actually meet Nora, she wants to know more about a variety of Ibo customs, traditions and beliefs, issues which, it must be repeated, Reginald and Peter are conversant with. As they turn out, the conversations of these three characters become Nora's learning experience of Ibo/ African customs and traditions.

Perhaps the most glaring fault in Nzekwu's novel is the way it deploys dialogue. Commentators point out that dialogue has always been used in fiction to heighten aspects of a

work such as character and theme. Rimmon-Kenan says that “[c]omplete novels in various periods of literature were also written exclusively or almost exclusively in dialogue” (54). However, it is crucial to know to what extent dialogue may provide a scene, and how dialogue may not necessarily produce a scene. For, according to Rimmon-Kenan, “although dialogue is the purest form of scene, a detailed narration of an event should also be considered scenic” (54). What this means, Rimmon-Kenan continues, is that there is a basic difference between dialogue and narration, which is that “what characterizes a scene is the quantity of narrative information and the relative effacement of the narrator” (54). Yet, in *Wand of Noble Wood* there is a confusion between narrative information and dialogue such that the narrator finds it extremely difficult to efface himself.

Take the conversation in *Wand of Noble Wood* in which the main focus is the fact that Peter is not married because of financial commitments to his family even if, as Reg says, “twenty pounds ... is the bride-price at Ado, the cheapest ... among the Ibo, east of the Niger” (38):

“Isn’t bride-price awful?” Nora remarked. “It gives one the impression that you buy your wives.”

“Bride-price is a misnomer,” I [Peter] explained. “It is applied to the presents a suitor makes to a girl and her parents. It consisted at first of samples of products from his farm. These went to prove that he was strong and hard-working enough for the prospective father-in-law to trust him with the care and welfare of his daughter.”

“That’s only fair,” Nora commented.

“The quantity and quality of presents varied with each suitor, depending on the number of the relatives who helped him on his farm and who contributed towards the presents which he made to his parents-in-law. Things gradually got beyond the reach of the average citizen, as each suitor tried to give more presents than his predecessors. It necessitated the standardizing, by the Obi-in-Council, of the presents that should be made by a suitor.”²⁶

A meaningful dialogue requires, by definition, a two-way flow; it further requires that the interlocutors demonstrate a keen interest in the subject-matter. Yet, Nora already seems to be biased against Ibo customs and traditions: “bride-price,” she feels, is “awful.” Furthermore, the dialogue lacks balance; Nora repeatedly asks short and precise questions, while Peter’s answers are usually long, and predictably informative in their socio-cultural/ Ibo content. They are, in fact, what Peter himself aptly describes as “expla[nations] to ... the background ... [of] the ... bride-price” (38) to Nora, the non-Ibo/ African. Arguably, therefore, Peter’s Ibo friend, Reg, rightly reprimands him that such “explanation is uncalled for” (38). For this reason, Peter Young (1978) describes the socio-didactic function of dialogue in *Wand of Noble Wood*, as follows:

[T]he significance of this first novel lies more in the attempt at the creative integration of the theme, basically the urban-rural exposition of culture conflict, and the *informational motive*, than in the artistically *superficial attempt* to reach a more general ... readership. (34); emphasis mine)

In the context of this study, it is instructive to note that Young's notion of the "general" reader is not meaningful because it is vague. The notion is amorphous, for it blurs the various readerships that a regional novel often caters for. Yet, Young is right in his pointed attack on the "informational motive" in Nzekwu's novel, for this motive raises another problem in the above conversation: it is quite unlikely that Nora is genuinely interested to learn about Ibo/ African customs and traditions. Apart from feeling that the practice of the bride-price is appalling, she also adds that the customs is "unreasonable" (38). She is, in fact, happy about the socio-cultural change that is sweeping across Ibo land at the time: "[f]ortunately, this traditional set-up is breaking down," she says, "and will soon be completely gone" because, according to her, "*Africans are becoming more individualistic these days*" (37; emphasis mine).

It is significant to emphasize that Nora's appreciative observation about Africans (including Peter and Reg) "becoming more individualistic these days" is critical to the problems this chapter raises about Peter's vision of, and attitude towards, Ibo culture, traditions and customs as a narrator in Nzekwu's novel. It reiterates the point about the effects of urbanization on African characters such as Peter himself and Reg, which has already been made. Therefore, the impression the reader gets from the conversations involving Peter, Reg and Nora is that Nora, the foreigner, superficially wants "to know" probably for the sheer fact of the conversation while Peter and Reg, the Ibos, are keenly anxious to provide "explanations." The ultimate effect of the conversations, then, is that they are merely brought in the narrative only for sake of teaching Ibo culture, traditions and customs to the international readership.

If there is a passage in *Wand of Noble Wood* in which the tendency to focus on the international readership is very pronounced, it is the one where Reg makes recourse to scientific discourse, as follows:

"You mentioned *ofo*-staff a little while ago," Nora said. "Does it mean anything more than the symbol of priesthood?"

"Yes," I [Reg] said "Whoever takes charge of the *ofo*-staff is regarded as the abode of ancestral spirits."

"What does it look like?"

"It is a short piece of stick," Reg explained, "cut from the *ofo* plant (*Detarium Senegalese*) which, when consecrated, is a symbol of authority and a guarantee of truth. Freshly obtained, it is consecrated and becomes dynamized. There are

different kinds of *ofò* -- the family *ofò*, which is the one we are now discussing; the personal *ofò*; the *ofò* used by medicine men; the cult *ofò* and so on. The family *ofò* are of two types: that of the men and that of the women. Both are used in invoking a relative's ancestral spirits, in the administration of oaths, in effecting curses on people who have offended grievously and in warding off evil. The staff is regarded with awe and is believed to be more powerful than poison or black magic. In the case of the woman who takes charge of *ofò*, her duties include the convening of meetings of female descendants of the family, and she is chairman at such meetings Her decision on issues affecting women, unless set aside by her male counterpart, the *akpala*, is final." (42-5; emphasis mine)

The intended receiver in Reg's explanations of the *ofò*-staff cannot be Nora; it has to be the interpretative community of anthropologists. The botanical details in parenthesis (probably in Greek, Latin and French) add nothing to Nora's understanding of the socio-religious aspects of the *ofò*-staff; in fact, they only further cripple the narration of an already stumbling story. Still, Nora's question about the *ofò*-staff cannot be justified because it comes from a mind that is already biased towards the customs and traditions to which the *ofò*-staff belongs. It can only be explained in terms of being a launch pad for Reg's information to the international readership. Indeed Nora in general serves this purpose because from Chapter Seven of the novel to the end, Peter is with his people and, for no apparent reason at all, Nora disappears completely from the narrative. Furthermore, although Nora is the assumed target of Peter's and Reg's explanations is out of the novel from Chapter Seven onwards, Peter takes over the narrative and continues with the narrator/ participant's technique of *informing* even when no one asks. For this reason, one reviewer of *Wand of Noble Wood* says that "[s]ome of the conversation [among the main characters in the novel] is artificial, particularly when it is used to argue problems of polygamy, interracial marriage, and the like."²⁷

The beginning of Chapter Seven in *Wand of Noble Wood* is a case in point as it also provides a transition from dialogue to narration:

Two weeks after the dance at Green Grove my cousin Mbanefo and his wife Bessie drove to see me. After I [Peter] had welcomed them and enquired about their children, I presented them with a *kola-nut* in a saucer. Among us, *kola-nut* is a highly valued and indispensable product. Though it is one of the commonest vegetable products seen in Nigeria, it represents in our society a vital social and religious element. *Kola-nut* is a symbol of friendship, the proper offering at meetings and religious occasions.

Many hold that the presentation of *kola-nut* is one proof of the religious disposition of some African peoples *Kola-nut* is dragged into every aspect of our daily life by our religion which itself permeates every phase of our traditional heritage. (67)

Note that in this passage Peter's guests are all fellow Ibos. This is to point out that all Peter's guests are familiar with the cultural implications of the *kola-nut*. The explanation of the *kola-nut*, which immediately follows Peter's introduction of his visitors is, then, unnecessary. For this reason, the intended reader is left wondering as to whether who, in fact, is the target of this explanation. From the critical procedures of this chapter, it is, therefore, demonstrable that Nzekwu has not grasped the appropriate narrative technique, with which to construct the various axes of readerships in African regional fiction.

4. Prospects of the African Regional Novel

This chapter shows that it is in the African regional novel that the African writer begins to write *about* his own particular community *for* both national and international readerships, which, in turn, constitute sub-categories. The chapter further points out that because of these various readerships in the African regional novel, the aims and objectives of various African regional texts are often not the same. Put differently, although in general terms African regional texts have a socio-didactic function -- to *teach* the cultural and social dynamics of their particular settings -- the chapter points out that the aims and objectives of African regional novels are often different because of the various readerships that they target. For example, the chapter argues that in teaching the national readership, the intention of the African regionalist is *to remind*, and *to confirm* to, the national readership of their rich cultural, social and historical heritage. Yet, the implications of the aims and objectives of African regional fiction with respect to the international readership are to make this readership (especially the non-African one) aware of *another* society that has a valid social and cultural history. Such a twin-project, the chapter argues, requires narrative technique that is grounded in the realist mode.

Narrative technique in African regionalist fiction is then critical to a meaningful African criticism, for it is at the level of style that critics of the African regional novel can identify both the themes and relevant readerships in African regional fiction. In fact, to be able to meaningfully discuss narrative technique in African regional fiction is, equally, to be able to identify the nature of the problems that African regional texts such as *Wand of Noble Wood* may have. This is precisely the critical procedure this chapter has employed to argue that narrative problems in Nzekwu's novel usually manifest themselves at the level of the provision of cultural information; that it is often in the instances of both *informative* narration and stray conversations that the story-line in *Wand of Noble Wood* becomes impeded.

It is instructive to explain that *descriptions* in themselves in a work of fiction are not untenable because description is usually the novelist's only facility for doing what, say, a dramatist may do in a few seconds with the stage spectacle. However, such lavish expenditure need not necessarily be as wasteful as it is in the many cases in *Wand of Noble Wood*, in which the intended reader is unable to identify *how* such descriptions *enhance* the development of the plot. Yet, in skilled hands such as Achebe's, description is often a fruitful aspect of narrative technique in *Things Fall Apart* because in Achebe's novel descriptions provide meaningful

transitions from, say, narration to dialogue, from the *thinking* of a character to the resultant action of the same character. In this way, Achebe's regional novel provides a meaningful example of how selective and sparring description is deployed to enhance the plot. Significantly, description in Achebe's novel well demonstrates how the African regionalist makes a concerted effort to grasp an appropriate style to employ in *teaching* multiple readerships a great deal of aspects of African culture that colonialist fiction may have taken for granted or even suppressed.

However, it is significant to emphasise that much of the current criticism of African fiction has been concerned with the thematic aspects of African texts such as the African regional novel. The criticism has, in fact, been particularly concerned with themes such as the socio-didactic concerns of African regional texts. Yet, there are some African texts which are concerned with the *novel* itself as an appropriate *form* for thematic issues such as socio-didacticism. Such African texts problematise the novel as a genre in the African context. Indeed, by their content and form, these African texts do not easily lend themselves to the critical procedures of current African criticism. This is precisely because narrative technique and theme in such African texts often require a particular kind of readership, and are, therefore, discussed in the next chapter.

NOTES

1. Gikandi (1991a) asks: “[w]hy isn’t ... Tutuola the father ... of modern African literature?” According to him, “[t]o raise th[is] question is ... [among other things,] also the first step in” refocusing African literary history from chronology, from some outdated assumptions that the growth of African literature was the natural product of our recent history, that writing and historical development necessarily go hand in hand. (2)

In the context of this chapter, it is argued that it is the *realism* of African regional novels such as *Things Fall Apart* that privileges this genre in much of African criticism. In the Critical Idiom Series essay, *Realism*, Grant locates the discussion in a historical perspective, while suggesting how, in recent years, the use of the term has been influenced by the Brecht-Lukacs debate which dates from the 1930s. He, however, suggests that it is often useful to problematise “realism”:

If, as Henry James claimed, ‘the novel remains still, under the right persuasion, The most independent, most elastic, most prodigious of literary forms’ ... the word realism -- so often invoked in the discussion of it -- must surely be the *most independent, most elastic, most prodigious* of critical terms. (1; emphasis mine)

Grant concedes, in conclusion, that “[t]he exploration of realism is ... ultimately subsumed in the larger question of the relationship between life and art” (64). In this chapter realism is understood to mean a particular narrative technique which Belsey -- borrowing from advertising -- describes as “[t]he process of constructing meaning by reproducing what is familiar”; that “[r]ealism is plausible not because it reflects the world, but because it is constructed out of what is (discursively) familiar” (47).

2. It may be useful to point out that the genre of the *regional* novel has often been used to describe texts such as the work of Hardy and Faulkner. Millgate provides a meaningful discussion of the work of these two authors and explains how what he designates as the “unreal estate” fits in with the *imaginary* “regions” of Wessex (Hardy) and Yoknapatawpha (Faulkner). These “regions,” Millgate says, provided Hardy and Faulkner with an amazing wealth of characters, incidents and themes, which, in fact, are used to explore the social dynamics of the *real* regions in which the authors themselves lived. It is, therefore, significant to say that the fictional regions in the African novels this study examines are, in

fact, representative of the geographical areas where the African authors themselves come from.

3. According to Ashcroft *et al.*, there are other aspects of a text that may suggest an outside readership:

Editorial intrusions, such as the footnote, the glossary, and the explanatory preface, where these are made by the author, are a good example ... [of strategies of appropriation in postcolonial writing]. Situated outside the text, they represent a reading rather than a writing ... into that ... [interpretative] territory in which the *Other* [as reader] stands. (61; emphasis mine)

Commentators trace the origins of the concept to Lacan, as Hawthorn explains:

To characterize a person, group, or institution as 'other' is to place them outside the system of normality or convention to which one belongs oneself. Such processes of exclusion by categorization are thus central to certain ideological mechanisms. If woman is other, then that which is particular to the experience of being woman is irrelevant to 'how things are', to the defining conventions by which one lives. If members of a given racial group are collectively seen as other, then how they are treated is irrelevant to what humanity demands -- because they are other and not human. When granted a capital letter the term invokes ... Lacan's theory of the way in which the subject seeks confirmation of itself in the response of the Other Without its capital letter, 'other' in Lacan's usage designates the other, imaginary self, which is first formed during the mirror stage when the infant confronts his or her own image. (141-2)

Wilden adds:

Lacan's 'other' represents the patrocetric ideology of our culture. The Other is only theoretically *ne-uter*, for it is not pure 'Otherness'. It is the principle of the locus of language and of the signifier, which for Lacan, is naturally the phallus. (261)

It is interesting to note that Said (1979) also uses the term when he explains, in his view, that that Orientalists were complicit with imperialism and that they effectively provided Europe with "one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (1). Along these lines, Said's development of "Orientalism" draws out its concealed political allegiances. In this way, it is also clear why discussions of the subject/ object aspects of nationalist/ post-colonial texts such as *Things Fall Apart*, and those of colonial fiction such as *Heart of Darkness* often use "Other" to denote the African/ European dichotomy.

4. Fish (1972) explains this notion when he describes "reading" as an interaction between text

and intended reader, as follows:

A dialectical presentation ... is disturbing, for it requires of its readers a searching and rigorous scrutiny of everything they believe in and live by. It is didactic in a special sense; it does not preach the truth, but asks that its readers discover the truth for themselves, and this discovery is often made at the expense not only of a reader's opinions and values, but of his self-esteem For the end of dialectical experience (or should be) nothing less than a *conversion*, not only a changing, but an exchanging of minds. (1-2; emphasis in text)

The "conversion" of the intended reader that is the result of "an exchanging of minds" is, in the context of this study, the hallmark of the intentions of the African regional novel. This is to say that the conversion of the intended readership's social attitudes, values and ideology is, in fact, the result of the interaction between the text's horizon and that of the intended readership.

5. Cited in JanMohamed, 162. Significantly, this is the same "we" Williams (1990) uses in the following:

We all know that there are novels about people living in the country [regional novels] and other novels about people living in cities. In this simple sense of setting for the story *we* already recognize some general differences of feeling and atmosphere. Yet, there is also ... in the development of modern fiction, a deeper and more decisive contrast: a difference *we* can come to recognize as a difference of form. (4; emphasis mine)

It is only the interpretative communities who are able to distinguish the differences in narrative technique -- what William designates as "form" -- between "Hardy['s] ... knowable community" of Casterbridge, and Joyce's Dublin in which "a whole social order [is] in sustained crisis ... in *Ulysses*" (6, 12). It is also worth noting that throughout this study, attention will be given to the way most critics use the personal plural pronoun "we"/ "us"/ "our".

6. Ngugi (1980) makes an interesting comparison when he also problematises his intended readership, as follows:

I [Ngugi] take it that ... [my audience] is ... primarily a Kenyan East African audience or rather people who are in some ways affected by the kind of conditions and issues that I write about. (29)

7. Note that Achebe quotes Yeats at the beginning of *Things Fall Apart*, while Nzekwu places at the beginning of *Wand of Noble Wood* lines from Aristophanes' *The Frogs*. In employing these textual grafts/ extra-fictional structures, these two African regionalists are, in fact, signalling the themes in their texts; they are, in Lanser's words, "bring[ing] a particular textual theme to the foreground" (125).
8. Cited in Gikandi, 1991a: 6. It is significant to mention that this same literature which Achebe and the British "were taught" was the same literary staple across the British empire at the time, as Visswanathan points out:
- British colonial administrators, provoked by missionaries on the one hand and fears on the other, discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of liberal education. (Cited in Ashcroft *et al.*, 3)
- The point, therefore, is that all the five African writers this study examines are heirs of that education. For this reason, they offer interesting/ meaningful points of comparison/ contrast in terms of both their narrative technique and intended readerships as well as their authorial/ literary ideologies.
9. Cited in Gikandi, 1991a: 3.
10. Omotoso (1996) makes useful remarks about narrative technique and intended readership in Achebe's work. According to him, "Achebe is simple and easy to read and understand" (xv) and that "[a]t the level of style Achebe's novels make their points, using the conventional forms of the European novel of the nineteenth century and a measure of the forms of oral narrative" (135).
11. Gikandi (1991a) makes interesting remarks about what he describes as Achebe's "limpid theoretical position on the function of the novel as a form of cultural intelligibility" (24). According to him, "Achebe will have been a novelist for many years before he became a critic of his own writings" (24-5). This point is critical to the intentional criticism this study advocates, for it has far-reaching implications on the relationship between an African writer's comments on his own work, and the work itself since most African writers, such as Achebe, Aidoo, Armah, and Ngugi often explain their intentions *after* they have written the fiction.

This is to say that there is nothing wrong for African writers to make critical remarks about their own work, for such comments, in fact, tend to reveal important aspects of the writers' intellectual and artistic growth as well as the similarities and contradictions between what the writers *say* and what they *actually do*.

12. Dathorne cites the Nigerian Ibo, Ebele Obumselu, who contests the veracity of Achebe's memory, saying that Achebe's "generation did not know the life [of the Ibo people] he [Achebe] is out to present" in *Things Fall Apart* (69).

13. In the same breath Achebe (1975) says that:

What we [African regional writers] need to do is to look back and try and find out where we went wrong, where the rain begun to beat us.

Here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse -- to help my society regain belief in itself and *put away the complexes* of the years of denigration and self-abasement. (44; emphasis mine)

Ngugi (1986) discusses Achebe's remarks. He finds them interesting with respect to Achebe's intended audience in a regional novel such as *Things Fall Apart*, as follows:

Since the peasant and the worker had never really had any doubts about their Africanness, the reference could only have been to the 'educated' or petty-bourgeois African. In fact if one substitutes the words 'petty-bourgeois' for the word 'our' and 'the petty-bourgeois class' for 'my society' the statement is apt, accurate, and describes well the assumed audience. Of course, an *ideological revolution* in this class would affect the whole society. (33; emphasis mine)

In Reception the implication of both Achebe's and indeed Ngugi's remarks is that regional novels such as *Things Fall Apart* and *Wand of Noble Wood* are intended to necessitate in their readerships what Jauss (1982) describes as "a 'change of horizons' through the negation of familiar experiences or through raising newly articulated experiences to the level of consciousness" (25). In other words, to the intended readerships in the two regional novels under discussion, reading these African regional texts may result in what Jauss describes as the *alteration* of a horizon of expectations as it subverts another, on the other (23, 88-9).

14. Cited in Gikandi, 1991a: 8-9.

15. Ibid., 31.

16. Lukacs (1981) provides a useful definition of this genre:

The classical historical novel arose out of the social novel and, having enriched and raised it to a higher level, passed back into it. The higher level of both the historical and social novel in the classical period, the less there are really decisive differences of style between them. (290)

According to Green, “the ‘total context’ referred to here includes pre-eminently, as the connectedness of the present and past suggests, a unified sense of ‘history’”:

The very attribution of a specific genre to the ‘historical novel’, claims Lukacs, rests on a failure to grasp this connectedness: ‘the social reason for creating the historical novel [as] a genre or sub-genre in its own right is ... the separation of the present from the past, the abstract opposition of the one to the other’. (23)

17. Achebe, 1958: 3. Subsequent page references to this edition, preceded by *TFA* where appropriate and are incorporated into the text.

18. Palmer adds that:

Achebe’s rural characters that would normally use Ibo in actual situations are made to speak in English, but the English they use has been considerably modified in order to reflect an African rural community and the thought and speech patterns of native Ibo speakers. (76)

19. Mendilow explains the implications of this particular tense pattern, as follows:

Mostly, the past tense in which the events are narrated is transposed by the reader into a fictive present, while any expository matter is felt as a past in relation to that presentness. (94; emphasis mine)

20. Achebe says that “[i]t is the story-teller, in fact, who makes us what we are, who *creates* history. The story-teller creates the memory that the survivors must have -- otherwise their surviving would have no meaning. (Cited in Gikandi, 1991: 10; emphasis mine)

21. The extradiagetic narrator in *Things Fall Apart* states that:

Okonkwo ... had an *old rusty* gun made by a clever blacksmith who had come to live in Umuofia long ago. But although Okonkwo was a great man whose prowess was universally acknowledged, he was

not a hunter. In fact *he had not killed a rat*. (27-8; emphasis mine)

From these remarks it is logical to assume that the possible cause for the explosion of Okonkwo's gun is that the gun was old and that Okonkwo did not frequently use it.

22. Nzekwu, 1963: 28-9. Subsequent page references to this edition, preceded by *WONW* where appropriate and are incorporated into the text. It is significant to explain that the first-person point of view that Nzekwu's novel employs has important implications for Peter the narrator/participant. First-person narrators can take different positions with regard to narrated events. First, they can tell stories in which they are or have been the hero/ heroine. Secondly, they can tell stories in which they mainly feature as observers and, thirdly, they can tell stories which someone else transmits to them in an oral or written form and which they are then merely *presenting literally* on paper. There is also a hierarchy of narrative levels that a writer can use in various ways in first-person narratives. For instance, a writer could use the first-person to serve as a framework only to present the character that is going to tell another (the main) story. In this case the latter is an inner narrative that is subordinate to the first level narrative in which it is embodied. This is to say that in the first case, the "I" has a central position on the first level, as a narrator, and also on the second level, the level of the story itself where the "I" acts and is presented as the main character. In this case first-person narrators tell and observe; they express themselves and recall their past experiences, as the case with Peter in *Wand of Noble Wood* (and also with Modin, Solo and Aimee in *Why Are We So Blest?* and Sissie in *Our Sister Killjoy*, as will be seen in the next chapter, and Odili in *A Man of the People* in the fourth chapter of this study).

23. For this reason, commentators often question the veracity of newspaper information.

Handlin cautions historians about newspapers, as follows:

It is ludicrous to consider the newspaper as a type of evidence. Newspapers are written with target readers in mind, and this may not necessarily be factually correct. Writers may portray an event in such a way that readers see only *one side of the story*. (134; emphasis mine)

24. Commentators observe that many rural customs often decline in urban and semi-urban conditions; that ethnic behaviour, cultural practices and the symbolic worlds of particular social groups are usually disrupted through the process of urbanization. Thus in the African

context, Mazrui and Mazrui in the following discuss urbanization as a problematic:

In the scramble for limited opportunities and resources in the cities and towns, the pull of *ethnic* loyalty has remained strong. *Ethnic behaviour may have changed*, but ethnic loyalty has remained strong. (128; emphasis mine)

Peter's and Reg's positive attitudes towards the Ibo culture could, therefore, be described only only in terms of "ethnic loyalty."

25. The function of *a detail* in a work of art is critical. Lukacs (1970) says that:

The artistic correctness of *a detail* [in a work of art] thus has nothing to do with whether the detail corresponds to any similar detail in reality. The detail ... is an accurate reflection of the total process of objective reality, no matter whether it was observed by the artist in life or created through imagination out of direct or indirect experience For merely arranging thousands of chance details in a row never results in *artistic necessity*. (43; emphasis mine)

26. Most African regionalists are aware that the significance of the "bride-price" cuts across many African cultures. Ngugi (1980) explains to Egejuru the implications of the bride-price in some African regional novels with respect to the intended readership, as follows:

There are writers who do ... [this] because their readers are outside Africa. There is also the popular belief that African writers are writing for a non-African audience. There are writers who want to reach that mythic non-African audience. Another thing that conditions them is not so much this non-African readership but other national commitments, because we cannot assume that cultural symbols of one community apply to the rest [of Africa]. (31)

27. Cited in Dathorne, 89.

CHAPTER III

THE SUPERREADERSHIP IN THE AFRICAN METANOVEL: AYI KWEI ARMAH'S *WHY ARE WE SO BLEST?* AND AMA ATA AIDOO'S *OUR SISTER KILLJOY*, OR *REFLECTIONS FROM A BLACK-EYED SQUINT (OUR SISTER KILLJOY)*

Armah is a profoundly ... democratic artist. By this I ... mean that ... he has a deep and sophisticated sense of the ... [readership] for which he writes, and of obligations towards them. That audience ... is identifiably and almost exclusively African. To the extent that ... [Western] readers and critics have taken cognisance of his work, this must be a spin-off or by-product of the central process embodied in the books, the transmission of cultural confidence by a writer speaking directly to his [African] people by means of the [Western] fictional medium.
Robert Fraser (1980: 104-5)

By "primary ... [readership]" I am suggesting that Aidoo initially targets a broad spectrum of Ghana's elite (the petit, national and comprador bourgeoisie) That others outside ...[this] group ... may find themselves ... implicated or engaged in and by Aidoo's works speaks to the power of her "art" to "defamiliarize" or "alienate."
Vincent O. Odamtten (1994: 176)

1. The Novel and its Subversion in African Metafiction

The African metanovel is exciting on two levels, which this chapter examines. First, this particular African text is interesting in the way it interrogates the exigencies of the novel as a Western art form/ genre in the African context. Secondly, most African metanovels embody one of the most fascinating characters in African fiction -- the "been to" figure. In dealing with the first aspect of African metafiction this chapter explores how the intentions of African metanovelists challenge and subvert the expectations of the intended audience of African metatexts such as before Ayi Kwei Armah's *Why Are We So Blest?* and Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*. At the same time, in investigating the ramifications of the "been to" character in the same texts, the chapter seeks to demonstrate to what extent this figure is, in the words of A. Gerard (1990), "the new culture hero who has been initiated abroad and comes back to his own country and people in order to help them up the steep path of modernization and self-preservation" (148). The argument of the chapter, then, is that it is in examining these two aspects of the African

metanovel that one can meaningfully explain both narrative technique and intended readership in African metafiction.

In his study of Aidoo's work, Vincent O. Odamtten (1994) defines the "been-to" character, as follows:

[T]he term 'been-to' ... in most neo-colonial African societies has come to refer to people ... who have been educated in Europe, America, or other Western countries. 'Been-tos' are seen as harbingers of desiderata, ... as the conduits through which Western commodities or the 'cargo' is brought back for the benefit of the 'loved ones' (the family and, finally, the whole society). (30)

Odamtten's remarks are apposite because the notion of the "been-to" is, in fact, stated in *Our Sister Killjoy*, as follows:

So when they eventually went back home as 'been-tos', *the ghosts of the humans* they used to be, spoke of the wonders of being overseas, *pretending* their tongues craved for tasteless foods which they would have vomited to eat where they were prepared best.

Fish and Chips.

They lied.

They lied.

They lied.

The Been-tos lied. (Emphasis mine)¹

To say that the "been-to" is a "ghost[...]" and a "pretend[er]" is already to attack both the spiritual/ emotional dimension and integrity of this intriguing character in African fiction. For as Derek Wright (1989) observes on the capacity of the "been-to" to be relevant to society, the "been-tos," according to him, are Africans *spirited away* from native cultures by Western education" (187; emphasis mine). Gareth Griffiths (1978) also notes the influence of Western education on the "been-to"; in particular, he raises the aspect of "return": according to him, the "been-to" is usually found in West African fiction as an "ubiquitous ... figure ... or man who has *returned* from education abroad" (62). What is striking about the "been-to" character in African fiction is that this "return" is never meaningful because the idea of "ghosts" in *Our Sister Killjoy* and that of being "spirited away" in Wright's comment, suggest the theme of social alienation² in the African texts which usually deal with the "been-to" character: it implies the cutting off from African society of this compelling figure, as this chapter shows.

It is significant to mention that although the "been-to" character attracts the attention of commentators, especially the way in which he provides a fertile ground for thematic criticism of some African texts (Bruner 1977, Davenport 1978, Lawson 1982, Tucker 1970), narrative

technique and intended readership in the African texts in which this figure appears are not sufficiently explored. This is to say that critics who discuss African novels in which the “been-to” character appears fail to recognise the fact that one of the preoccupations of some of these texts is to drastically revise the novel as genre. They fail, indeed, to problematise this aspect of these texts probably because their critical procedures do not easily allow them to meaningfully discuss these texts. As this chapter shows, the most meaningful way to discuss some of the implications of the deployment of the “been-to” character in these African texts is to focus on narrative technique and intended readership in these novels. For this reason, this chapter points out that an analysis of narrative technique and intended readership in *Why Are We So Blest?* and *Our Sister Killjoy* leads to a meaningful definition of what this study designates as the superreader[ship] in African metafiction.

Perhaps it may be important to state that an analysis of narrative technique and intended readership in *Why Are We So Blest?* and *Our Sister Killjoy* shows that in these two texts what the authors are trying to write is, in fact, only *another form* of Western fiction -- the metanovel. The characterizing feature of this form of narrative, according to Jeremy Hawthorn (1994), is that it “talks about other, embedded narratives, or [it is] a narrative which refers to itself and to its own narrative procedures” (116). This is to emphasise the point that in the metanovel narrative technique, says Hawthorn, plays “an extremely important role *vis-à-vis* the establishment of a particular ideological position in a work of fiction” (116).

Lewis Nkosi (1981) warns against the tendency to look at certain African texts in the light of their Western counterparts; he rightly observes that it is not always fruitful to look for influences in African texts from seemingly similar Western fiction. However, what he says in the following is significant, for he further explains the distinguishing qualities of *Why Are We So Blest?* and *Our Sister Killjoy*, as metanovels:

[I]t has sometimes been argued that what distinguishes modernism in ... [literature] is not so much the oddity of the subject-matter as the deliberate focusing of *our attention on technique as interesting in itself*, so that, instead of the object which it is supposed to represent, ... [narrative] *form itself now becomes its own subject-matter*. Such a definition is, of course, too extreme to apply without qualification to the specifically African conditions. But if we disregard, for the moment, the ‘art for art’s sake’ implication inherent in such a formulation, we shall soon find that this definition does, in fact, contain a key element in the kind of distinction we are trying to make: the fact that in opposition to, say, the almost classical serenity of ... Achebe’s ... style, which may be said to represent the sort of ‘art which conceals art’, ...

novelists (such as Okara in *The Voice*, Soyinka in *The Interpreters*, Armah in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born ...* [and] Awoonor in *This Earth, My Brother ...* who could be group[ed] under the 'modernist' label are constantly calling to *our attention* not just to the events being narrated but *to the essential duplicity of form itself*, to the strained artificiality of language, to the uncertainty of the ground which modern ... [African literature] tries to inhabit. That the 'modernist' writer should choose this unstable ground upon which to build his house is, so to speak, the very essence of what *we* now think of as the 'modernist temper', its final irony and its artifice. (54; emphasis mine)³

The shifts in the concerns of some African writers from, say, thematic preoccupations to interests in "technique" and "narrative form" in some of their work, should alert critics of African literature to the continually shifting ground of African fiction. These constant changes clearly suggest that African writers are often searching for meaningful ways to respond to their various societies. For this reason, it becomes incumbent upon the critic of African fiction to take cognisance of these changes, to suggest equally meaningful critical procedures. It is important to emphasise this point, for to ignore the main concerns of African writers themselves is precisely to provide a criticism of African fiction, which is unmeaningful indeed. The point is that any useful criticism of African fiction should be alert to the primary concerns of African writers themselves in their work, as this study shows.

It is significant to explain that the African metanovel is that kind of African text in which several forms of literary art are merged in order to subvert the novel as a genre, thereby to draw the intended readership's attention to the anti-representational nature of literature and the reader's own status as reader of fiction. There could be in the same text instances of the diary and commentary, as in *Why Are We So Blest?*, or cases of poetry and prose, as in *Our Sister Killjoy*. For this reason, Adeola James' query to Aidoo (1990) about narrative technique and intended readership in *Our Sister Killjoy* is significant:

James: In *Our Sister Killjoy* it would appear that you are *experimenting* with a *new style*, a fusion of poetry and prose in a novel I often wonder whether *one can appropriately call this a novel*.

Aidoo: Well, I wonder too. When I have been forced to describe *Killjoy*, I have said *it is a fiction in four episodes* I leave it to the *critic to say whether it is a novel or not*. (15; emphasis mine)

While James makes the point that the reader who looks for resemblances between Aidoo's text and the tradition of the Western novel is likely to find none, Aidoo's answer suggests a new reading, a fresh criticism of her text. This fresh reading and new criticism of *Our Sister Killjoy*,

this chapter suggests, is equally applicable to Armah's *Why Are We So Blest?*. The aim of this chapter, then, is to explore how narrative technique and intended readership in the African metanovel are deployed to subvert both the novel as a genre and the expectations of the superreader.

It has already been implied that *Why Are We So Blest?* and *Our Sister Killjoy* require a similar kind of reading. In fact, critics have often noted similarities between the two Ghanaian texts (Odamtten 125, Cooper 1992: 81-99). In particular, Odamtten notes that there are similarities in the involvements between the African male and Western/ European female characters in the two novels. In the light of the relationships between Modin and Aimee, and between Solo and Sylvia in Armah's novel, Odamtten also discusses how, according to him, "Sissie's nascent lesbian relationship [in Aidoo's novel] had begun to assume the power dynamics of a sexist heterosexual one" and that Sissie's relationship with Marija was, therefore, "a perversion as horrifying as the stories she [Sissie] had heard" (125) in which, as the narrator says (Odamtten quotes from Aidoo's text), Sissie imagined herself as "one of the black boys in one of these involvements with the white girls in Europe" (*OS* 61). "The ending of such relationships," Odamtten adds, "like that between Modin and Aimee ... is for 'these black boys' to have '[t]heir penises cut'" (125).⁴

Brenda Cooper (1992b) also notes a similarity between Modin's castration in Armah's novel and the themes in *Our Sister Killjoy*. In particular, she suggests that Modin's castration "is very closely aligned [thematically] to ... [*Our Sister Killjoy*]," for "[t]he high moral tone of *Our Sister Killjoy* ... derives from an attempt to explain history by way of the individualized cruelty, vengeance and sickness" (94). However, a consideration of the above comments explains little about the stylistic implications of, say, the symbolism of the two African metanovels; the comments neither suggest, nor explain both the *level* and *quality* of the interpretation the symbolism in these texts invite. This failure to indicate the type of *reading* these two African metanovels need often creates a gap between meaningful assumptions about the texts themselves, and the critical procedures used to arrive at the assumptions.⁵

Perhaps it is K. Owusu (1989) who attempts to provide a criticism of the African metanovel that is close to the one this chapter recommends. Owusu rightly points out that African texts such as *Why Are We So Blest?* and *Our Sister Killjoy* are primarily concerned with a *literary process*, which he designates as "fictionalising as fiction-analysing."⁶ Owusu's concept should be seen to draw attention to the manner in which some African texts invite the intended reader to what Armah earlier notes as "genre," to both structure and form as well as to narrative technique in

those texts. This is to say that the reader who wishes to engage African metafiction must, first, be familiar with aspects of fiction such as language, structure, plot and characterisation; he must have, in fact, what J. Culler (1975) describes as the “*knowledge* of the conventions by which fictions are *read*” (113; emphasis mine). This is well put, but one needs to go further: one needs to know *who* possesses that understanding with which to respond to literature. In the context of this chapter, it is argued that it is the superreader who usually possesses that knowledge. For this reason, such a reader will be able to identify which African novels, as Owusu says, “confine ... [themselves] to a delineation or dramatisation of the fictiveness of the fiction” as well as to determine “[t]he extent of the involution or self-reflexivity of the African novel.” This kind of reader, it must be emphasised, is the superreader of the African metanovel.⁷

2. *Why Are We So Blest?*: Structure, Symbolism, Race Relations and Stereotypes

Josiah Uguru (1987) records an interview with Armah in which the latter “spoke about his literary philosophy and his evaluation of literature in Africa.” In that interview Armah identifies “forms of poetic words and techniques of expressing ideas, the ideas themselves, [and] the genres employed,” among others things, as “‘rich *intellectual* tools’” indispensable to “‘the [African] writer’” (12, 13; emphasis mine). It is instructive, then, to realize that Armah recognizes the significance of appropriate “forms of poetic words and technique of expressing ideas” in African fiction. It is also important to note that he suggests that African fiction is a highly “intellectual” activity.

Now, if the African writer recognizes the significance of appropriate “forms of poetic words and technique of expressing ideas” in his own work, it is only incumbent upon the critic of African fiction to do likewise, to accord narrative technique in African fiction a central place in the criticism of African literature. For as has already been pointed out in this study, it is necessary that the criticism of the African novel keeps abreast with the constantly shifting trends in African fiction itself. Significantly, too, when Armah says that African fiction is a highly “intellectual” activity, he equally implies that the *quality* of the criticism of African literature should be highly skilful and well-informed indeed.

The rhetorical “techniques [employed in] expressing ideas” in African fiction can at times be complex depending on the project of the work in question. In fact, the task of exploring these “rhetorical techniques” in a novel such as *Why Are We So Blest?* can be daunting indeed, for Armah’s novel is about novels; it is fiction about the aims and objectives of fiction itself, as James Booth (1980) points out:

Why Are We So Blest? is ... an attempt to nail the novel down. It is a ... fiction -- a particularly complex one, since on one level it comprises an *analysis* of the ... *fiction* of racism. (50; emphasis in text)

While Booth is apt to suggest the direction of any meaningful criticism of Armah’s novel (because he identifies Armah’s novel as basically “an analysis of ... fiction”), he does not explain what is actually entailed in the pursuit of this direction. He fails, too, to point out that a meaningful “analysis” of any African text that seeks to problematise fiction must require a particular kind of reading, as has already been noted.

According to Modin’s notebook, the title of Armah’s third novel is foreshadowed by that of

an essay of the same title written by an unidentified person in the *Sunday Times* to commemorate Thanksgiving in the United States of America. Mike and Modin discuss this article, as follows:

“Hey, this is great,” Mike said.

“Keep it to yourself,” I [Modin] said.

“You don’t run from sharing a good thing, Modin. It’s irrational.”

“If it’s good for you it’s bad for me.”

...

[Mike] couldn’t take his eyes off the magazine now.

“Listen to this. This guy is good”

“The myth of paradise finds its full meaning here, in the New World. Paradise a state of good grace, and grace is space -- the distance that separates the holy from the merely human, the sacred from the profane And that is the distance between the American commonwealth and the remnants of the world. It is the measure of our blessedness.”

“ ‘The vulgar have come to call it abundance. That is unavoidable, for even here the vulgar imagination remains myopic But there is no necessity for the vulgar to acquire vision. Here they too are blest at their own level. The blest among the blest know that this vision from the New World is’ ”

“He is terribly smug about America,” [Modin] said.

“Not smug. Just honest. We are fortunate.”

“Depends on which America you choose to see.”

“America is one.”⁸

“America” may be “one”; but it turns out that “the so-called Indians” and “Negroes” are, from Mike’s point of view, justifiably outside the scope of the *Sunday Times* article: “Look the piece is titled ‘Why Are We So Blest?’ The guy didn’t set out to write about the under-privileged” (99). The article “Why Are We So Blest?” generates the dramatisation of a clash of opposing viewpoints because Mike insists on reading it aloud rather quietly to himself as he is urged to (“ ‘keep it to yourself’”[100]). To Mike, “Why Are We So Blest?” constitutes an affirmation of the “blessedness” (100) he shares with the author of the piece. Thus Mike in this instance is what Serge Doubrovsky (1973) would call the anonymous author’s “fellow-worker and accomplice” -- he “[tries] to become him” (46) in the process of enthusiastic interpretation of the *Times* text.

However, to Modin, the question “Why Are We So Blest?” is a cruel one, calling as it does, for the ironic examination of the state of the “unblest” (98). It is important to note that how the *Times* essay foregrounds its themes and constructs its superreadership seems to prefigure the method in which Armah’s novel deploys its themes and organises its superreadership -- that of contrasts. *Why Are We So Blest?* thrives on opposites: “Matter of fact, blessedness as a state can’t exist without its *opposite*. It wouldn’t make sense,” as Mike puts it (100; emphasis mine). Yet, *Why Are We So Blest?* is an *African* metatext and, as this chapter shows, there is another

interesting aspect to it: the novel is one of the vexing instances in Africa fiction in the way this novel's viewpoints converge.

The story in Armah's novel concerns social and ideological contradictions of a global magnitude that are brought to the fore through the eyes of three schismatic narrators: Solo, Modin and Aimee. By this narrative technique, the novel presents a reality that appears to be three-dimensional, too complex to be contained within the single point of view. Amazingly, this reality is, in fact, still contained within the single and non-contradictory viewpoint which is confirmed and ratified by Solo who is, according to S. Gikandi (1987), "not only the narrative's informing consciousness, but a key narrative agent in himself" (94). By thus smoothing over the contradictions in *Why Are We So Blest?* through Solo, Armah's text offers a particular position, an attitude which is given as non-contradictory and fixed. Interestingly, though, the novel also seems to offer multi-dimensionality, the level of narration at which Armah's text begins to invite a *superreading*.

It is important to explain Solo's role in this composite text, because Solo's interpretation of the notebooks entrusted to him is not given any privileged status at the expense of what might be the superreaders' interpretation of the notebooks. Booth makes the following suggestion without directly referring to Solo:

So not only are the two main black characters [Modin and Solo] in the novel illustrations of the paralysis of their race, but the outermost narrative voice with all its impressive authority belongs to *one of these characters* and controls our response to the entire story. The reader is allowed no avenue of escape. (58; emphasis mine)

A reading of Booth's article shows that as far as Booth is concerned, "the outermost narrative voice" in *Why Are We So Blest?* which has the most "impressive authority" is Solo's. In fact Booth makes the revealing comment that it is almost impossible for "the reader ... [to] simply doubt[...] Solo's authority" (58). Yet, as this chapter shows, Solo is not the narrator of *Why Are We so Blest?*.⁹

Perhaps it is O. S. Ogede (1990) who offers a useful explanation of Solo's role when he points out that:

Solo's ambiguity and ambivalence are also embedded in the puzzling role he plays as a narrator of the story who is sometimes a detached observer and commentator but who is often a consumed participant in the heat of the action he describes. (62-3)

Solo, like Modin and Aimee, is a complex character in Armah's text; he is a narrator/ participant who, like the other two, participates in, and contributes to the development of the plot in *Why Are We So Blest?*. For this reason, Armah may have allowed Solo an important narrative function, but a variation on the same privilege is extended to Modin and Aimee. In Armah's novel, each character's narrative function is limited because it is competing with other, equally limited, narrative points of view. Structurally, Solo's explications and reminiscences are given the same significance which is accorded the notebook entries of the other two characters. To use Robert Fraser's (1980) language, Solo's "weary view of things" does not merge with "the authorial consciousness" (48), although, arguably, it still dominates the entire novel. In fact, depending on particular circumstances, Solo's "view of things" either underlines, challenges, or contrasts with the other characters' "view of things" -- characters he comes into contact with directly or indirectly through notebooks, letters, and journals. Significantly, the name Solo, according to the Ghanaian/ Akan Owusu,

functions in Armah's fictional world as the anglicised equivalent of the Akan name Baako which means 'one' or 'single' and implies 'alone', 'going solo'. Solo's second name is Nkonam. And Nkonam in Akan translates loosely into 'I walk alone.' The full name 'Solo Nkonam' is, therefore, a tautology that is textualized, in this instance, as a paradigm of self-reflexivity. (86)¹⁰

At the level of *naming*, then, *Why Are We So Blest?* suggests an inside sub-group of the super-readership as its intended readership, which is Akan, and to which both Armah himself and Owusu belong, thus emphasising one crucial argument of this study -- that it is possible for a text to have more than one readership.

There is also another point to make about the names of the characters in Armah's novel: characters' names in *Why Are We So Blest?* indicate the different points of view from which the events in the novel are narrated. What then the superreader is invited to read about in the name Solo, as well as in the character of this individual, is a tortured person's doomed "solo" or lone effort to come to terms with himself in a world peopled by characters who are as tortured, in their own way, as he is. Thus Solo is not different from the other two characters. In fact, the other two also have as "weary [a] view of things" as he. As Solo himself puts it at the beginning of the novel:

The entries in the African's book do not all bear dates. The things he wrote of were in general not events; they were more like concatenations of ideas. Some I [Solo] have not understood at all I have left them alone. The book of the American girl does not contain much that promises to be understandable ... I

do not, in the end, understand his attraction to her. The truth is, I do not want to understand. I am afraid, ultimately, *for myself*. (*WAWSB?* 71; emphasis mine)

On occasions such as this one when Armah appears to Fraser to have “resign[ed] his narrative and explicative function to Solo” (48), “narrative” refers to nothing more than the provision of straight-forward, sometimes banal, information; and the “explicative function” turns out to be Solo’s attempts at self-analysis. What is important to note with respect to Solo’s role and narrative technique in *Why Are We So Blest?* is that the novel provides an instance of the presentation of one troubled vision (Modin’s) through another troubled vision (Solo’s).

However, Solo’s role must not be overstated since it cannot influence the interpretation of the notebooks very much. For example, Solo’s crude attempt to condition the superreader’s response to “[t]he book of the American girl” is unsuccessful. If Solo finds little in Aimee’s notebook “that promises to be understandable,” then he lacks the intuition of the author who created her: Solo cannot be speaking for Armah. The following is Solo’s response to the notebooks:

These notebooks have broken my paralysis. I [Solo] search them, filling in holes answering questions I have asked myself and found no answers to, speculating, arranging, and re-arranging these notes to catch all possible meaning. Is this creation? How could any exercise so useless, so clearly of no help to any destroyed be called creation?. (231)

Aimee had entreated Solo to keep the notebooks secret: “ ‘Don’t let anyone see them No one’ ” ((267). However, Solo ignores Aimee’s earnest request. Such ironic reversals abound in *Why Are We So Blest?*, and their cumulative impact undermines expectations and challenges assumptions. In this way, it is possible to argue that these ironic reversals invite a superreading of the novel.

There is a particular notion in *Why Are We So Blest?* that needs comment: this is the notion of the “crossover”. This notion, in fact, is an important identity principle that is discussed explicitly in the novel. From Modin’s notebook, the following is Mike’s observation that Modin is a crossover:

‘Modin you’re nobody’s plaything In the Greek tradition you’d be a crossover. One of those who rise from the plains to live on Olympus. A hero. Part man, part god. Therefore, more interesting than either.’ (101)

When Modin draws attention to “ ‘the Promethean factor’ ,” Mike is forced to consider the possibility of a “ ‘reverse crossover’ ,” but decides, ultimately, that “ ‘that’s insane.’ ” Modin suggests that they agree to disagree: “ ‘[t]here are other myths you know’ ” (102). The superreader’s knowledge of what Mike may not have known makes the latter’s use of the word

“insane” ironic. It is also important to note that by the time the novel provides the exchanges between Modin and Mike quoted above, Modin is already dead. The recollection that Modin had undergone a symbolic and ritualised form of castration at the hands of Europeans (those who “live on Olympus” in the application of Mike’s mythology) and had been left dying in the “hard”, “stony” (278) African desert (“the plains” Modin is supposed to have “rise[n] from”), makes the implications of Mike’s crossover reference doubly ironic. For this reason, Gikandi correctly notes the irony in Armah’s novel, as follows:

The central irony in the novel is the transformation of aspiration into self-annihilation: characters aspire to ideals which are in themselves humane, but have to go through a process of spiritual death to attain what, they discover in the end, is unattainable. (95)¹¹

It is instructive to note that Armah’s ire in *Why Are We So Blest?* is not only directed towards the “been-to” character such as Modin and Solo who, in Armah’s (1984) words, could be described as being “incapable of democratic co-operation” and consequently “louse comrade[s]” (62).¹² The anger in Armah’s novel is also directed towards the schemes of the West such as how its education system impacts on the African while he is overseas:

I [Modin] should have stopped going to lectures long ago. They all form a part of a ritual celebrating a tradition called great because it is European, Western, White. The triumphant assumption of a superior community ... designed to reduce us to *invisibility*¹³ My participation in this kind of ritual made me not just lonely, not just one person unsupported by a larger whole, but less than one person: a person split, fractured. (31-2; emphasis mine)

Without the support of “a larger whole,” the “lonely” individual becomes “less than one person.” “Split” and “fractured” advance the process of disintegration and suggest that the ultimate purpose of this process is to annihilate and, thus, celebrate absence or invisibility.

However, when examined carefully, these charges against the West raise problems for Armah: these attacks actually have a ring of contradiction to them in the total context of *Why Are We So Blest?*. First, reference has already been made to the legend of Prometheus. This myth is, indeed, an intrusion of Western culture in this text which, according to Wright, is the “least ‘African’ of Armah’s works” (193). Then there is the narrative technique in Armah’s text, which Wright, again, describes as “over-sophisticated” and “analytic” (197) and, as such, borrows from the European novel. Leif Lorentzon (1994) also suggests with respect to the way Armah’s novel structures the time of the action, as follows:

Why Are We So Blest? is a virtual temporal jigsaw puzzle. This kind of narrative,

where the temporal order of the primary story-time is internally distorted, appears first with the modern novel after *Madame Bovary* and particularly with William Faulkner and the French *nouveau roman*. (55; emphasis mine)

To successfully piece together “a virtual jigsaw puzzle” requires an engagement that is highly intellectual indeed. It is the same kind of involvement, Lorentzon suggests, that is required of the superreader in much of the Western modern novel, and now of the superreader in Armah’s novel. In this way, Armah’s novel, say Lorentzon and Wright, has its antecedents in Western¹⁴ fiction.

It is, therefore, critical to emphasise that when the black race borrows the style and narrative techniques of “the destroyers” to bewail its own destruction, *writing* itself becomes an act of self-betrayal. The African metanovel’s aesthetic form reflexively declares its achievement to be worthless, signalling its author’s arrival at a terminus and the imminence of some radical formal innovation, as Solo resonantly puts it:

There is no creative art outside the destruction of the destroyers. In my people’s world, revolution would be the only art, revolutionaries the only creators I [Solo] search these notebooks ... speculating, arranging these notes to catch all possible meaning. Is this creation? (*WAWSB?* 231)

Solo seems to argue that because his rearrangement is not informed by a coherent ideology, this rearrangement is, therefore, no more than an aesthetic refuge from chaos, a spurious unity patterned from fragments. This is well put as the discussion on impotence (“inner sterility”) in Armah’s novel shows impotence as a kind of both spiritual and emotional death.

Quite early in *Why Are We So Blest?* there is a pointed illustration of the inseparability of form and content in Armah’s novel:

Even before my death I [Modin] have become a ghost, wandering about the face of the earth, moving with a freedom I have not chosen, something whose unsettling abundance I am impotent to use. There is no contact possible. Life goes on around me. (11)

In technical terms, the foregoing suggests that within the larger context of the autobiographical and confessional modes employed by Modin -- modes which, ironically force him to contemplate, or at least imagine, his own demise -- the (therapeutic) epistolary sub-text sustains the “illusion” of a presence (the real or imagined addressee) that, in fact, is absent. Each of Modin’s letters to Naita is predicted upon her absence, and that absence prefigures Modin’s own absence: his demise, contemplated or imagined in his autobiographical and confessional (intra-)text.

However, there is another dimension to narrative technique in a diary, a genre employed in Armah’s novel: the diary (or journal) says M. H. Abrams (1988), is “a day-to-day record of events

•

of a person's life, written for *personal* use" (15; emphasis mine). The contents of this genre are, therefore, not often intended for the public; they are rarely published because of their *privacy*. It is then not surprising that Aimee instructs Solo not to allow anybody to see the notebooks (diaries) of the other two characters (Modin and Aimee). Yet, Solo is a translator; he is a "*traducteur*" (*WAWSB?* 253), as the novel puts it. Therefore, because of the fact that in reading a writer's diary (in this case Modin's and Aimee's diaries), Solo's experience as a reader is almost like that of one that is looking over the two writers' shoulders to share with them in their intimate experiences. In this way, Solo eventually finds the notebooks/ diaries interesting; he ends up "translat[ing]" them. This development is a critical undertaking on Solo's part; in translating the notebooks, Solo is evidently suggesting, and appealing to, a readership that could, in fact, understand what he has "not understood" (71).

Consider the physical arrangement of Modin's entries in *Why Are We So Blest?*: the undated entries are at the beginning of the novel, while the dated ones are at the end. In spite of this deceptive orderliness, the undated entries read "backwards" and "forwards". It is clearly because of this haphazard arrangement ("concatenation") of Modin's entries (and, though, lesser still, of Aimee's) that the structure of the novel seems to gyrate. The physical arrangement of Solo's own intercalating narrative also moves "to" and "fro"; for instance, Solo begins to comment on the notebooks early in *Why Are We So Blest?* (71), but explains how the notebooks came into his possession close to the end of the novel (267). The total effect of reading the novel, therefore, is an episodic narrative requiring an experienced/ competent superreadership to follow the story-line.

Still, on Solo's part, he translates this tragedy into, and encodes it in, literary terms which to some extent are quite misleading generalizations. Take the following attack on the professional writer/ artist:

[T]o be a writer at a time like this, in the midst of the world's most painful truths, a communicator doomed to silence?

...

I [Solo] am sick with the inability to consume other people's works of art Why not simply accept the fate of an artist, and like a Western seer, close my eyes to everything around, find relief in discreet beauty, and make its elaboration my vocation? Impossible. The Western artist is blest with that atrophy of vision that can see beauty in deliberately broken-off pieces of a world sickened with oppression's ugliness. I hear the call of that art too. *But in the world of my people that most important first act of creation, that re-arrangement without which all attempts at creation are doomed to falseness,*

remains to be done My mind in self-protection refuses to follow these thoughts of goodness and a new-created world. From here to there the distance is so great, and my spirit is tired, beaten. (230, 231; emphasis mine)¹⁵

It may be useful to note that Solo often makes comments that touch on aspects of his life that are similar to those of Modin's. This is apt because both characters are too "tired ... [and] beaten" to do anything meaningful in their circumstances. Solo's tragedy is Modin's and, by extension, it is also the tragedy of postcolonial Africa. For example, right from the beginning of the novel Modin also claims that his demise is "arranged"; in fact at the level of the text, the demise is arranged in terms that are both thematic and structural, as follows:

The directions made available to me [Modin] within this arrangement are suicidal. I am supposed to get myself destroyed out of my own free-seeming choice The real question is not to commit suicide but how best to invest my inevitable destruction Outside of investing my death in an ongoing effort to change things as they are, it wouldn't matter much what kind of death I choose. (31)

From the foregoing, it is possible to argue that the plot in Armah's novel puts the superreader in a privileged position from which he can deduce both the reasons and literary implications of Modin's inevitable self-annihilation. The role-players of this modern tragedy are, again, the African "been-tos" and Western education. Nowhere is this tragedy more articulated than in Modin's architectonic representation of what he describes as the "imperial structure" at the beginning of the novel.¹⁶

Surprisingly, an essay such as Booth's with its telling title, "*Why Are We So Blest?* and the Limits of Metaphor", does not discuss Modin's pyramidal image. Modin's idea, which expresses, among other things, the binary divisions of "centre"/ "margin", "centre"/ "periphery" and "high"/ "low" is three-pronged; first, it suggests what kind of authorship the novel has (Maja-Pearce 22); secondly, it alludes to the kind of text *Why Are We So Blest?* is (Booth 61), and, finally, the image implicates the novel's intended audience. It is also true to say that it is from Modin's extended metaphor that much of the novel really stems (Wright 188). Therefore, it is instructive to point out that the image suggests two positions which are deliberately structured vertically to "distribut[e]" equally two types of information. The two vertical positions are the "centre" and the "peripheries," while the two types of information located at these positions are the "high" and the "low." The main feature of the two types of information are that because of their positions, "clarity is potentially only from the central heights," while "the peripheral areas are meant to ... mystif[y]." ¹⁷

Perhaps the most meaningful approach to discuss Armah's authorial ideology is to examine the sexual encounters in *Why Are We So Blest?*, encounters that suggest, again, the irony in the novel.

Ogede asks why Modin is "ironically rivet[ted] to Mrs. Jefferson" whom

[he] ... finds ... physically alluring, but when they make love she is repulsive and reacts horrifyingly, expressing fear and tortured excitement to a union that should open their personalities to each other for mutual enjoyment. (56)

This is to say that just as the other students during the laboratory experiment do not find Aimee attractive, now it is Modin who does not find Mrs Jefferson sexually satisfying. Yet, she falls in love with both white women. For this reason, Ogede asks: "[a]re they [the two love affairs] meant to underscore the differences between *African* and the Western practices of sexual intercourse?" (56; emphasis in text)

To understand the thematic implications of the two love affairs, especially the consequences of Modin's encounter with the Jeffersons, Ogede, then, argues for a special kind of reading of the affair, a "stretch[ing] of the symbolism further," which is, for the purposes of this chapter, a superreading of Armah's novel. Ogede points out that:

[I]f *we stretch the symbolism further*, it is not far-fetched to interpret as snares of imperialism both Mrs. Jefferson herself and the trap that Professor Jefferson sets for Modin, when he [the Professor] uncovers the immoral affair, by organizing a party at home and inviting Modin to it. (56-7; emphasis mine)

One useful quality of superreading is *care*; that is, the capacity to demonstrate a scrupulous attention to the work. For to be careless often leads to distortions of African metafiction as Robert Fraser (1987) does in "The American Background in *Why Are We So Blest?*." In this essay Fraser adds an outrageous embellishment to his presentation of Modin's relationship with the Jeffersons, which results in a distortion of events, as follows:

Professor Jefferson, the African scholar who takes a patronizing interest in the young [Modin] ... on his arrival in the States, is impotent. Consequently it is left to the abashed and confused student to satisfy his nymphomaniac wife. When the professor discovers the betrayal, he comes after the copulating couple with a loaded shotgun, and dispatches ... [Modin] to hospital with multiple wounds. (41)

It is not correct to state that Professor Jefferson "comes after the copulating couple with a loaded shotgun." In Armah's novel, the professor *stabs* Modin with *a knife*.¹⁸ However, Modin survives his stab wounds, and the text makes it clear that the physical wounds are objective correlatives of "deeper", "spiritual" wounds:

I [Modin] find it bad that I should have run away from knowledge of the deeper wounds, the spiritual damage awaiting me in these involvements, till a physical wound forced on me the necessity to think of what my life ... has been about.
(*WAWSB?* 159)

The thrust of “these involvements,” like the one with Mrs. Jefferson, incapacitates with as much certainty as stab wounds: “[t]he friendship I [Modin] thought was most peaceful would certainly have turned out to be the most ruinous if I had not seen through it and evaded its thrust” (156-7). Modin suffers from multiple stabs of passionate agony before and after the professor stabs him. Fraser’s error then arises from the following: when he invents a “shotgun”, gets it “loaded”, and puts it in the hands of Professor Jefferson, he simultaneously unloads Armah’s text of the physical stabbing which feeds the cluster of stabbing imagery that is of importance to any meaningful discussion of *Why Are We So Blest?*.

Furthermore, Professor and Mrs. Jefferson have a daughter, Molly, who is old enough to be a graduate student (*WAWSB?* 131). Like most couples their age, the Jeffersons make love “[o]nce in a while” (154). Fraser’s categorical assertion that “Professor Jefferson ... is impotent” is not substantiated. Fraser also does not feel the need to explain why he turns Mrs. Jefferson, who uses Modin to get her husband’s attention (133, 154), into what he describes as a “nymphomaniac wife.” Still, when Fraser (1978) introduces a “black buck” (14), who, according to him “seems to be gifted with almost endless virility” (1980: 55), into the world of the “impotent” white male and the “nymphomaniac” white female, it becomes obvious that another form of stereotyping is at work here: what Armah (1977) designates as “Larsony”.¹⁹ What needs to be pointed out is that by deliberately undermining the superreader’s expectations and also challenging his presumptions, Armah in his novel signals his interest in codes that are mainly ironic and novelistic; he has put in place a specific narrative technique to achieve his ideological programme.

It is significant to explain that Armah in *Why Are We So Blest?* employs stereotypical tropes (Ogede 59, Wright 206) to achieve his ideological intentions. For example, Modin is aware of the “black buck”/ “black stud” stereotype so that he can actually joke about it: when Aimee asks him what he is studying, Modin’s answer is ““Soc. Stud.””(*WAWSB?* 175). In fact, the conversation between the African student of social studies and the (Euro-American) student of African History, which leads up to the latter’s question and the former’s answer, is a case in point:

She [Aimee] laughed, then asked me [Modin]:
“Why were they [graduate students in Psychology] so scared?”
“I thought you knew.”
She laughed again, very loud.

"You live around here?"

"Adams."

"That's close. Can I come with you?"

"When?"

"Now."

"Right now?"

She nodded. "I won't rape you. Just want to use your sink and mirror. You sharing?"

"alone."

"Good. Let's sneak in."

...

"It's nice in here," she said

"Kind of bare, but nice. I [Aimee] don't know, but I feel relaxed. You[re] a senior?"

"Yes."

"In what?"

"Soc. Stud. You?"

"History. You're West African I didn't guess. I've been to East Africa, so I'd have known."

...

"What part of West Africa?"

"Does it matter?"

"Not if it doesn't to you. Hey you're kind of mysterious."

"Was it mysterious of me to let you in?"

"I only wanted to be friends. You're not upset, are you?"

...

That's how I met her. I held the door open for her and she left. (174-6)

The Psychology graduate students have been "scared" because Aimee has shattered their assumptions, and also undermined their expectations. As one of eight "subjects" to whom "graduate ... shocks of increasing intensity" are administered to determine the "specific threshold of tolerance for pain" (170), Aimee records a level of "tolerance for pain" far beyond everybody else's. This result is contrary to "an idea of Nietzsche's ... that Africans ... [are] less sensitive to pain than Europeans" (170-1). Modin is one of the seven other "subjects," and the above conversation takes place soon after that laboratory experiment. Significantly, neither Modin nor Aimee fits the Nietzschean stereotype. In the conventional wisdom of the Psychology (white) students, both "subjects" are atypical. For this reason, the ironic reversals of stereotypical European-African roles in the laboratory are complemented by an equally ironic reversal of assumed male-female attitudes outside the laboratory. It is Aimee who assures Modin that he will not be "rape[d]"; it is she who "feel[s]" "relaxed" in his room; and it is she who is anxious to ensure that he is "not upset." In a novel that invites "[the superreader to] imagine ... [he is]

them' ” (241) -- to put himself in other people's position, to see himself as others see him -- it is not surprising that the three main characters, Modin, Aimee and Solo, act out the novel's (reverse) crossover and ironic reversal motifs. In this way, and implicitly suggesting that *Why Are We So Blest?* is intended for both a dual (black and white) superreadership, Ogede says that Armah “use[s] stereotyping to underscore the superficial interactions between Blacks and Whites that preclude one race's knowing the other beyond the levels of the racial stereotypes each holds about the other” (59).

The journey motif²⁰ in *Why Are We So Blest?* needs comment. This is necessary because the notion of the journey in literature often implies that returning to the point of initial departure, the travellers rejoin the community they call home. Moreover, the journey outward results in lucidity, or self-understanding. The heroes and heroines return wiser and, as mature individuals, will assume their position within the community. However, this does not happen in the case of Modin and Solo. What, in fact, happens to these two African characters is directly the opposite of the philosophical implications of the journey, which are often “equivalen[t to] a philosophical or simply initiating purpose.”²¹ This is to say that while Modin and Solo are away in America and France, respectively, they only learn about the ways of the white man, which, in fact, make them “come[...] back home scarred in body and soul.”²² Thus their spiritual and emotional scars do not eventually prepare these two characters for anything meaningful at home.

Solo's experiences in Portugal with Sylvia need further comment: in Portugal, the perception of the whites is that Solo is much a type of “sickness” (*WASB?* 38) as the unnamed “white woman” in Kansa. At La Cova in Lisbon, Solo had given his Portuguese girl-friend, Sylvia, “a small silver ring” (62) as a token of love. “A small group, three men and a woman, watching [them] with undisguised attention” (63), did not like what they saw. The woman in the group, Maria, spoke for the rest:

She ... stopped directly in front of Sylvia.

“What is it you want?” Sylvia asked.

“You know very well what it is we want,” the woman said. “What you are doing is very foolish.”

...

“I will not talk about that”, Sylvia said.

“And why not?”

“It is something personal.”

“But to the stranger you open yourself, Sylvia,” the woman said.

“Speak to me. What *sickness* is this?.” (64-5; emphasis mine)

It is instructive to note that the African, Mzee Nyambura, and the Portuguese, Maria, both use the

word "sickness" to describe relationships they object to. The isolated outsider in Kansa or Portugal is perceived as the convenient embodiment of "fears-unknown" (168) -- fears which the dominant group would, literally, rather not know. Metaphorically, the outsider is a type of "sickness." And the cure for this "sickness" is excision -- with Modin's eventual castration by the white men in the desert as its macabre equivalent. From such ramifications of the three journeys in the novel, that is, Solo's and Modin's (to the West) and Aimee's (to Africa), one can argue, as Ogede does, that "Armah could be said to be engaged in some myth making, using one myth to destroy another" (59).

Why Are We So Blest? suggests that in the immediate context of relationships between Africans and Europeans, and in the larger one of Africa's relationship with the West, "privilege" and "destruction" are intertwined. As Solo puts it:

The man in me [Solo]: the African absorbed into Europe, trying to escape death, eager to shed privilege, not knowing how deep the destruction has eaten into him hoping to achieve a healing juncture with his destroyed people. There is still a part of me, closer to the girl [Aimee], the consumer of experience, user of people. She played at love: her aim was survival, not union: to survive, a possessor of the experience, not its victim. (232)

Now, in dealing with this subject -- relationships between Africa[ns] and Europe[ans] -- Armah's ambivalence mirrors the ambiguity that characterizes such relationships. The language of *Why Are We So Blest?* is markedly characterised by ambivalence, ambiguity, and variations on these words. Solo is said to have been "lost in this story of the ambiguity of love, of its closeness to hate" (28), for according to him:

Love. A fusion, a confusion, of the self with an other self. With terrifyingly different, *other*,²³ selves a terrifying case of love. (139; emphasis in text)

Fraser points out that Aimee should not be regarded "as an individual person, but as a matrix for all those vices which Modin comes to see as most characteristic of white America" (56). In the same vein Wright suggests another dimension to Aimee's role in Armah's text, which, unfortunately, is symptomatic of a misunderstanding of the novel's intended audience. He relies on a facile notion of realism and, then, arrives at the following inconclusive remarks:

At the realistic level, *the characterization of Aimee outrages the reader's desire for objectivity* and fair play as well as his common sense, and it seems more plausible to regard ... [Aimee] as a generic concept, an artificial construct harbouring the collected vices and neuroses of her country, that the character coheres, and its origins are neither literary nor African but are to be found in black American polemics of the 1960s. (209; emphasis mine)



3. *Our Sister Killjoy*: "A Fiction in Four Episodes"

It has been suggested throughout this study that the comments which most African authors make about their work are often relevant to a meaningful criticism of African fiction. Aidoo's (1990) remarks to James that *Our Sister Killjoy* "is a fiction in four episodes" (15) are such useful comments in explaining both narrative technique and the institution of readership in *Our Sister Killjoy*, as has already been noted. However, there are other comments that Aidoo makes that are meaningful in explaining the relevance of *Our Sister Killjoy* to this study. In the same interview, James asks Aidoo to suggest if there are any "[African authors] who have been significant in ... [her] development" as a writer. Aidoo's reply is, as follows:

There are significant voices. These male African writers who have been propped up for our [Africans'] attention, we cannot ignore them -- Ngugi, Achebe, Armah. Because these are the ones who have been made available to us, we cannot ignore them. (19)

Aidoo's response to James' query implicitly decries the absence, it seems to Aidoo, of a balanced criticism of African female authors such as Aidoo herself; she, in fact, censures what J. M. Nfah-Abbenyi (1997) describes as Aidoo's dissatisfaction with "the blatant exclusionary practices and lack of attention from the world of (predominantly male) critics, both African and non-African" (3).²⁵ For this reason, it is only appropriate that a study such as this which approaches African fiction from a fresh perspective (that is, the interrogation of narrative technique and audience positions in African literature) ought to examine *Our Sister Killjoy*.

While it is not in the interest of this study to discuss in detail the aspect of language in African literature, it is useful, nevertheless, to note that both male and female African writers have always been concerned about the function of language in African literature. Aidoo would certainly agree with Adrienne Rich's (1979) discomfort with the "language that has lied about us [women]" (13), which is the feminist's variation on Ngugi's (1986) irritation over "colonial" languages. The African woman writer who uses English, French, or Portuguese as her medium of expression writes with what Andrea Dworkin (1974) describes as a "broken tool" (26). Dworkin's own attempt at "re-inventing" language reminds one of Achebe's (1975) interest in fashioning out an "English language [that] will be able to carry the weight of my [Achebe's/ African writer's] African experience" (62). For Rich, Ngugi, Dworkin and Achebe, the re-assessment of the very life-blood of literature, language (as Solo puts it in *Why Are We So Blest?*-- "that most important first act of creation, that re-arrangement without which all attempts at creation are doomed"

[231]) -- is critical indeed. Significantly, this “re-arrangement” is a function of the revisionist thrust of feminist and postcolonial African literatures. She who has been consistently displaced and misplaced now reads and writes, as Terry Eagleton (1983) would say, “in a way which revises, displaces and recasts the precursor [canon] ... so that [she] clears a space for [her] own imaginative originality” (183).

It would appear to be the case, then, that while the particulars of race and/ or gender²⁶ inhibit hasty generalizations, there are, upon closer examination, some significant points of convergence -- particularly in the areas of the function of language and the contextual approach to criticism. However, a more specific than general question remains to be explored: how the African female writer defines herself and her readership in relation to the male-dominated “tradition” of African literature at one extreme, and Western-inspired feminism, at the other. A discussion of *how* narrative technique in *Our Sister Killjoy* constructs its intended readership must, therefore, include a consideration of this question.

Our Sister Killjoy does not just signal how the text ought to be read in a general sort of way; it, in fact, intimates particular reading strategies as these are entailed in the languages which the text employs. These languages are the symbolist/ imagist, archetypal,²⁷ and psychoanalytic. To begin with, Cooper makes useful comments that assist to fruitfully examine narrative technique in Aidoo’s text; her comments also assist to identify the superreadership in *Our Sister Killjoy*. Her comments suggest that in order to identify the superreader of Aidoo’s novel, one needs to locate it, as Cooper herself does, in its historical and political contexts, for it is from these contexts that *Our Sister Killjoy* not only finds its intertwined aspects of form and content, but also its super-readership:

Although published only in the late 1970s, *Our Sister Killjoy* was written in the 1960s, when Africans experienced horrified disillusionment with the promises that independence had so exhilaratingly offered. *It speaks almost exclusively to black intellectual men about their role and duty, as Aidoo interprets it, in the face of this betrayal of promise. It is these brothers whom she sees as the potential solution.* Within this framework, then, ordinary people are prevented from perceiving the social and economic realities that divide them from their ‘scholarship brothers,’ and women are constrained in their struggles against the patriarchy. (87; emphasis mine)

The “intellectual men” that Aidoo’s text “speaks ... to” are, in fact, sophisticated readers such as Nkosi and Odamtten -- the “been-tos”. These are “the brothers,” to use Cooper’s words, who are able to read the four-part structure (or “four episodes,” as Aidoo tells James) of *Our Sister Killjoy*

as an archetypal journey. It is, in fact, such superreaders that are able to provide a superreading of Aidoo's text as a search for the meaning of existence in a space where almost everything seems illusory.

It has already been suggested that Aidoo's text deploys the journey motif; that *Our Sister Killjoy* should be read as a journey/ an initiation. In Aidoo's novel this journey/ initiation begins at home with Sissie's fare-well party where she meets Sammy, a young Ghanaian who, according to the narrator, "laughed all the time: even when there was nothing to laugh at" (9). Sammy epitomises the stereotypical happy and servile colonial subject, and his manner upsets Sissie. However, as a journey into "whiteness," it is useful for the superreader to start to *superread Our Sister Killjoy* from the beginning. The text's full title, "Our Sister Killjoy, or Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint," tells a story that anticipates *the* story; it suggests ambiguity in "[b]lack-[e]yed [s]quint." This ambiguity, in fact, points to textual strategies, which are central to the text's concerns. The protagonist is "black-eyed" because she is "black"/ "brown" -- the epithet transference turns a brown-eyed black girl/ woman into a black-eyed brown girl/ woman -- and metaphorically "beaten" ("she has suffered, the African [woman]. Allah, how she has suffered" (123). Her squint is both paradoxical and ambiguous: she is neither necessarily "cross-eyed" nor "spiteful"; but having closeted for so long, she has out of necessity, developed the ability to "see with half an eye" -- to see things or understand situations with ease because they are so obvious to everybody. "Reflections" from this "[b]lack-eyed [s]quint" are, therefore, meant to be as curious to the intended reader of Aidoo's text as they are paradoxical. Indeed these "reflections" also turn out to be as unnerving as they are ambiguous, again, to the superreader.

Perhaps it is worth repeating that the plot of Aidoo's text is structured on an archetypal journey. This journey is Sissie's to Europe as a member of an international volunteer organization called "INVOLU" (33); she eventually finds work in Germany in a Bavarian nursery. On arrival in Germany one of Sissie's immediate reactions to whites is telling:

So she walked along in her gay, gold and leafy brown cloth, looking, feasting her village eyes.

Cloths. Perfume. Flowers. Fruits.

Then polished steel. Polished tin. Polished brass. Cut glass. Plastic.

As Sissie moved among what was around, saw their shine and glitter, she told herself that this must be where those 'Consumer Goods' [back home in Africa] *trickled from, to delight* so much the hearts of the folks at home. Except that here, there were not only a million times more, but also a thousand times better.

Music. Sounds. Noises.

So many different noises mixed together. (12; emphasis mine)

Sissie's education begins here. First there is a hint of her awareness of the dynamics of imperialism -- there is plenty and more of the "[c]onsumer [g]foods" at the centre/ metropolises and little and even less of the same items at the margins/ peripheries. There is also a sense of bitterness in this awareness: notice that there is irony in the phrase "[a trickle of 'Consumer Goods'] to delight so much of the hearts of the folks at home." The point here, according to Sissie, is that if the "folks at home" were aware of what was happening at the centre, perhaps their delight would have been much less. If the superreader ponders in retrospect Sammy's behaviour at the embassy's fare-well party for Sissie before she leaves for Europe -- remember that Sammy "had ... [already] been [to Europe] and seemed to have stayed [there] for a long time" (9) -- against Sissie's immediate impressions of Europe, the conclusion would be to agree with the definition of the "been-to" in Aidoo's text which has already been discussed. As it is, the "been-to" is a buffoon indeed, for at the "small dinner in ... [Sissie's] honour" (8) at the ambassador's home, it is said that:

Sammy laughed all the time: even when there was nothing to laugh at. Or when ... [Sissie] thought there was nothing to laugh at.

And when he was not laughing loudly, he carried a somewhat [not genuine, that is] permanent look of well-being on his face, supported by a fixed [not natural] smile

Perhaps he had been invited to the dinner just to sing of the wonders of Europe?

He spoke their language well and was familiar with them in a way that made her feel uneasy.

Our Sister shivered and fidgeted in her chair

Time was to bring ... [Sissie] many. And they always affected her in the same way. (9)

Sammy, as Odamtten says, "epitomises the stereotypical happy and servile colonial subject." Indeed, "[t]he rather uncomfortable meeting with Sammy, one of the many she is to meet on her journey into the *blank whiteness*, is only the beginning of her education and maturation" (122; emphasis mine). This means that the statement "[a]nd they always affected her in the same way" is supposed to signal to the superreader Sissie's subsequent negative reactions to the African "brothers" she would meet in Europe.²⁸ Most importantly, it is as though whatever Sissie was going to find in Europe, it was not going to change the village girl's vision of the world. Her mind-set is already against the "been-to". This, therefore, means that some of the results of

Sissie's journey to Europe serves merely to confirm what she had already thought about both the "been-to" in Europe as well as Europe itself.

Cooper notes that racism in Aidoo's novel has problematic thematic implications. She explains that *Our Sister Killjoy* "is ... flawed by a corrosive ethnicity which muffles gender oppression and wipes out class differences."²⁹ Perhaps one of the problems Aidoo's text has with respect to race relations is what Cooper describes as the "crude paradigm of neo-colonial dependency" (88). An example of this in *Our Sister Killjoy* is, as follows:

How can a
Nigger rule well
Unless his
Balls and purse are
Clutched in
Expert White Hands? (56)

This "anti-foreigner syndrome," says Cooper, has a resultant black exclusivism which is more often than not expressed in "the familiar symbols and poetry of Negritude" (88). An instance of how white culture is described along these lines is the following in a letter to "my dear brother":

My dear brother,

I [Sissie] have been to a cold strange land where dogs and cats eat better than many children;

Where men would sit at table and eat with animals, and yet would rather die than shake the hands of other men.

Where women who say they have no time to bear children and spoil their lives would sit for many hours and feed baby dogs delicate food with spoons, and make coats to cover the hairy animals from the same cloth they wear, as sisters and brothers and friends in our village would do on festive occasions.

My brother, I have been to a land where they treat animals like human beings and some human beings like animals because they are not.

Dumb enough. (OS 99)

It is instructive, therefore, to note that the "kind of ethnic and corrosive imagery" in *Our Sister Killjoy*, says Cooper, "forms the poetic and thematic framework of the book" and also that in Aidoo's text "Blacks are shown to love people, not things or places as whites do" (89).

The point, then, is that neither Sissie who embarks on the journey, the Europe she visits and leaves behind later, nor the Africa she departs from and returns to, remain the same, for the first leg of Sissie's journey corresponds to the first section of the text, "Into a Bad Dream". The writing that characterizes this section, in fact, resembles much of the writing of the entire text. It is "concatenated" (to use Solo's description of Modin's notebook). For instance, the first page has a phrase "[i]nto a bad dream," which is the title of the first section of the text. Yet, this title is

followed with a blank page and the blank page, in turn, is followed by an independent clause -- “[t]hings are working out” (*OS* 3). On the next page there is, again, an incomplete sentence -- “towards their dazzling conclusions” (4; note that the three dots are in the text). It is only on the next page that the superreader begins to make sense of the previous “concatenated” two lines because on this page there is what looks like a stanza from a poem:

... so it is neither here nor there,
what ticky-tackies we have
saddled and surrounded ourselves with,
blocked our views, cluttered our brains. (5)

If one “quickly” reads the first two lines, which are under discussion and, then, ends the reading with the above stanza (without pausing between the pages), one realises that the section “Into a Bad Dream” opens with a short poem of six lines. This, then, is the kind of careful reading that Aidoo’s text requires if the superreader has to make meaningful conclusions about the net effect of some aspects of narrative technique in *Our Sister Killjoy* such as the blank pages, concatenated sentences and dots (suggesting pauses). The point to note is that these aspects of narrative technique in *Our Sister Killjoy* give this metanovel an extra dimension; they show that Aidoo’s text is a verbal object that has a complex structure. In this way, as the superreader superreads this metanovel, narrative technique ultimately produces a “dazzling” effect (to use the text’s own word) on the intended reader’s intellectual faculties.³⁰

It is significant to mention that it is at the levels of the journey and the dream that *Our Sister Killjoy* begins to take on the dimensions of the archetype. It is also important to note that the conjunction of the journey and the dream motifs in Aidoo’s text clearly invite a superreading as these motifs resound with psychoanalytic implications and, as such, require a psychological interpretation in particular (Odamtten 125). In the case of the journey, the superreader will see that the journey in Aidoo’s text is two-dimensional: first, there is the physical journey from Africa to Europe and, secondly, there is also a psychological/ spiritual passage. Significantly, there is the need also for the superreader to explore the extent to which the physical journey is internalised and, whether or not, there is, on Sissie’s part, a feeling of guilt in all that she does.

In the next section of *Our Sister Killjoy*, Sissie is already in Europe and the title of this second section is significantly called “The Plums.” As will be seen, this title is both sensuously suggestive and eminently symbolic. For instance, the superreader familiar with Helen Chasin’s (1986) “The Word Plum” should find this poem useful to a discussion of Aidoo’s choice of “plums” as section-title. To begin with, the following is Chasin’s poem:

The word plum is delicious
pout and push, luxury of
self-love, and savouring murmur
full in the mouth and falling
like fruit
taut skin
pierced, bitten, provoked into
juice and tart flesh
question and reply, lip and tongue
of pleasure.

In *Our Sister Killjoy* Sissie turns out to be the “plum” of Marija’s eyes. The German house-wife feeds her African female acquaintance with the juicy fruit, plum, and, occasionally, with other “plump” delicacies:

So she sat, Our Sister, her tongue caressing the plump berries with skin-colour almost like her own, while Marija told her how she had selected them specially for her, off the single tree in the garden. (*OS* 40)³¹

As was earlier the case with the Akan names in *Why Are We So Blest?*, Owusu, again, draws attention here to the inside Akan superreadership as a specific category within the superreadership, which now includes Aidoo herself, Nfah-Abbenyi and Odamtten that should be the subgroup of the superreadership of *Our Sister Killjoy*. In the case of Aidoo’s text, however, this observation would seem to support Odamtten’s comment in the epigraph to this chapter: that “Aidoo initially targets a broad spectrum of Ghana’s elite.”

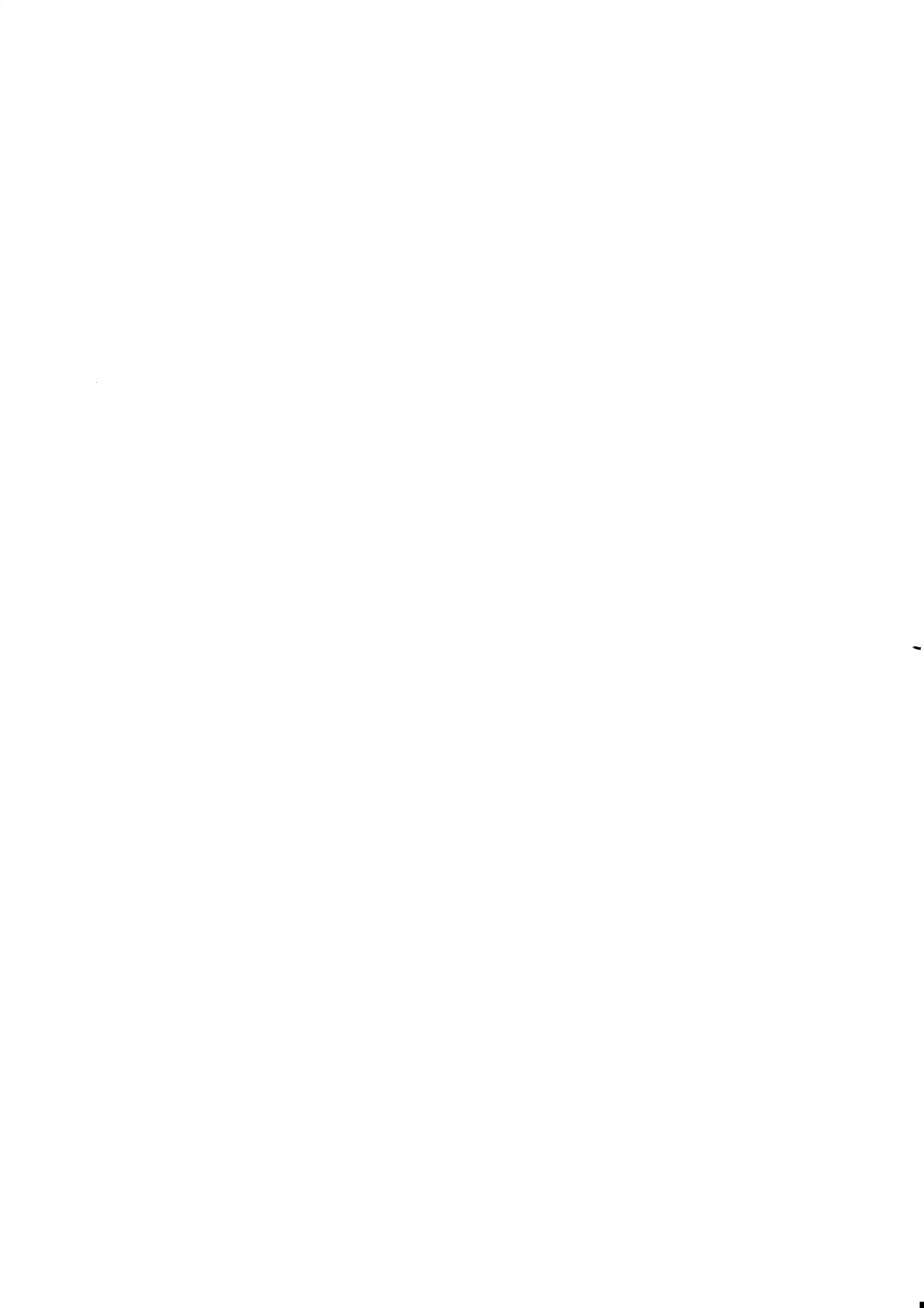
“Plums,” it is worth noting, are actually mentioned early in Aidoo’s novel, as follows:

When Sissie managed to convince Marija that she had to return to the youth hostel, Marija immediately produced two brown paper-bags, filled with apples, pears, tomatoes, and plums.

But
The plums.
What plums.
Such plums. (*OS* 38)

Cooper then connects the associations of the symbol of the plums with the significance of a passage in *Our Sister Killjoy* and comes up with an illuminating observation on Aidoo’s text, as will be seen. The passage in Aidoo’s text which strikes Cooper is the following:

But just where and when the sun came to chase the moon away, Our Sister thought she had heard the music of the spheres. The Alps at six o’clock in the morning. *Grey rocks, more grey rocks. One huge grey rock Is it really possible that any part of the earth can also reach so high in the sky? Sissie was overwhelmed*, a lowland born. Wondering if this was not the beginning of the world and amoeba yet to be. (*OS* 11; emphasis mine)



Cooper begins her point by observing that the above passage is about Sissie's naivety; that here Sissie's "hard narrowness is nudged by a sense of the wonder of travel, the beauty of nature and the joys of youth" (95). She further suggests that if the implications of the symbol of the plums are examined in the context of Sissie's youthful vision of nature, the result is that there is the possibility of "risk[ing] a mixed metaphor [which] cracks this hard, cemented-up novel of cultural nationalism." Significantly, "Munich may be merely a place to meet a brother," Cooper continues, "but the music of the spheres is not entirely silenced." In fact, according to Cooper, this "music of the spheres" "is audible most particularly through the strange, evocative symbol of the plums" (95).

It is important to explain that "The Plums" section explores what the poem describes as the "power to decide," which is the topic of the poem that ends the first section of the novel, as follows:

But what she also came to know was that someone somewhere would always
 see in any kind of difference, an excuse to be mean.
 A way to get land, land, more land
 Gold and silver mines,
 Oil
 Uranium
 Plutonium
 Any number of ums --
 Clothes to cover skins,
 Jewels to adorn,
 Houses for shelter, to lie down and sleep
 A sharper ring to commands.
 Power, Child, Power.
 For this is all anything is about.
Power to decide
 Who is to live,
 Who is to die. (OS 13; emphasis mine)

This "[p]ower to decide" and the knowledge "that someone somewhere would always see in any kind of difference, an excuse to be mean" alludes to, and, in fact, foretells Sissie's future in Europe. Central, too, in this section is the relationship between Marija and Sissie. Marija's ignorance of other races/ peoples is brought to the fore when she asks Sissie if she is Indian:

"Are you Indian?" she asked Sissie.
 "No," she replied --
 Knowing she could be
 Except for the hair.

She might have heard her answer. She might have not. But she was speaking on, the words tumbling out of her mouth as though she had planned out the meeting

and even drafted the introductory remarks.

“Yes, I like zem weri much. The Indians. Zey verkt in ze supermarket. Zey ver weri nice.”

“Which Indians?”

“Ze two. It vas before last vinter. For a long time. And zen zey left. I like zem weri much.”

Sissie guessed they might have been male. (19-20)

Significantly, in this section of Aidoo’s text there seems to be some sarcasm directed at Marija: apart from thinking that Sissie is Indian Marija thinks, too, that Ghana is near Canada:

“I really like ze two Indians who verkt in ze supermarket,” [Marija] insisted

“Zo ver is Ghana?”

“West Africa. The capital is called Accra.”

“Ah ja, ja, ja that is ze country zey have the President Nukurumah, ja?”

“Yes.”

“My name is Marija. But me, I like ze English name Mary. Please call me Mary. Vas is your name?”

“My name? My name is Sissie. But they used to call me Mary too. In School.”

“Mary ... Mary ... Máry. Did you say in School zey call you Mary?”

“Yes.”

“Like me?”

“Yes.”

“Vai?”

“I come from a Christian family. It is the name they gave me when they baptized me. It is also good for school and work and being a lady.”

“Mary, Mary ... and you an African?”

“Yes.”

“But that is a German name!” said Marija. (24)

Though Marija cannot understand why Sissie should have been called Mary in school, the super-reader is not left in doubt about the whys and wherefores. In case the superreader thinks that the narrator/ Bird of the Wayside only wishes to catalogue the sins of various oppressors, the vitriolic intensity of her “reflections from a black-eyed squint” gradually turn to the evolving relationship between Marija and Sissie. Their association, founded on their mutual sense of isolation, it seems, becomes the talk of the town.

Lemuel Johnson (1987) writes about “[t]he ubiquitous reading of the female body in terms of hunger ... and availability” (241). Along these lines the superreader can point out that Sissie is available and Marija is hungry. Yet, there will be neither rising action nor climax in this situation because Marija and Sissie are female. Lesbianism, then, may just be a possibility in the future; but for now Sissie is wholly unprepared for it. She beats a hasty retreat emotionally, quite content, it seems, to eat “literal” plums. And, if, as Katherine Frank (1987) says that the “logical outcome”

of “feminist separatism ... [is] lesbianism” (15), then Sissie is not yet ready for such a condition. Whatever thematic implications this section of *Our Sister Killjoy* may have, it seems to have been worked out in such a way that it provides the superreader with symbolist and imagist entry points to it. Indeed, what this chapter raises here is precisely what Odamtten, who is Akan, provides in his superreading of some of the “strangely Freudian and surrealist” implications of the meeting between Sissie and Marija (125).

As has already been noted, the deployment of two genres -- prose and poetry -- in *Our Sister Killjoy* complicates the narration in the text. The text, in fact, warns the reader that it is not for “those for whom things were only what they seemed” (OS 79). This is why Arlene Elder (1987) observes that *Our Sister Killjoy*’s “unusual typography ... suggests” Aidoo’s interest in “something other than the conventional novel” (110). However, in spite of this awareness, Elder’s impatience with the text’s unconventionality is surprisingly apparent:

The narrative proper does not begin until page 8. Preceding the story are several pages of curiously spaced, conversational observations Page 6 is only three-quarters filled with prose; pages 5 and 7 are shaped like poems; and pages 3 and 4 consist of only one line apiece. (110)

Indeed, there is really almost no “narrative proper” in *Our Sister Killjoy* as such: the text defines itself as “improper” because it is metafiction. As was the case earlier with *Why Are We So Blest?*, Aidoo’s “[un]conventional novel” equally requires a particular kind of reading, which is super-reading, as has already been noted. Given the nature of Aidoo’s text, it is hardly surprising to note that the blank spaces on those pages of *Our Sister Killjoy* Elder refers to speak volumes. It seems, therefore, that Aidoo mixes forms of verse with prose in her text partly because she has some prosaic things to say about silences. Thus if, as Ellman (1984) says, a “woman’s place is to be out of place, perpetually displaced by a discourse that depends on her effacement,” then the blank space signifies “the vagrant gap where woman does not appear, does not *take place*” (100; emphasis in text).

Johnson’s remarks on “Caribbean Female Ancients” say a bit more to what is at issue here: Johnson points out that the “Caribbean Female Ancients ... represent not continuity as such ..., but rupture; they mark the gaps, discontinuities, indeed, the ambiguity of bridges in the Caribbean experience of the past” (233). The desire to find out “equivalent[s]” for Aidoo’s blank spaces that “serve as a bridge in the narrative” (Elder 112-13) is seemingly motivated by Elder’s own need for a comforting, mainstreaming “bridge” where its absence is indeed the point *Our Sister Killjoy* makes. “Rupture” and “discontinuities” are a function of Aidoo’s language. And “the ambiguity

96; emphasis mine). As a superreader, Cooper often reads carefully; she is usually able to fill in the gaps in *Our Sister Killjoy*, thereby making the most meaningful thematic linkages as when she explains that “[i]n the pages of poetry [in *Our Sister Killjoy*] which follow [the above], the image is extended to include West Indians and Negroes” (97).

It must be emphasised that in Aidoo’s text, the multiple *narrative languages* often suggest that style is much an indicator of the mood of a fictional character or an individual in the real world (“the worse Marija felt, the more Germanic was her English” [OS 77]) as it is an indicator of the African metanovelist’s stance on both art and life (“we have to have *our* own secret language. *We* must create this language ... [s]o that *we* [can] make love with words” [116; emphasis mine]). Yet, for now, this language is politicised and historicized, and carries the burden of “rupture” and “discontinuities”:

*A common heritage. A
Dubious bargain that left us
Plundered of
Our gold
Our tongue
Our life -- while
Dead fingers clutch
English -- a
Doubtful weapon fashioned
Elsewhere to give might to a
Soul that is already
Fled.* (28-9; emphasis mine)

The “soul that is already fled” is now the nature of the African “been-to” because he does not have a meaningful language. The colonial language -- “English [French and Portuguese]” -- that he possesses is not an adequate “weapon” for self-assertion and, as such, the African “been-to” is, therefore, the “ghost” that was explained at the beginning of this chapter. Thus the above poem brings this chapter full-circle to the definition of the African “been-to” as problematised in the two metatexts this study examines. The point, nevertheless, is that in the fictional world of Aidoo’s text, the “history” of language is an ultimate tragedy, and the dialectical thrust of the language in *Our Sister Killjoy* is a means to this ultimate end. Multiple registers, then, reflect the variety of fictional modes that Aidoo incorporates into the text; that although the archetypal, psychoanalytic and symbolist/ imagist languages appear to be different, they are, in fact, related. Thus the very process that emphasises multiplicity also foregrounds simultaneity.

It is significant to reiterate that reference has also been made in a different but related context to the epistolary form which characterises the fourth section of *Our Sister Killjoy*. Yet, if as Abrams points out “[a]nother important precursor of the novel ... [is] the picaresque narrative” (119), then Sissie’s “adventures” in Africa and Europe make up and impinge upon the structure of Aidoo’s text as a *Bildungsroman*³⁴ because of the episodic structuring of Sissie’s “adventures” as well as the formative/ educational import of her experiences. For the protagonist’s trip abroad is meant to be educational since her experiences in Germany and England in particular force her to face up to and accept, first, her identity and, second, her role in the scheme of things.

The episodes and Sissie’s “adventures” in *Our Sister Killjoy*, it may be necessary to explain, are saved from the limitations³⁵ of the picaresque mode through the protagonist’s “reflections” which transfer the experiences in Africa and Europe to the steady flow of the (inner) seascape of her mental life. Those “reflections” usually find expression in interior monologue or stream of consciousness and account for the text’s poetic impressionism. Aidoo provides a mixture of fictional forms which is intended to be superread as an admixture of the “old” (epistolary and picaresque modes) and “modern” (the stream of consciousness technique). Although the old/ new and traditional/ modern themes come up with predictable regularity in African literature, Aidoo’s perspective on these themes in *Our Sister Killjoy* is as different as it is refreshing.

The co-existence of prose and verse-forms in the world of fiction is both “old” and “new,” “traditional” and “modern” does not need much emphasis. This is precisely what Elder means when she points out that “there are passages” in Aidoo’s text that are “written in poetic form, like the songs interspersed throughout the oral performance of a folk tale.” Elder, quoting Okechukwu Mezu, buttresses her point, as follows:

‘When children gather to listen to stories, yarns and fairy-tales from their grand-parents, they listen to pieces interspersed with rhymes, lyrics and choruses One of the interesting aspects of traditional African civilization is the unity of the art forms.’ (111)

If, as has already been suggested, Aidoo is conscious of modernist and postmodernist trends, she, therefore, seems to be fascinated, at least, in part with the unity of apparently disparate art forms (celebrated in *Ulysses*, for instance) and the coupling of poetry and prose commentary (as in *Pale Fire*) because she has been literally brought up on African proto-types of coupling and/ or “unity of ... art forms.” It would appear, then, that Aidoo somehow sees the future of African meta-novelists such as Armah and herself, and their superreaderships, as a judicious return to an African tradition that has always underscored the fundamental unity of the vast continuum of

verbal discourses. For this reason, Aidoo's text needs meaningful critical attention, as this chapter shows.

4. Superreading the African Metanovel

This chapter demonstrates that the African metanovel is indeed a very unusual text both in African literature as well as in the literary careers of its authors. The chapter has also shown that the singularity of the African metanovel should often be noted primarily on two levels, which are usually a complex narrative technique and a sophisticated intended readership. In this way, the chapter then suggests that a meaningful criticism of African metafiction should focus on this corresponding *qualitative* relationship between narrative technique and superreadership in African metafiction.

However, on the level of narrative technique, the chapter has shown that there is often a contradiction in the African metanovelist's literary ideology; that in spite of the attacks on the West in African metafiction, there are several aspects of the African metanovel that are, in fact, related to/ borrowed from Western modernist writing. This contradiction, the chapter postulates, will remain unresolved for as long as African writers continue to use aspects of Western forms of writing. In tandem, the chapter has argued that the incidence of the African metanovel inheres a far-reaching contradiction; that because of its sophisticated narrative technique, the African metanovel consequently limits its intended readership. In this way, Armah in *Why Are We So Blest?* ceases to be "a profoundly democratic artist," as Fraser thinks in the first epigraph at the beginning of this chapter.

A similar stricture could be made about *Our Sister Killjoy*. For, if Aidoo's novel, as Cooper explains, is "essentially about the grouping ... Armah [in *Why Are We So Blest?*] call[s] 'the blest': the privileged, brilliant recipients of overseas scholarships, the educated elite of independent Africa," then *Our Sister Killjoy*, equally "speaks almost *exclusively* to black intellectual men (one may actually add women also) -- ['the blest'] -- about their role and duty" (87; emphasis mine), which is the reconstruction of the African continent.

The regeneration of the African continent is often related to African politics, which is the interest of African political fiction. Interestingly, narrative technique and readership in the African political novel are so inextricably intertwined that one of the themes in the African political texts this study examines is, in fact, the intended readership of African political novels such as *A Man of the People* and *Petals of Blood*, to which the thesis now turns.

NOTES

1. Aidoo, 1977: 89-90. Subsequent references are to this edition, preceded by *OS* where appropriate and are incorporated into the text. The typography of all passages/ poetry cited from *Our Sister Killjoy* is the same in the thesis as in the original. The spacing/ margins between lines/ words may, therefore, baffle the average reader who may not be familiar with Aidoo's intentions in *Our Sister Killjoy* as well as the way in which the typography of Aidoo's text is rendered/ cited in this thesis.
2. Commentators usually trace the origin of this concept to Hegel through Marx. Albert *et al.* explain that "Marx adopts Hegel's moral concept of *alienation* and gives it a materialistic interpretation by contrasting alienated labour with ... productive activity" (221; emphasis mine). In this way, commentators point out, Marx was able to arrive at what he describes as the distortions of human nature caused by the structure of capitalist society. However, this is not exactly the way this chapter uses the term to explain the social/ psychological condition of African "been-to" characters such as Modin and Solo. In this chapter alienation is understood in the way Ashcroft *et al.* ascribe it to what they designate as "[d]iscourses of marginality such as race, gender, psychological 'normalcy', geographical and social distance ... [and] political exclusion" (104); it is used in this chapter to mean a dislocation of "vision and the crisis in self-image," which is often due to the African "been-to"'s contact with a powerful "centre" (9). The result of this contact is often the African "been-to" being cut off both from his own normal/ ordinary self as well as from his own African background/ home. That is why Wright (1989) is apt to say of both Modin and Solo that "[t]he *lonely* pondering minds of its [*Why Are We So Blest?*'s] Anglophone [Modin] and Lusophone [Solo] narrators record *no family ties and few memories of home*" (187; emphasis mine). Although this may not be said about Sissie in *Our Sister Killjoy*, the same condition could be true with respect to the other "been-to" characters such as Sammy and Kunle in Aidoo's text.
3. It is significant to note that although Nkosi rightly suggests that African texts such as *The Interpreters* and *This Earth, My Brother* require a particular kind of reading, he, nevertheless, fails to fully explain the kind/ quality of this reading he has in mind. He is correct, indeed, to

suggest that the focus/ attention of that reading should be “narrative form” and “technique” in the African texts he cites; he, however, still fails to recognise that the significance of both narrative form and technique in fiction could only be satisfactorily explored in relation to the reader. In this way, Nkosi’s remarks on these fascinating African texts are merely suggestive/ speculative.

4. Perhaps the other Ghanaian novel with which to compare *Our Sister Killjoy* is Awoonor’s *This Earth, My Brother*. Strikingly, these two texts share unusual typography and structure. In particular, the two texts also alternate poetry with prose in their structures. However, while the typography in Aidoo’s novel is choppy, in Awoonor’s text, the author standardizes the typography by confining his poeticising to the “Prologue” and chapter-fragments “1a” to “12a” and ensuring that the fifteen main chapters read like “normal prose.” It is also instructive to note that if one considers the implications of drama in Aidoo’s notion of “four episodes” to refer to the structure of her text, Griffiths’ (1987) remarks on Soyinka’s work and *This Earth, My Brother* also hold true for *Our Sister Killjoy* and, thus, emphasise the reason why Aidoo’s text deserves to be examined in this thesis. According to Griffiths:

Soyinka’s later plays and novel and ... *This Earth, My Brother* may be seen to exist by virtue of undoing themselves as forms, forcing the socio-cultural constraints of the patronage system which sustain them to betray their limitations. (25)

5. Cooper’s (1992b) remarks about the authorial as well as literary ideologies of Armah and Aidoo once again allow this study to compare Aidoo with African male authors. She says that:

Aidoo clearly belongs to a school of African fiction writers which includes ... Armah and others who see the primary political function of their work as resisting the cultural imperialism that has engendered so much self-hatred in *the colonised*. (98; emphasis mine)

6. In the context of African literature, Owusu’s concept should be understood, as follows:

When Achebe, for example, informs Anna Rutherford that ‘one of the key issues’ in ... *Antihills of the Savannah* is ‘the very nature of the story,’ he draws attention to ... [a] story which concerns itself with its own ‘very nature,’ literally ... [a story which] analyses itself; but if this were all, then we would not be saying anything that has been said about ‘involved fiction’ ... [n]or would we be parting company

with the related term 'self-reflexive fiction' The extent of the involution or self-reflexivity of the African novel to date is confined to a delineation or dramatisation of the fictiveness of the fiction. (46-7)

Owusu further clarifies his notion when he points out that "*Antihills of the Savannah* is not concerned only with the 'nature of [its] story'"; that "there is more: the text's 'exploration' is one 'of [both] the story and the story-teller'" (47).

7. Significantly, Owusu's thesis discusses the two African metanovels this study examines; the discussion is under the following relevant headings: "*Why Are We So [Read]?: A Question of Fiction-Analysing [Why Are We So Blest?]*" and "Canons Under Siege: [...] Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*" (viii).
8. Armah, 1974: 97-9. Subsequent references are to this edition, preceded by *WASB?* where appropriate and are incorporated into the text.
9. Perhaps deliberately or unfortunately unaware of some of the work already done on Armah's novel, Maja-Pearce, repeats the same error Booth commits. According to her, Solo is "the snivelling ... [and] otherwise dispassionate narrator" in *Why Are We So Blest?* (21).
10. Booth adds that in Armah's novel:

[t]he characters ... seem somehow permanent: realistic but also larger than life. They have symbolic names to imply their universality: 'the African,' Solo, Aimee ('beloved'). The man who first meets Modin in the United States is named Blanchard ('whitener'). (58)

It could also be argued that since Armah's novel shares some qualities with modernist fiction, as this chapter shows, the superreader may as well see the name Modin as a variation on "modern." With this superreading, it is then easy to recognise the extent to which the experiences of Solo in Europe and of Modin in America complement each other. However, in the context of African literature, Izevbaye (1981) makes a useful point with respect to how naming affects the relationship between the "named" characters in a text, and the intended readership in the same text:

Because fictional names are often taken directly from actual names in use, ... they can ... throw light on the function of names in the three narrative areas where names are influential -- in creating a make-believe world, in characterization and in the



development of meaning. For, although human beings may not have the kind of control over the correspondence of the thing named -- a problem explored in various theories of naming -- the writer is the master of that correspondence since he largely orders and determines the world of his narrative. (162)

I am indebted to F. A. Abban, English and Classical Languages Department, University of the Free State, for explaining to me that Odamtten, Owusu, Aidoo, Armah and Nfah-Abbenyi are all Akan names/ people; that the major ethnic groups/ languages in Ghana are Akan, Ga, Ewe, Dagomba and Nzema, while Fanti (Anglicised Fantse), Twi, and Akuapem are dialects of Akan. Armah (1977) says of himself that his "mother-tongue is Fant[i], the Southern variant of Akan" (39). With the incidence of inter-tribal marriages in postcolonial Africa/ Ghana, it is, therefore, possible for Odamtten to be familiar with Ewe, which he uses to provide this particular superreading of *No Sweetness Here* and *Our Sister Killjoy*.

11. Ogede also notes the irony in Armah's novel with respect to Modin's affair with Aimee: he further explains how the irony invites the superreader to superread Modin as a tragic figure, as follows:

[W]hat we need to bear in mind, in turning to Modin's association with Aimee ... is that it comes as a climax to his career of errors, as a matter of tragic inevitability. Irony hangs heavy over this relationship, for it is in his quest to earn a living that Modin picks up Aimee ... who will ultimately bring about his death. Another irony is that of Aimee's appearance -- both her vulgarity and her physical repulsiveness -- which promptly puts off the other people in the laboratory, is the very source of Modin's attraction to her. (58)

The tragedy here is that Modin is a victim of blind love; what is repulsive to others, is exciting to him. It is perhaps due to this lack of perception at critical moments in his life that ultimately leads to his own undoing.

12. In the struggle for political/ economic independence in Africa, Armah views the African intellectual as being incapable of any meaningful contribution to these changes. It may be worth noting that while Gramsci's either/ or dichotomy of the *traditional* and *organic* intellectual may be useful in discussions of the history/ role of the intellectual in society, its application in the African context may be problematic. Sole (1978b) defines the African intellectual and, then, provides a useful explanation for the failure of the African intellectual, when he explains the African intellectual's affiliations together with that of what he calls the "new" petty-bourgeoisie in the in various social, economic and political spheres:

The petty-bourgeoisie includes two groups of agents with different positions in production. These are the traditional petty-bourgeoisie (small-scale producers and small traders) and the 'new' petty-bourgeoisie (civil servants, teachers, intellectuals, journalists, etc.) whose numbers have increased markedly under monopoly capitalism particularly in the 'third world' country, where their predominance is partially attributable to the present international structure of capitalist control. Though holding different positions in the economic sphere, both types of petty-bourgeoisie present ideological and political characteristics which are in many ways similar. These characteristics include: attraction to ... the idea of 'social advancement,' political instability, aspirations to petty-bourgeois status, petty-bourgeois individualism ... [and a] belief in a neutral state above classes. (3)

Such affiliations as the African intellectual may have, raise what Cooper (1980) describes as "[t]he problem of how to place the [African] intellectual ... [i]n the field of African literature" (61). To circumvent what she calls the "ambigu[ity]" of this figure, Cooper proposes that one possible way of explaining the African intellectual is to place him "within the interstices of the social formation, as a potentially unstable wavering group" (77). This study takes what Ngugi (1997) describes as "[t]he questioning mind ... that wants to be judged against the highest possible professional standards" (147) as one fundamental quality of the African intellectual.

13. According to Wright (1989), "the traditional black invisibility ... runs through American writing." It is there, according to him, "from Melville's *Benito Cereno* to Ellison's *Invisible Man*. However, in Armah's novel this conditions, says Wright, "becomes ... the lot of the African, whose education is 'designed to reduce ... [the 'been-to'] to invisibility while magnifying whiteness'." (214).

14. Booth also recognises how *Why Are We So Blest?* looks back to Western fiction. He points out the contradiction in its literary programme what he describes as "Solo's ... own enslavement to sub-white status":

Even the form of ... [Armah's novel] itself which ... [Solo] has created shows his enslavement. It is a masterly exercise in the modernist technique of the 'European' novel with its multiple centres of consciousness and artful manipulation of disjointed narrative sequence. Solo is, as he himself tells us, caught and lured by Western art, which entrances him, robbing him of the strength to resist his spiritual enslavement. (59)

15. Mamadu says the following about Armah's conception of the African artist/ writer:

Perhaps the greatest of the artist's pains is that which arises from the complex issue of fidelity to his vision, on the one hand, and, on the other, recognition of the need to serve the society. The artist, the verbal artist especially, Armah conceives in terms of bard and prophet, vatic and visionary, burdened with knowledge of life and the specific issues which touch on the history and well-being of his community. And because Armah is against fragmentariness in this no less than in other aspects of life, he thinks of the artist as a repository, more or less, of the history and culture of his people, hence a man able to appreciate the significance of the single individual signal or event because he can relate to the whole. And being part of the whole, the artist's functions include not only hearing, seeing, and uttering and identifying for his community the spiritual path to take but also active involvement in the realization of the ideals he has helped to identify. (519-20)

It is instructive to mention that Lindfors (1997: 71-3) traces Armah's dissatisfaction with Western literature in the work Armah did on the English Romantics. However, in the context of this study, Solo's conception of the Western artist is contestable indeed. According to him, it would seem that the Western artist is like the Lady in Lord Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" who, Armstrong says, is "a mythological being outside human culture" (284). This is to say that in Armah's/ Solo's view, the Western artist is so totally cut off from the community that the work produced has no intended audience: the work is supposedly art for the artist. Solo makes this misleading assumption from what seems to be a reference to the so-called Aesthetic Movement that was a European phenomenon during the late nineteenth century and had its chief philosophical headquarters in France, as commentators explain (Gaunt 1975, Kermode 1957, Praz 1933). Needless to say, however, that a careful study of Western literature shows that there have always been "Western seer[s]" that have often not found it appropriate to "close [their] eyes to everything around" (*WAWSB?* 230).

16. Modin describes the relationship between the West and Africa, as follows:

This loneliness is an inevitable part of the assimilationist African's life within the imperial structure. Because of the way information is distributed in the total structure -- high information in the centre, low information on the peripheries -- overall clarity is potentially possible only from the central heights. The structures in the peripheral areas are meant to dispense low, negative or mystificatory information. The choices are clear. Those who stay in the peripheral areas intellectually, emotionally, psychologically, totally are not lonely. They are in touch with home, not cut off. The price they pay for not being lonely, however, is that they suffer the crudest forms of manipulation and planned ignorance. Those who shift from the periphery

to the centre can hope to escape some of the crude forms of manipulation. But the price they pay is loneliness, *separation from home, the constant necessity to adjust to what is alien, eccentric to the self*. All this is in the present structuring of the machinery for acquiring knowledge, not in the essential nature of the learning process itself. Before I [Modin] came here I was not aware of my loneliness in all this pervading way. What made me aware was the clear way in which Mr Richmond Oppenhardt undertook to *manage my alienation*. (33; emphasis mine)

“[A]lienation”/ “separation from home,” it was pointed at the beginning of this chapter, is the dilemma of the African “been-to”; it is the result of, according to Modin, “the constant necessity to adjust to what is alien, eccentric to the self.” The idea of “manag[ing]” the alienation of the “been-to” is apposite indeed, for it implicates a well-planned Western scheme.

17. In the context of this study, the “central heights” are the former colonial powers such as Great Britain and France (and in the context of neo-colonialism/ imperialism, one could also add the United States of America), while the peripheries are the former colonies, such as Congheria in *Why Are We So Blest?* and the so-called “Third World”/ “developing” countries. One of the critical issues which Modin’s image raises is how Africans, for example, are positioned both in this complex scheme and in the institutions/ structures available at different geographical locales “in the present structuring of the machinery of acquiring knowledge, not in the essential nature of the learning process itself.” To illuminate the workings of this process, Modin offers the totality of himself and his life as the telling signifier of the African caught in action, as it were, of the process, while Mr Richard Oppenhardt signifies “the imperial structure.”

Armah’s vision of the relationship between Africa and the West in *Why Are We So Blest?* has been repeatedly contested. After discussing what he considers to be the “[l]imits of [m]etaphor” in literature in general, and in *Why Are We So Blest?* in particular, Booth concludes that:

At the bottom of *Why Are We So Blest?* lies the ultimately sentimental desire to blame all the problems of the contemporary African on the whites. And the fact that, instead of the usual gentle and innocent African victim beloved of the soft liberal imagination ... [the superreader] finds in Armah a powerfully evoked self-disgust, should not blind ... [the superreader] to this. *Why Are We So Blest?* is in the end just a ‘justificatory hallucination’ as Solo sees in all self-images created by blacks, if a subtle one, one even half-aware of its own hallucinatory quality.

As a cry of resentment and suffering the book is unparalleled. As a universal myth of race-relations it is deceptive. (63)

18. In Armah's novel, the following is what happens:

First there was a noise from inside the [Jeffersons'] house, of glass breaking, metal dropping. I [Modin] turned to look. Mrs Jefferson held me tighter Next, something cold and sharp hit me Then the object was removed and my own hot blood was rushing down the side of my neck. I got up. The object went into my cheek. I reached for the shape wielding the *knife* Mrs Jefferson says her husband kept *stabbing* me till the other dancers came and pulled him away. (156; emphasis mine)

19. The strictures Armah (1977) makes on Larson's work could also be made on that of most commentators on African fiction. It was seen in Chapter Two with respect to Gleason's distortion of Ezeudu's funeral in *Things Fall Apart* and, now, on Fraser's of the party at the Jeffersons in *Why Are We So Blest?*.

20. The notion of the journey, which is also employed in the structures of *Our Sister Killjoy*, *A Man of the People*, *Petals of Blood*, *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari*, has important ramifications in literature. Whether travelling heroes or heroines depart voluntarily or involuntarily from home, they almost always intend to return and, most important, view home as haven. Significantly, though, when they come back from their journey, they often come back with a boon or elixir. As Kunene explains:

Out there is jungle. The hero who turns his back on the court-yards and cattle-folds and grazing fields of his home is entering this jungle with all its beasts and monsters. If he comes back alive and unscathed he will have learned some serious lessons of life. If he comes back scarred in body and soul, he will have tasted the hazards of being away from home, and will appreciate all the more the advantages of maintaining his links with family and his society. (189)

It is instructive to note that the journey motif in African literature has a dual origin, as Mortimer explains. According to her, African writers "[a]s youngsters ... had greater contact with the oral tradition of their people ... [and then later at university] with the European literary masters [such as] Cervantes and Defoe" (4).

21. Kane, 202.

22. Ibid., 189.
23. In *Why Are We So Blest?* Solo's use of "other" is curious indeed. To begin with, Solo's "other" does not suggest gender roles in the sexual relations between himself and Sylvia, and between Modin and Aimee. Secondly, it does not also implicate the Manichean dichotomies such as white/ black and coloniser/ colonised which JanMohamed explores in African literature.
24. In such a world, as Blake would put it, one "must [c]reate a [s]ystem, or be enslav'd by another [m]an's." (Cited in Erdman, 153)
25. At the Second African Writers' Conference held in Stockholm in 1986, Aidoo (1988) acknowledged gender discrimination and the traditional roles assigned to women within patriarchal society as some of the drawbacks to African women's writing:
- It is definite that anything that had to do with African women was, of all vital pieces of information, the most unknown (or rather unsought), and the most ignored of all concerns, the most unseen of all the visibles and we might as well face it, of everything to do with humanity, the most despised. This had nothing to do with anything that African women did or failed to do. It had to do with the politics of sex and the politics of the wealthy of this earth who grabbed it and who held it. (156-7)
26. The primary focus of this study is not themes in the African novel. If that were the case, this chapter would have explored the theme of gender in Aidoo's text in depth.
27. The term "archetype" is used here in the way Frye (1972b) explains it, as follows:
- By an archetype I [Frye] mean a literary symbol, or cluster of symbols, which are used recurrently throughout literature, and thereby become conventional. A poetic use of flower, by itself, is not necessarily an archetype. But in a poem about the death of a young man it is conventional to associate him with a red purple flower, usually a spring flower like the hyacinth. (434)
28. Sissie's impressions of the African who is still in Europe add another dimension to the way the African metanovel explores the African "been-to" figure. According to Booker, Aidoo's text "suggests that these Africans are not only depriving their own people of the benefits of

their services.” He explains that *Our Sister Killjoy* points out that:

[These Africans] are also playing into the hands of a Western neo-colonial educational system that is designed not only to create a ‘brain drain’ by luring Africa’s best and brightest to the West, but also to help the West maintain its economic and cultural domination of postcolonial Africa. For the narrator expatriate intellectuals have betrayed their African heritage, selling out for a few crumbs of Western material wealth These intellectuals cannot contribute meaningfully to the development of a postcolonial African identity that escapes the legacy of the colonial past because they have gone too far in accepting the superiority of Western education and culture. (124)

29. Odamtten adds an interesting dimension to the superreading of the section “Into a Bad Dream”:

We are then left with the rest of page one and the whole of page two as blank paper, and page two has no pagination. We are tricked, quite literally, into ‘the blank of whiteness’; or perhaps we are invited to take a journey opposite to Marlow’s trip into the *Heart of Darkness*. The reversal of Conrad’s central metaphor for the exploration of the imperial project marks Aidoo’s overt departure from the aesthetic-ideological paradigm that supports that other journey. (120)

Odamtten emphasises the racial issues of Aidoo’s text: the point here, however, is that *Our Sister Killjoy* seems to invert racism -- it is now the whites and their institutions that are attacked (in the manner of *Two Thousand Seasons*, as will be seen in the last chapter of this study). Cooper also notes the following about the theme of ethnicity in Aidoo’s text:

[T]his ethnicity is so self-certain that far fewer contradictions appear compared with ... [*The Dilemma of a Ghost*]. There are only limited textual signs leading to an ideological unmasking of the novel. I [Cooper] see this as a regression, for while such signs are far from my ideal, they are preferable to the sealed uncertainties expressed in *Our Sister Killjoy*.

[Aidoo’s novel] is dominated by a stark polarization between foreigners merged with their lackeys and the rest of the people. This polarization, based on race, allows little space for other divisions along lines of either class or gender. (88)

30. As a Ghanaian superreader, Odamtten provides an indigenous superreading of Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy* and *No Sweetness Here*:

[T]hese two texts may be described as *nyakpakpawo*. This implies that the narratives are serious and demand serious contemplation by the reader-audience. In Ewe, we may distinguish between these two works by defining the former as *fefewo kple eme nyakpakpawo*, a collection of dramatic prose for the audience-reader[s’] contemplation. I [Odamtten] use the English term *episode* to describe the individual short stories in the *fefewo No Sweetness Here* to distinguish them from “A Love Letter”. *Our Sister Killjoy* may be described as *fefewo aloo*

nutinyawo kple eme nyakpaakpawo, a collection of prose-poetry performances and a meditation for the audience-reader[s'] contemplation. These translations are meant only to convey the sense of the original. I will use *nutinyawo* as the term that best describes *Our Sister Killjoy* in its entirety; *nutinya* (singular) to describe each of the three sections written-spoken by the Bird of the wayside; and *nyakpakpa* (singular) to refer to "A Love Letter", since it is her meditation that is also meant for our contemplation. (186-7; emphasis in text)

Odamtten's "our contemplation" is simply a reference to the Akan superreader's contemplation.

31. Significantly, Owusu explains that:

Marija's intentions would be as clear to speakers of Aidoo's [Akan] language as they would be to those familiar with either Chasin's poem or the biblical tree ['of the knowledge of good and evil'] in the garden [of Eden]. The Akan word *di* means both 'eat' and 'make love to.' (171-2)

32. Bradbury provides a useful history of the "stream of consciousness" technique, as follows:

It was William James who provided [in his *Principles of Psychology*] the famous idea of a 'stream' of consciousness: 'A river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it [consciousness] is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us agree to call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life' (93)

Abrams' definition of the "stream of consciousness" as a narrative technique is also useful:

The stream of consciousness, as it has been refined since the 1920s, is a special mode of narration that undertakes to capture the full spectrum and the continuous of a character's mental process, in which sense perceptions mingle with conscious and half-conscious thoughts, memories, expectations, feelings, and random associations Some critics use 'stream of consciousness' interchangeably with the term interior monologue. It is useful, however, to employ the former as the inclusive term denoting all the diverse techniques employed by authors to describe or to represent the overall state and process of consciousness in character. (180)

33. Abrams traces the history of concrete poetry to the Greeks as follows:

Some Greek poets, beginning in the third century B.C., shaped a text in the form of the object which the poem describes or suggests. In the Renaissance and seventeenth century there was a considerable vogue of such patterned forms, called *emblem poems*, in which the lines vary in length in such a way that their printed shape is in the outline of the subject of the poem; familiar examples in English are George Herbert's 'Easter Wings' and 'The Altar'. (33; emphasis in text)

Morgan (215) adds that as far back as 1954, Eugen Gomringer stressed the function of

concrete poetry in society in a manifesto, as follows:

We ought perhaps to conclude that the language of today must have certain things in common with poetry, and that they should sustain each other both in form and substance. In the course of daily life this relationship often passes unnoticed. Headlines, slogans, groups of sounds and letters give rise to forms which could be models for a new poetry just waiting to be taken up for meaningful use. The aim of the new poetry is to give poetry an organic function in society again, and in doing so to restate the position of poetry in society So the new poem is simple and can be perceived *visually* as a whole as well as in parts. It becomes an object to be both seen and used: an object containing thought but made concrete through play-activity, its concern is with brevity and conciseness. (Emphasis mine)

34. According to Abrams, the *Bildungsroman* genre usually implicates “novel[s] of formation” or “novel[s] of education,” whose “subject”

is the development of the protagonist’s mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences -- and usually through a spiritual crisis -- into maturity and the recognition of his or her identity and role in the world. (119-20)

35. According to Scholes and Kellog:

Picaresque presents us with the deeds of *an unhero*, a rogue, seen through his own eyes and thus located in the actual world; but the picaresque narrative in its plotting is very similar to the epic song of deeds, unified by its single protagonist, but not poised between his birth and death since the picaresque figure normally tells his own life story and *is in no position to employ his own birth and death as neat boundaries for his tale*. (209; emphasis mine)

CHAPTER IV

TOWARDS A LOCAL SUPERREADERSHIP IN AFRICAN POLITICAL FICTION: CHINUA ACHEBE'S *A MAN OF THE PEOPLE* AND NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S *PETALS OF BLOOD*

Most [African] literature ... is the product of intellectuals, about intellectuals, and for intellectuals.
Ian Glenn (1983: 1)

[I]t would be an injustice not to note that Ngugi's primary concern for some time has been the question of audience.

Kelwyn Sole (1978b: 28)

1. African Political Fiction: Problems with Definition(s)

The African political text is complex to discuss. In fact, commentators point out that the political novel in general is often difficult to define precisely because of the various uses to which *politics* is put. Thus in the chapter "Defining the Political Novel," Harish Trivedi (1984) avers that:

'[P]olitics' has been taken out of government capitals and cabinets to inhabit not only clubs and coffee-houses but even the kitchen and the bedroom. In a spectacular semantic explosion, the word 'politics' has gathered to itself an astonishing variety of new meanings and pervaded every area of human activity, or very nearly. (11)

As an illustration, Trivedi provides a catalogue of studies, in which "politics" assumes all-pervasive manifestations. The list, says Trivedi, provides "the senses ... and their extensions [in which] the word politics has since come to be used with increasing frequency in all kinds of hitherto unlikely contexts." Trivedi's list begins with Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* and ends, as Trivedi says, "inevitably [with] *politics of interpretation* ... of which, of course, one of the most impressive example is [Frederick Jameson's] *The Political Unconscious*" (12; emphasis in text). With politics assuming such diverse manifestations, it would appear that the political novelist seems to have his work cut out for him. In fact, the radical expansion of meaning politics has gone through, as Millett (1970) puts it, would then seem to be the shift from the exclusive and elitist "government" to near universal "dominance" and the infinitely various "power equations" (31, 32, 33). This shift, commentators say it is now possible to argue, has turned politics into a

common device of everyday application from the rare instrument it formally was -- that of occasional pomp and splendour.

Irvine Howe (1975) had earlier suggested that it is possible to define a political novel as a text in which *the idea of dominance* is paramount:

Perhaps it would be better to say: a novel in which *we take to be dominant political ideas or the political milieu*, a novel which permits this assumption without thereby suffering any radical distortion and, it follows, with the possibility of some analytical profit. (17; emphasis in text)

Howe here draws attention to the intended reader's ("we") own construction of narrative in a political text. He does this, first, by emphasising the dominant *presence of political ideas* in a novel as being suitable for his (Howe's) purpose no less than a political setting; he repudiates any obligation to discuss works which mechanically fulfilled his requirements by making their admissibility a matter of individual discrimination -- "in which we take to be dominant." He also rules out from the start the prospect of a masochistic grind through unworthy examples of the genre by making "the possibility of some analytic profit" virtually a pre-condition to the discussion of a political novel, thus more or less begging this crucial question. In this definition of the political novel Howe, nevertheless, establishes the meaningful principle that a political novel does not come pre-packaged and neatly labelled to the intended readership; rather, the intended readership has to recognise the political novel on the basis of the intended readership's own construction of such a novel.¹

There is already a substantial body of criticism of the African political novel. Curiously, although narrative technique often suggests the intended readership in African political texts such as Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* and Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Petals of Blood*, current criticism of this particular genre is usually silent on this important aspect of African political fiction. In "Chinua Achebe and His Critics: Reception of His Novels in English and American Reviews", Ebele Eko (1975) explains the theoretical and intellectual backgrounds of the variety of superreaders that initially responded to *A Man of the People*. With respect to *Petals of Blood*, Joseph McLaren (1995) provides a similar discussion. Although the two studies are eloquent in elucidating the preferences of this superaudience in the two texts in terms of the plots, themes, narrative technique and language, they do not say anything about the intended audience in either *A Man of the People* or *Petals of Blood*. The reason for this short-coming seems to stem from the methodology of the kind of Reception Eko and McLaren are prone to: they have a keen interest in empirical Reception, which explores, first, the literary work's performance in the market place

and, second, the reactions to the literary work by the reviewing establishment (journalistic and academic). In this way, this form of Reception articulates the publishers'/ reviewers' views, but neglects to focus on the aims and objectives of the African authors themselves with respect to narrative technique and intended readerships in their texts.

A meaningful starting point for the study of narrative technique and intended readerships in both *A Man of the People* and *Petals of Blood* is to acknowledge the aspect of *verisimilitude* in these two texts. The Nigerian, Nkwelle Ekaney (1977), identifies this aspect of narrative technique in *A Man of the People* in the claim that "Achebe's *examples* of corruption ... especially in *developing countries*, are commonplace to *those who live in such countries*" (115; emphasis mine). Ekaney here suggests *signification* as a critical narrative technique in *A Man of the People*. The referential noun phrases "examples of [moral and political] corruption" and "[t]hose who live in such countries" are open-ended; they implicate generality/ commonality of moral and political experience particularly in "developing countries," on the one hand, and both a local and international readership, on the other.

Petals of Blood could also be discussed using similar critical procedures. When he was the Heinemann representative in Kenya, Henry Chakava's (1995)² comments about the revisions/ publication of *Petals of Blood* make the point more forceful. According to him, he had noted the *verisimilitude* of the destination (Ilmorog) of the *matatu* journey from Nairobi that Wanja makes in the novel: the fictional Ilmorog, says Chakava, "was then *identifiably* [the real] Limuru" (18; emphasis mine).³

It is significant to point out that Chakava also takes note of the resemblances that pertain to certain towns in Kenya, the country's Geography and the setting in Ngugi's novel. The point to make about these remarks, then, is that they suggest a particularly *local* Kenyan readership which is likely to appreciate the meaning and significance of *Petals of Blood*.

However, the local Kenyan readership in *Petals of Blood* that Chakava's remarks suggest could also be further categorised: take Chakava's other remark on the characterization of the peasants and workers that

the delegation of workers and peasants from Ilmorog to Nairobi to meet their 'lost' M.P. ... was ... loaded with content which seemed to come out of Ngugi's mouth rather than his characters. (18)

Such incisive criticism is only characteristic of a superreader. Indeed such criticism is similar to that of another experienced reader, S. Gikandi (1987), who suggests that in reading Ngugi's novel, it is critical to recognise that

[t]he most salient feature of characterization in *Petals of Blood* is ... Ngugi's use of a group of characters from different social backgrounds who are, nevertheless, consciously presented as agents of authorial views and thus function as instruments of mediating the character of a neo-colonial state in modern Africa This is the point when *the reader must evaluate the reliability of each persona, since our eventual judgement of the world of Ngugi's novel depends on the extent to which we must trust one character more than the other.* (135; emphasis mine)

For the "reader" to successfully "evaluate the reliability of each persona" requires scrupulous care and attention to narrative detail, to characterization, to contrasts between the narrator's point of view of a particular character and that of the character about himself; it needs attention to dialogue, to the points of view of characters about each other. In this way, the kind of reading that is required of African political novels such as *Petals of Blood* is likely to be the facility of a local superreadership.

It is instructive to add to both Gikandi's and Chakava's comments those of the East African Laban Erapu. Although not a Kenyan himself, what he says about Ngugi's novel poignantly suggests the superreadership in *Petals of Blood*. At the beginning of each part of *Petals of Blood*, Erapu identifies, as was seen in Chapter II of this study, what Susan S. Lanser (1981) describes as "extra-fictional structures" (125). In Erapu's (1992) case, he identifies both the sources of the extra-fictional structures (the epigraphs at the beginning of each part of *Petals of Blood*) and their implications and, then, makes the striking point that "[t]he splitting of the line from Yeats' 'The Second Coming' [in Ngugi's novel] demonstrates the relentless forward movement of the plot" (103) in *Petals of Blood*. As this chapter, then, shows, Erapu is correct in the way he explains the implications of the epigraphs in *Petals of Blood*, for he says that these "extra-fictional structures" could be pointers to an exclusive readership in Ngugi's novel -- the experienced superreadership that is familiar with non-local writers such as Walt Whitman, William Blake and Amilcar Cabral, from whose work Ngugi borrows the epigraphs that he intertextualises⁴ in his own novel.

From the foregoing, it should, therefore, be arguable that it is partly at the level of intertextuality in African political texts such as *Petals of Blood* and *A Man of the People* that both the local and international superreaderships in these texts begin to emerge; that in *A Man of the People* it is in the way Odili discusses Chief Nanga's library (as will be explained later) that suggests the superreaderships in Achebe's novel; that in *Petals of Blood* it is any superreadership

that is familiar with non-Kenyan writers such as Blake, Yeats, Whitman, and Cabral that is likely to grasp Ngugi's intentions in his postcolonial Kenyan novel. In fact, this chapter suggests that this superreadership should include the South African commentators, Ian Glenn and Kelwyn Sole, whose useful comments on the significance of audience/ readership in African political fiction are cited as epigraphs at the beginning of the chapter. For these reasons, this chapter insists that the most viable way to explore both the local and international superreaderships in *A Man of the People* and *Petals of Blood* is to focus on narrative technique in these two African political novels.

2. *A Man of the People* and the Uses of Irony

G. D. Killam (1977) points out that “*A Man of the People* marks a change in Achebe’s novel writing” because, he explains, “Achebe employs the irony of a satirist⁵ in order to *ridicule* and *condemn* the circumstances the book evokes and which determine its *moral pattern*” (85; emphasis mine). However, in this comment Killam merely hints at both narrative technique (“ridicule”) and intended readership (“moral”) in Achebe’s novel. He only hints at these critical aspects in Achebe’s novel because he does not show that in his comment he, in fact, suggests a most viable approach to discuss Achebe’s novel: *how* Achebe’s novel “ridicule[s] and condemn[s] the circumstances ... [*A Man of the People*] evokes,” and *who* is able to identify the novel’s “moral pattern” as well as to determine its effectiveness.

It is, perhaps, Eustace Palmer (1979) who seems to be aware of Achebe’s intentions at the levels of both narrative technique and intended readership. He shows this when he acknowledges the local super-readership in *A Man of the People*. According to him, because “Odili *tells* the story *in the first-person* ... Achebe must thus make the reader aware of *the gap in point of view between himself and Odili*” (82-83; emphasis mine). Palmer’s remarks are apt: he raises the important critical point that Achebe’s choice of the first-person narrator/ participant technique implicates both the object and subject of the story. He suggests that in *A Man of the People* the story in itself is usually not important; that, rather, it is the “*tell[ing]*” of the story in Achebe’s political novel that is significant, for it reveals how Achebe shows his intentions. In this way, Palmer correctly suggests that what is meaningful in any criticism of *A Man of the People* is to explore *how* Odili tells his story and to *what* purpose. This is to say that Achebe’s deployment of the “first-person” narrator technique in *A Man of the People* already suggests a particular readership: it is the readership that is familiar with the ramifications in literature of the first-person narrator point of view such as *distancing*. It is, therefore, the reader who is familiar with the demands of the first-person narrator technique that is likely to appreciate the implications of Palmer’s statement that in *A Man of the People* Achebe “must ... make the reader aware of the gap in point of view between himself and Odili.” This type of reader, this chapter argues, must then have the same literary knowledge as Palmer himself does; he is that reader, which this chapter has already identified as the superreader in African political fiction. From the foregoing, it should be correct to say that this chapter will argue that the object/ subject in *A Man of the People* is

primarily Odili himself -- the Nigerian/ African/ local intellectual; that Odili is telling a story primarily about *himself* to his *fellow* Nigerian' African/ local intellectuals.

Gikandi (1991a) also identifies the narrative technique of distancing in Achebe's novel; he points out that Achebe deploys irony in his novel precisely because he wants to detach the superreadership in the novel altogether from the malaise the text explores. According to him, "[A]chebe develops ironic strategies [in *A Man of the People*] which will help his readers explicate this world and at the same time, *distance* themselves from it" (115; emphasis mine). He, however, provides a more meaningful observation on Achebe's novel than both Palmer and Killam do, for he explains, first, the causes of what Palmer describes as the "the circumstances" in Achebe's novel and, then, proceeds to suggest what the novel proposes as the solution:

As both a character and narrator, Odili would prefer to fit the truths and realities of the nation -- and Chief Nanga's place in the collapse of the nationalist dream -- into clear political, cultural and social categories, but the historical crisis in the new nation negates this desire for systematisation. Odili would prefer, as he strenuously tries to do in the first chapter [of the novel], to present us with Chief Nanga as a typological character, one whose development mirrors the different stages in the evolution of the colony into a nation. In this connection, the narrator strives to pigeonhole Chief Nanga in three categories: the innocent schoolmaster ..., the nascent politician he admired ..., and the party boss whom he came to detest To explicate and represent the pitfalls of national consciousness in Africa, *the narrator wants us to read the rise and fall of Nanga as an allegory* of the promise and betrayal of nationalism. (107-8; emphasis mine)

To read the graph of Chief Nanga's career as an *allegory* is to invite a particular kind of reading that requires a knowledge of the demands of allegory as a literary genre; it requires an understanding of allegory as a trope, which functions on various levels of meaning; it insists on discovering another level of meaning beyond the literal one. This, then, is to give "the rise and fall of Nanga" a new lease of life, for this particular reading partly interprets *A Man of the People* as "a political allegory, in which the characters and actions that are signified literally in turn *signify*, or 'allegorise,' historical personages and events (emphasis mine)."⁶ This particular interpretation is also the achievement of the Nigerian, Ben Obumelu (1976), who claims that:

To be read at all, Nanga must remain an outline. We can almost say that he is not a fictional character at all but *a wave of the artist's creative hand in the direction of the politicians we know*. (16; emphasis mine)

Obumelu here raises important suggestions about *how* to read Chief Nanga's *role/ function* in Achebe's novel. To him, Nanga is a striking representation of a *well-known* political figure to both Nigerians and to "those who live in ... countries [where there is] corruption," as Ekaney puts

it. He further suggests that in order to appreciate Nanga's role/ function in *A Man of the People*, the reader needs to share Achebe's vision of Chief Nanga. For the purposes of the arguments of this chapter, Obumsele's point is that in order to understand Nanga's thematic significance in Achebe's novel, it is needful for the reader to have had similar social and political experiences with Achebe's. Herein, then, lies a meaningful pointer to the intended readership in *A Man of the People*. In this way, Gikandi's earlier remarks are, therefore, significant because they suggest important aspects of *A Man of the People*: narrative technique in *A Man of the People*, the problem which the novel attempts to address and, most importantly, the cause of this problem. Ironically, it so happens that in the African political novel both the problem and its supposed solution in the postcolonial state, turns out to be the alliance between the African intellectual and the politician, for as Palmer puts it, "Odili [the intellectual] is not much better than the minister [the politician]" (82).

Although some commentators point out that the intellectual in postcolonial Africa, especially the literary academic, has gradually tended to move away from economic and political power (the academic/ literary/ professional careers of Achebe, Aidoo, Armah and Ngugi are cases in point), Frantz Fanon's (1967) anxieties about the alliance between the African intellectual and the politician after the Second World War hold true about the intentions of *A Man of the People*.⁷ Indeed what Fanon says about the African bourgeoisie just before and immediately after political independence foregrounds the concerns of most latter day post-independence African political texts. In his view, Fanon points out that after independence African intellectuals seem to have straddled both the politics and economics of their countries in a very particular manner. This is to say that, according to him, at the beginning of the post-independence era, the African intellectual is commonly a nebulous figure who belongs simultaneously to local politics, on the one hand, and to international monopoly capital as a local agent, on the other. This "double image" of the African intellectual has had far-reaching implications on both narrative technique and readership in African political texts such as *A Man of the People*.

Achebe says starkly many things about the Nigerian/ African intellectual. In his reflective essays, he discusses African intellectuals in striking colours; the African intellectual is shown as double-edged in his characteristics and activities. While it is true to say that, on the one hand, there is in *A Man of the People* the intellectual who identifies with the ordinary people, there is, on the other, the intellectual who is an extension of the politician, and a puppet of the government. This dichotomy, however, is not conclusive about the character of the African

intellectual: as Brenda Cooper (1980) suggests, what one can do is only to locate this ambivalent figure “*ambiguously* ... at the levels of both economic and ideological practices” (77; emphasis mine).

It is instructive to note that Achebe has had concerns about the Nigerian/ African intellectual for a long time. In particular, he has had concerns about what he thinks are *poor* reading habits of this important figure in postcolonial Africa:

Surely, the African intellectual reads *Newsweek* and *Time Magazine*, and one or two local newspapers And it is conceivable that he might even find time once in a while to dip into that decorative set of encyclopaedias one sees ... these days adorning the sitting-rooms of the intellectual elite and their emulators. Although I [Achebe] doubt it.

Time is a serious handicap. In the major urban areas where the intellectuals generally live with other elite groups (political, business, military, etc.) time tends to be shorter As the number of our intellectuals is still relatively small they all seem to belong to the same tiny, highly-sought-after group, and to be drawn into the same cycle of time-consuming high-life.

But there are other limiting factors besides time. The habit of reading itself is *clearly the most important*, for if it were strongly cultivated in our intellectuals some of them at least would find the time. But the habit is simply not there. (1975: 38)

The reading habit of the African intellectual is, in fact, often a concern in African intellectual circles. At one conference, Kole Omotoso (1975) took up Achebe’s discussion and points out that “[i]t is not true that African ... [intellectuals] do not read” (256). According to him, “they do read.” The problem, nevertheless, is “*what* they read, what is *available* for them to read” (259; emphasis in text), argues Omotoso.

Although S. I. A Kotei (1981) is partly right to point out that “determinants of reading” such as one’s “occupation” may influence one’s reading habit (149), in the context of the arguments of this chapter, it is significant, however, to point out that the general view of the University of Ife Conference on “Publishing in Africa in the Seventies” at which Omotoso made his remarks is somehow different; the conference unanimously agreed that “the attention of African governments ... [should, in fact, be drawn] to the unsatisfactory state of the book” (ix); that “a lively and flourishing publishing industry is vital for the development of ... [good] *reading habit[s]*” (ix; emphasis mine).

In the context of this study, what is significant about Achebe’s “research” is to explore *why* Achebe should have been interested in the reading habits of a particular proportion of a community (in Enugu). One meaningful assumption is that in carrying out the research, Achebe

was probably looking for a potential *urban* readership in Nigeria. This is to say that Achebe conducts his research in order to find out whether fiction is *read* at all or not; he wants to explore *how* his own subsequent⁸ fiction was going to be *received*.

This chapter argues that what is true about the Nigerian/ African elite in Achebe's research (in Enugu) is also true about the Nigerian elite in *A Man of the People*; that the reading habits of the elite in Enugu as far back as 1958, are the same in 1966 as those of the elite such as Chief Nanga in *A Man of the People*. These poor reading habits of the Nigerian elite, therefore, partly explain Achebe's dismay with the Nigerian/ African elite in *A Man of the People*.

It has already been noted that any meaningful criticism of *A Man of the People* should primarily focus on the telling of the story in Achebe's novel; that attention should be given to the way in which the first-person narrator technique is deployed in Achebe's novel. A good example of this is how, according to Palmer, Odili demonstrates that he is "aware of his own shortcomings and teases himself good-humouredly about them"; that "he [Odili] is also often unaware of them [his shortcomings]" (82-3). The result of all this is that Odili reveals both his own *character* and what *type of narrator* he is in *A Man of the People*. In fact, the achievement of Achebe's novel lies in the way that Odili reveals this duality in the story.

There are several ways in which Odili portrays both his own character and his function in *A Man of the People*. Sometimes this is done through his addressing the readership; sometimes it is through his "loud" thoughts; sometimes he seems to have a plan or project to present. However, whatever he says, whatever his ostensible reason for speaking, the effect of what Odili says is often not the one he intends. For instance, his portrayal of himself at the beginning of the novel as a principled and unassuming person only reveals aspects of his own self-praise and pride:

[O]ne of the reasons why I [Odili] took this teaching job in a bush, private school instead of a smart civil service job in the city with car [*sic*], free housing, etc., was to give myself a certain amount of autonomy. So when I told the Minister that I had applied for a scholarship to do a post-graduate Certificate of Education in London *it did not even cross my mind to enlist his help. I think it is important to stress this point.* (Emphasis mine)⁹

Making verbal claims about his person and character often turns out to be one item from Odili's bag of tricks that he uses to state his case. He often uses this verbal trick both in praising and attacking himself, on the one hand, and, again, to censure others, on the other: "I [Odili] remember this broadcast very well" (*AMOTP* 3); "[b]ut the teachers in that school were all dead from the neck up" (7); "[m]y memory is naturally good" (9); "I [Odili] know it sounds silly" (16);

“[t]he surprises and contrasts in our great country were simply inexhaustible” (40); “[b]y late afternoon I [Odili] even had the crazy, preposterous idea of wanting to go to a public telephone to put through an anonymous call” (75); “[a]t that point I [Odili] was still naïve enough in my political thinking” (102); “I [Odili] don’t know what put into my head to go to Chief Nanga’s inaugural campaign meeting” (136).

It is significant to emphasise that Odili uses this narrative strategy to construct a particular world of the novel that he wants to impose on the superreadership. This means that what he says and does not say, may reflect adversely upon himself and, to the extent that it does, Odili becomes the object of the satire, the “man of the people” in Achebe’s novel, as this chapter shows. Take Odili’s claim that on his journey to Bori he “had *neglected* to bring *any* reading matter with him” and that “the Minister’s library turned out to be not quite to ... [his] taste” (40; emphasis mine). This remark is self-revealing: Odili begins to show here the main characteristics of the language he uses throughout his story. He shows the violence of his language, his delight in portraying ordure and filth, his overweening egotism, all of which suggest chinks in his own armour, as this chapter shows. However, occasionally, Odili admits his faults openly, as already noted. In this way, it will be seen that Odili is essentially a character created to serve a rhetorical purpose, and his views and personality are crucial to the understanding of Achebe’s intentions in *A Man of the People*. Secondly, in Achebe’s thesis, Odili is certainly one of those intellectuals in whom the reading habit is not very well inculcated, for Odili does not give reasons to explain his own “neglect[...] to bring *any* reading matter with him” (emphasis mine) to Bori. Yet, as this chapter shows, Odili can at times be an avid reader, whenever he has the opportunity to read. The point here is that Odili’s lack of resoluteness, and resolve, his inability to stand firm in most cases in the novel, betrays a flaw in character.

Chief Nanga’s is also another person who, according to the novel, cannot claim to have good reading habits. In fact, he also seems to be unfamiliar with the canon of English literature at a public meeting. Thus Odili is right in his assertion that:

[H]ow else could you account for the fact that a Minister of Culture announced in public that he had never heard of his country’s most famous novel and received applause -- as indeed he received again later when he prophesied that before long our great country would produce great writers like Shakespeare, Dickens, Jane Austen, Bernard Shaw and -- *raising his eyes off the script* -- Michael West and Dudley Stamp. (65; emphasis mine)

Here, to begin with, Chief Nanga's rising tone of voice while mentioning Michael West and Dudley Stamp (that is, to emphasise the significance, in Chief Nanga's view, of these two writers) is self-debunking. He does not seem to know the difference between, say, Shakespeare and Michael West as well as between Bernard Shaw and Dudley Stamp. Still, he does not know that Shakespeare and Shaw are writers, which commentators such as M. H Abrams (1988) would describe as "authors whose works, by a cumulative consensus of authoritative critics and scholars, as well as by their conspicuous and continued influence on latter authors, have come to be widely recognized as 'major'" (20). Indeed, he is unaware that West and Stamp are what John Sutherland (1991) would designate as belonging to the "echelon ... of 'lewd' or 'low' literature ... [that] tend[s] to be physically less durable than the bourgeois book" (821).

Secondly, Odili does not just laugh at the Minister's ignorance; he also sympathises with the Minister's audience because, as Odili puts it, they are victims of empty rhetoric -- "men ... [that] are swayed by their hearts and stomachs and not their heads" (65). The power of Chief Nanga's rhetoric, Odili explains, was in the former's "rare gift of making people feel -- even while he was saying harsh things to them -- that there is not a drop of ill will in his entire frame" (65).

Apart from noting Odili's attack on Chief Nanga's literary knowledge and his sympathy for Chief Nanga's audience, it is also significant to emphasise that Odili does not appreciate Chief Nanga's reading habit. If there is an instance in *A Man of the People* where Odili indicates this, it is in his pointing out to his own intended readership the quality of the material in Minister's personal library. From its appearance, Chief Nanga's library contains a potpourri range of texts that reveals, according to Odili, the fact that Chief Nanga is neither a serious, nor systematic reader:

There was a *decorative* set of an American encyclopaedia, there was *She* by Rider Haggard, and also *Ayasha, or the Return of She*; then there was a few books by Marie Correlli and Bertha Clay -- I [Odili] remember in particular *The Sorrows of Satan*. That was all really except for a few *odds and ends* like *Speeches: How to Make Them*. (40; emphasis mine)

To substantiate his claim that Chief Nanga is a bad reader, Odili claims that the set of the American Encyclopaedia in Chief Nanga's library is merely "decorative," while, again, according to him, the range of the material in the library is altogether disorganised: the reading, he points out, is characteristically "odds and ends" (40).

It may be true to agree with Odili that if Chief Nanga reads at all, he reads colonialist writers such as Haggard, in whose work one occasionally finds what C. L. Innes (1990) describes as the

“savage and superb” African woman. (101). Then there is the apt title *Speeches: How to Make Them*. This text is relevant to the Minister since one useful aspect of an effective politician is to be adept in rhetoric. However, there are also the sentimental romantic writers, Marie Corelli and Bertha Clay,¹⁰ who, Odili thinks, are not suitable reading for someone such as Chief Nanga who holds a government leadership post -- Minister of Culture -- that is responsible for the socio-moral fibre of a nation. For these reasons, Odili then points out that the average intellectual such as Odili himself is likely to find Chief Nanga’s library “not quite to ... [his] taste” (40),¹¹ as has already been noted.

What, then, should be interesting in the context of the arguments of this chapter is to explore *why* Odili discusses Chief Nanga’s library; to explore the function of the texts in Chief Nanga’s library in Odili’s own story; to explore why, in fact, he intertextualises Chief Nanga’s library. The point, it seems, is that Odili wants his own intended readership to compare and contrast the stories/ texts in Chief Nanga’s with Odili’s own story in *A Man of the People*, for it is arguable that Odili assumes that narrative technique and theme in his own story are more superior than what one finds in the stories/ texts in Chief Nanga’s library. That the story in *A Man of the People* is immediately relevant to the horizon of expectations of its intended readership, while the stories in the texts in Chief Nanga’s library are not to the Minister’s. Indeed about his own story, Odili says that:

No one can deny that Chief the Honourable M. A. Nanga ... was the most approachable politician in the country. Whether you asked in the city or in his home village, Anata, they would tell you he was a man of the people. I [Odili] have to admit this from the outset or else the story I’m going to tell will *make no sense*. (1; emphasis mine)

Odili often strives to “make” his story “sens[ible]” to the intended reader. Among the several strategies he adopts to achieve this is to demonstrate that he has a vigorous memory indeed. However, for the purposes of this chapter, it is instructive to explore *why* Odili, as he says, should “in particular *remember*” one book -- *The Sorrows of Satan* -- in Chief Nanga’s library (40; emphasis mine); why, in fact, he finds this particular text *memorable*. This observation is critical because the superreader is likely to suspect that *The Sorrows of Satan* may foreshadow the pre-occupations of *A Man of the People*. He is, indeed, likely to argue that there could be parallels in aspects such as plot and theme between *The Sorrows of Satan* and *A Man of the People*. Such a reading is not far-fetched, for the plots in the lives of the two protagonists in Achebe’s novel

-- Odili and Chief Nanga -- are similar to that in the life of Satan as told in the scriptures. Indeed, the plots in the lives of the two characters in Achebe's novel seem, in fact, to have parallels with the *coup de grace* in Satan's relationship with God. Odili and Chief Nanga fall as Satan does.

From the foregoing, it is arguable that Odili notices and, then, focuses on the shortcomings both in Chief Nanga's literary knowledge and library for thematic reasons; he wants to make an important point about the awful artistic and literary cultures of Nigerian/ African politicians. Consider Odili's observation that at "the first ever exhibition of works by local [Nigerian] authors" (58), which Chief Nanga opens in his capacity as Minister of Culture, the Minister, it seems, is unaware of both a popular Nigerian text, and its author:

I [Odili] had expected that in a country where writers were so few they would all be known personally to the Minister of Culture. But it was clear Chief Nanga hadn't even heard the man's name before [Mr. Jalio, the President of the Writers' Society].

"He is the author of *The Song of the Black Bird*," I said.

"I see," replied Chief Nanga, whose attention was clearly elsewhere.

"So your society *includes musicians* as well?" he [Chief Nanga] asked in one fleeting return of interest. But by the time Jalio said "no," his *attention* had again *strayed* from us. (61-2; emphasis mine)

Chief Nanga seems not to be interested both in what happens in his ministry at the literary/ artistic level, and the criteria used for the membership of such an important cultural society. In fact, he does not seem to be interested to learn about this arm of his ministry, for he does exploit the occasion of the exhibition of local writers to learn about what could be designated as the "Who is Who" in the Writers' Society. Odili's thesis, then, is that the particular person (Chief Nanga) who holds the office of the Minister of Culture is not fit for this office.

Achebe has continued to be uneasy with the Nigerian intellectual elite, especially with respect to their lack of activism. It is distressing, he says, to have intellectuals who are mere observers, thus contributing to a culture of *silence*, of what M. Masoga (2002) in a related context describes as the African intellectual's dilemma of the "absence of presence and presence of absence" (314).¹² In a stimulating polemical essay about what Achebe (1983) identifies as the persistent theme of "[t]he [t]rouble [w]ith Nigeria," he says that:

All *those enlightened and thoughtful Nigerians* who wring their hands in daily anguish on account of our wretched performance as a nation must bestir themselves to the patriotic action of proselytising for decent and civilized political values. *We have stood too long on the side-lines*, and too *many of us have adopted the cynical attitude* that since you cannot beat them you must join them. (53; emphasis mine)

The polemical essay is usually argumentative and written from a particular, usually personal point of view. It “undertakes to discuss a matter or ... *persuade us* to accept a thesis on any subject whatever” (emphasis mine).¹³ Thus, there is a particular interest in Achebe’s remarks above in narrative focus: the essayist/ intellectual/ fiction writer/ Achebe now adopts an *inward* looking point of view. In particular, Achebe here is pointedly concerned with his *own/ local* class, thereby ensuring a logical continuity between his concerns in *A Man of the People* and those in his essay. This is to say that what Achebe earlier addresses in fiction is, again, interrogated in a polemical essay, in which, according to Innes, one finds an “all too familiar” picture of “characters and patterns recur[ing] in grotesque and inflated forms” (116). In this way, this chapter suggests that a meaningful approach to a study of the intended readership in *A Man of the People* -- the Nigerian/ African intellectual/ political elite -- is to focus on both the novel itself and *The Trouble With Nigeria*.

Commentators point out that *A Man of the People* is a product of politically disillusioned author. They say that political independence, according to Achebe, was a mystique. Indeed, Gikandi explains that to Achebe, independence “had begotten a *pulverized reality* in which the gap between nationalist rhetoric and political practice became obvious, and it was difficult for people to get a grip of the ‘new cloud’ that had appeared on the African sky” (113; emphasis mine). This is apt, for Achebe (1975) himself explains his disillusionment with independence particularly in Nigeria this way:

One hears that the party boss is already conducting a *whispering* campaign. ‘You done see us chop,’ he says, ‘now you dem chop. Which one you like pass?’ And the people are truly *confused*. (70; emphasis mine)

Independence, Achebe argues, has made political activity non-transparent; it is as opaque as it is ultimately blurred to the ordinary people. In this way, Gikandi explains that:

In effect, the new politics had created its own rhetoric, its order of discourse, a discourse of duplicity and repression, of division and domination. In these circumstances, it is not difficult to see why Achebe would want to reproduce this new political discourse in *A Man of the People*. (113)¹⁴

Now, Gikandi says that in the new dispensation Achebe’s view is that “writing functions as a form of critique prompted by the writer’s estrangement from the realities of the nation” (104); that Achebe views *political writing* as a way to interrogate the new dispensation. This further means that in post-independence Africa, that Achebe no longer thinks that there is a conflict between politics and art,¹⁵ when the African political novelist becomes estranged from his

contemporary society, art/ literature becomes that writer's total way of life. The point, then, is ultimately that *activism* becomes an essential component of the life of the African political novelist in post-independence Africa. In the context of this study, it is, then, suggested that such a situation means that the African political novelist writes in order to be heard by, and to influence, the intended readership in African political fiction.

It is instructive to point out that Gikandi (1991a) makes a similar observation; he explains that as narrator/ participant in *A Man of the People*, "Odili's narrative is conditioned by his need to find a position of narration and social commentary outside the institutions of the postcolonial state." Furthermore, Gikandi adds that Odili "finds himself in a world in which truth comes out too late, or when no one is listening" (114) to what is happening around as, for instance, is the case with the newspaper reports of events leading to the dismissal of Dr. Kabinde as the Minister of Finance (*AMOTP* 3-4). The reason for Odili's predicament, Gikandi rightly explains, is because Odili is faced with "a world of contradictions and speculation in which the national language has been reduced to a series of meaningless clichés" (114). This is well put: consider the implications of the OHMS (our Home Made Stuff) tea episode, in which Chief Koko, Minister for Overseas Training, claims to have been poisoned:

There was *an ironic twist* to this incident which neither of the ministers seemed to notice. OHMS ... was the popular name for the gigantic campaign which the Government had mounted all over the country to promote the consumption of locally made products. Newspapers, radio and television urged every patriot to support this great national effort which, they said, held the key to economic emancipation without which our hard-won political freedom was a mirage. Cars equipped with loudspeakers poured out new jingles up and down the land as they sold their products in town and country. In the language of the ordinary people these cars, and not the wares they advertised, became known as OHMS. It was apparently from one of them that the cook [for Chief Nanga] had bought the coffee [home made] that had nearly cost him his life. (34-5; emphasis mine)

The "ironic twist" in this incident, put in other words, is that the cook seems to be aware of the new demands of the government, while the members of the government executive are not of the consequences of the regulations they promulgate. In this way, Gikandi concludes that "on another level, though such clichés are important because they symbolize, in language and speech, the values by which people may order their lives" (114-15).

In order to demonstrate how irony in *A Man of the People* translates into satire and, then, exposes the Nigerian/ African intellectual elite, it may, perhaps, be useful to acknowledge Glenn's (1983) remarks that:

Achebe's ... novel is a more conscious and witty recapitulation of Achebe's own career than critics have realized in its treatment of the intellectual hero who moves beyond any self-dramatising or martyr's role. Odili the hero, starts with a rejection of Nigerian politics and the local big man, Chief Nanga, because of an incident in parliament during a government crisis that led to Nanga's rise to power. (23)

It is apt to draw attention to the incongruities in Odili's life as both character and narrator: these contradictions in Odili's life underpin, first, the irony in the narration and, ultimately, the satire in *A Man of the People*. This aspect of the novel operates basically on two levels -- in Odili's actions as a character/ participant, and in his language as a narrator/ observer. Several events in the novel illustrate this point; for instance, at the beginning of the novel Odili clearly knows how despicable Chief Nanga's behaviour is. Yet, when Chief Nanga invites Odili to the capital, Bori, to take up "a strategic post in the civil service" (*AMOTP* 12), Odili does not hesitate. His friend Max's corrupt financial dealings, like Odili's own employment of thugs during the elections' campaign, are splendid examples of the adoption of the means of the enemy in the hope of a different end (126). It is true that Odili is obdurately unwilling to take Chief Nanga's money, but after the coup, an intellectual as he is, he rationalizes innocently why he can use C.P.C. funds, as follows:

I [Odili] had already decided *privately* to borrow the money... [which was] still in my hands....[The funds] were not likely to be needed soon, especially as the military regime had just abolished all political parties in the country. (147; emphasis mine)

The implications of Odili's "private[...]" decision "to borrow the money" have far-reaching consequences on Odili's character: the private decision is, in fact, a self-deprecating act that looks back, and is similar, to that of the "party boss[']s ... whispering campaign ... [of] 'You done see us chop ... now you dem chop. Which one you like pass?'" that has already been discussed in this chapter. Odili the intellectual has eventually become corrupt like the politician.

It is, therefore, instructive to explain that Odili's admission of faults like these, only serves as a rhetorical purpose. It establishes that Odili is a person who *knows* what he talks about, since he knows sin better than a deep-dyed sinner. It helps to establish the fact that Odili is a fallible human being, one who confesses to all-too-mortal failings of his own and pretends to no extraordinary virtue. Most significantly, such admissions of faults assists the intended readership in *A Man of the People* to question the extent to which Odili is a reliable narrator. They suggest, in fact, that as a direct observer of events, Odili is not a good and reliable source because he has

come to learn the tricks of the system which he initially sets out to expose; indeed, he has also come to know how well as to employ them for his own gratification. For this reason, it is difficult to see why B. Lindfors (1978) points out that Odili “manage[s] to remain untainted amidst all the surrounding corruption and his clear vision provides an undistorted view of a warped society” (62).

Examine, for example, Odili’s reasons in deciding to stay at Chief Nanga’s residence when he goes to Bori. According to him:

That was why the minister’s offer couldn’t have come at a more opportune moment. I [Odili] had of course one or two bachelor friends in the capital who would have no difficulty in putting me up. But they weren’t likely to provide a guest-room with all the amenities. (*AMOTP* 25)

An intelligent guess is that Odili avoids the accommodation of his friends because he is taken in by the luxury of the minister’s residence which has “seven bedrooms and seven bathrooms, one for everyday of the week” (36). He wants to be comfortable with Elsie as well as to impress her -- that he is close to important people such as Chief Nanga. In this luxury, Odili’s first night is revealing:

I [Odili] was simply hypnotized by the ... *great* suite assigned to me. When I lay down on the double bed that seemed to ride on a cushion of air, and switched on that reading lamp and saw all the beautiful furniture anew ... I ... [have] to confess that if *I were at that moment made a Minister I would be most anxious to remain one forever*. And maybe I should have thanked God that I wasn’t. (36-7; emphasis mine)

The “great[ness]” of the Guest Suite, in Odili’s view, is hypnotic; but this is exaggeration is only characteristic of Odili. He is usually sure of himself; often he is objectionably cocksure, as he is fond of superlatives. The “great”, the “most”, the “worst”, the “least” are staples of his vocabulary, as in the following:

Most of the time my mind was on Elsie, so much so in fact that I [Odili] had to wake up in the middle of the night and change my pyjama trousers. (37; emphasis mine)

But the *best* story that evening came from the Negro writer. (50; emphasis mine)

The *greatest* criticism a man like ... [Chief Nanga] seemed capable of evoking in our country was an indulgent: ‘Make no min’ am’. (65; emphasis mine)

Perhaps the *most* astonishing thing Max told me about the new party was that one of the junior ministers in the government was behind it. (82; emphasis mine)

I [Odili] thought much afterwards about that proverb, about the man taking things away until the owner at last notices. In the mouth of our people there was no *greater* condemnation. (86; emphasis mine)

But their [the new military regime] *most* touching gesture as far as I [Odili] was concerned was to release Eunice from jail and pronounce Max a Hero of the Revolution. (148; emphasis mine)

Odili is also certain of his own rectitude, or that of the Nigerian politicians, and when he makes reckless comments on such matters, his language results in a string of contradictory statements that become one important cue to Odili's unreliable motives for action. This is to say that whatever Odili says, the effect is not the one he ostensibly intends. Although in such cases the effects are often incidental, his words make it clear to the intended superreadership that he himself is lacking either in wisdom or moral sense. In this way, the primary effect the novel wants to achieve is to make the superreadership aware, through the agency of Odili as persona, that a blameworthy situation exists in Nigeria, which Odili himself sees differently than does the superreadership. Odili's words reveal a world which has only a single focus for him, but more than one for the intended superreadership.

Several critics have noted the moral implications of the Elsie/ Chief Nanga sex episode. They agree that actually Odili's subsequent interest in politics stems from this event (Carroll 1980: 120, Palmer 1972: 58, Wren 1980: 108). However, Obumsele is particularly incisive when he goes further to argue that the achievement of this episode is not so much in what it reveals about the immorality of both Chief Nanga and Elsie; that the interest of the episode is not in what Odili does afterwards. Rather, according to Obumsele, the significance of the sex episode is in the quality of the language that Odili employs to explain his feelings about the event. That there is a corresponding relationship between Odili's primarily "metallic" language and the flawed "dry" emotions it encodes, as follows:

I [Odili] sat in bed and tried to think, with my head in my hands. But a huge *sledge-hammer* was beating down on my brain as on an *anvil* and my thoughts were scattering *sparks*. (AMOTP 70; emphasis mine)

The sex episode, then, reveals another side of Odili's character, which is also revealed in his excitement with the luxury of Chief Nanga's official residence. The episode shows Odili as an innocent, though a naïve person who does not really understand the situations into which he is thrust, or in which he finds himself. Sometimes he simply describes a situation he himself does not understand. At times he makes no comment at all; at others he misses the implication or point; frequently he praises when the superreadership knows he should be blaming. The kind,

and degree, of Odili's lack of comprehension varies from a mild, hardly culpable one to perverse moral blindness, as in the sex episode. The sex episode, it must be emphasised, reveals a violation of trust essentially between lovers, between Elsie and Odili. Odili fails to see this, and instead directs his ire onto a third party -- Chief Nanga. In this way, Obumsele is right to say that Odili reveals the underlying basic insecurities of African intellectuals in post-independence Africa (16).

This section of the chapter has attempted to show the extent to which Achebe's deployment of irony in *A Man of the People* is successful, and to *what* purpose. It has tried to demonstrate to what extent irony is effective in *A Man of the People*. The section of the chapter further argues that the way in which the novel employs the first-person narrator technique is meaningful because this narrative strategy successfully exposes at once both the subject and object in Achebe's novel. In this way, the section suggests that a fruitful approach to *A Man of the People* should be to focus primarily on narrative technique in the novel in order to avoid what Gikandi describes as the "impos[ition] on ... [Achebe's novel] patterns it never sought in the first place" (105). According to him, this is precisely what Palmer (1972) neglects to do, and ends up saying that the aspect of *teaching* in *A Man of the People* fails "to create situations, characters, and a plot which can *convincingly* carry the *message*" (84; emphasis mine).

What is surprising about Palmer's comment is that he ignores to fully explore the *discourse/ narrative* implications of his useful notion of "convinc[ing]"; he ignores to acknowledge that *convincing*, in fact, necessitates a *communicative* act, which further implicates one of the ever so important co-ordinates/ component parts in any linguistic/ communicative process -- the intended *addressee/ audience*. Palmer ignores, too, to discuss the discourse/ narrative ramifications of his other meaningful concept of "message"; he disregards the fact that a *message* usually presupposes an intended *receiver/ readership*, as was explained in the first chapter of this study. This, then, means that because Palmer ignores this critical aspects of his own notions, whatever he subsequently says about *A Man of the People* -- "situations, characters ... and ... plot" -- cannot be "convincing[...]" For this reason, Gikandi is right to disagree with Palmer's view on the theme in Achebe's novel, as follows:

[T]he novel's relationship to *its times* is actually profound: Achebe was writing in a historical situation that was still incoherent; the form and ideology of his novel was bound to carry the contradictions and confusion of the times, and if the novel fails to carry the 'message,' it is precisely because *the message is still forming* as Achebe writes. (105; emphasis mine)

While this section of the chapter suggests that Palmer's problem arises from his failure to consider the intended readership in *A Man of the People*, Gikandi points out that it is the premises from which Palmer starts his argument that are misleading; that Palmer's assumptions about Achebe's novel are misleading precisely because he, again, ignores another critical corollary in the communicative act: the *context*. In this way Gikandi rightly explains that Palmer's criticism of *A Man of the People* is faulty because he does not take cognisance of the "times"/ setting in Achebe's novel.

3. *Petals of Blood*: The Multiple Consciousnesses and Informational Dialogue Techniques

Petals of Blood, some commentators suggest, is Ngugi's consummate political novel. They claim that Ngugi's novel is a politically accomplished text because it has a clearly defined political ideology (Gikandi 1987: 134, Maughan-Brown 1985: 244-6, Ngara 1985: 116). In the words of D. Cook and M. Okenimkpe (1997), *Petals of Blood* is probably the first African political novel which

affirms ... [the author's] bold and powerful attempt to combine the intimacy of the traditional novel with a *public rhetorical manner* in a new perhaps itself artistically revolutionary amalgam in order to analyse social injustice and the human dilemmas it creates, and to *mark out the practicable path to social change*. (111; emphasis mine)

"[A] public rhetorical manner" suggests at once both narrative technique and intended readership in Ngugi's novel; it highlights a variegated narrative technique that equally implicates a wide intended readership in *Petals of Blood*. Yet, although Ngugi's superreadership in *Petals of Blood* is likely to be wide, it cannot be overemphasised that such a superreadership must, indeed, include the local Kenyan intellectual, as was pointed out at the beginning of this chapter. In fact, Ngugi (1972a) would seem to have foretold his local superreadership in *Petals of Blood*, as follows:

When I [Ngugi] look around me, I see sad faces, I see unfulfilled hope and promise. *We who went to schools and colleges and had regular salaries* were quickly able to buy positions among *the middle classes*. With our cars, land and mansions, *we forgot that we are only joining our European and Asian counterparts in living on the sweat of the millions*. (49-50; emphasis mine)

The plural noun phrases "we who went to schools and colleges and had regular salaries" and "the middle classes" implicate the intended readership in *Petals of Blood*, as this section of the chapter shows. The noun phrases further implicate local Kenyans such as Chakava and Gikandi. These are, in fact, the people in whom Ngugi has confidence to bring about social and economic amelioration in their society. They are the people, who, in the words of Cook and Okenimkpe, are capable of "mark[ing] out the practicable path to social change." For this reason, the Kenyan/ African intellectual elite could, therefore, be assumed to be the intended readership in *Petals of Blood* precisely because of the implications of Ngugi's authorial ideology: "we forgot

that *we* are only joining *our* European and Asian counterparts in living on the sweat of the millions” (emphasis mine).

Ngugi has confidence in the African intellectual elite, as follows:

I [Ngugi] believe that ... African *intellectuals must align themselves with the struggle of the African masses for a meaningful nation ideal*. For we must strive for a form of social organization that will free the manacled spirit and energy of our people so *we* can build a new country, and sing a new song. Perhaps, in a small way, *the African writer can help in articulating the feeling behind this struggle*. (50; emphasis mine)

Ngugi begins with an ideologically loaded clarion call particularly to “African intellectuals.” He argues that it is often the intellectual elite that have the capacity to define the destiny of a nation. He, then, proceeds to posit that nationalist literature, in particular, has a pointed programme that cuts across social, economic and political spheres of a nation. He implies that nationalist literature often assumes an intended audience/ readership, for its purpose is to “articulat[e]” (or explain) the “nation ideal.” What, then, is critical in *Petals of Blood* is to explore *how* Ngugi’s novel *articulates* (or explains) its themes; *how* it strives *to say* what it wants the African intellectual *to hear*. And, finally, it is critical to explore the achievement of this mode of *articulation* (or explanation), which is narrative technique in *Petals of Blood*. This section of the chapter, then, attempts to argue that the African intellectual elite is at once the subject and object in *Petals of Blood*. It tries to show that narrative technique in Ngugi’s novel is particularly fashioned to implicate the African intellectual elite. It further suggests that the use of both the informational dialogue and multiple consciousnesses techniques, in fact, suits the aims of Ngugi’s novel.

It is instructive to note that while the multiple consciousnesses and informational dialogue techniques in *Petals of Blood* are related to each other in so far as they are based on the interaction between characters, Ngugi begins to deploy the technique of multiple consciousnesses in *Weep Not, Child*. In this novel, the technique is deployed as the “free indirect discourse”;¹⁶ this narrative strategy is used in *Weep Not, Child* as a complex narrative mode, in which a third-person narrator usually speaks in ways that reflect the point of view of one or more characters in the text, while still reflecting the narrator’s own point of view. Indeed, this method seems to be attractive to Ngugi because he later deploys and, then, develops it in *Secret Lives* (1975), particularly in “A Mercedes Funeral”, in which the voices of narrator and protagonist often merge into a sort of chorus.

However, in *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi makes the multiple consciousnesses technique characteristically his own. In fact, together with the informational dialogue method, Ngugi employs the multiple consciousnesses narrative strategy to channel a substantial amount of social-political criticism, as will be seen.

It may be useful to note that Ngugi begins to develop the multiple consciousnesses technique in “A Mercedes Funeral”. In that short story Ngugi borrows Conrad’s (Marlow-like) narration with an implied author/ persona/ observer-participant familiarly introducing the story which he purports to have heard being narrated in a bar. Then, once the narrator takes charge of the story, the implied author/ persona/ observer-participant withdraws and only reappears twice on pages 120 and 131-32 during “pauses” in the story within a story. There are, of course, two audiences that are indicated in “A Mercedes Funeral”; these are the “real” or immediate one to which the entire story (frame story) is being retold by the implied author/ persona/ observer-participant (the intended audience), and the “inner” one to which the narrator recounts the story in the bar. It is in this “inner” story (the central story) where the intended superaudience gets an interesting deployment of the narrator to narratee(s) technique which Ngugi exclusively uses. As this chapter then shows, *Petals of Blood* makes a fascinating variation on the relation between the narrator and the narratee to maximum effect, as the method of informational dialogue is developed through Ngugi’s much improved handling of dialogue between characters whom he renders more articulate, as compared with what happens in *The River Between* and *Weep Not, Child*. Thus instead of “telling” about *them*, he renders *them* more articulate so that *they* are made to reveal *themselves*: indeed he makes *them* reveal/ confess their personal philosophies and attitudes, and their fears and hopes. In so doing, the superreadership is enabled to “listen” clearly to the characters directly and, consequently, enjoys the benefit of various points of view.

The method of using various points of view is deployed in *Petals of Blood* particularly in individual characters’ recapitulations of their past as a way of problematising their present circumstances. This is usually done in the first-person and to selected narratees or audiences within the text. The immediate impression this technique makes is that these “speeches” read like testimonies/ confessions. Significantly, in such involved intimacies, the intended reader is afforded a deeper insight into the characters’ histories and personalities. Sometimes the intended reader is also introduced to other characters through such recapitulations. A case in point is Munira’s first-person narration about his school days at Siriana to Abdulla and Wanja:¹⁷

it is through this method that the intended reader is initially introduced to Chui in his moments of glory as the model student, who later leads a strike against Cambridge Fraudsham, Reverend Hallowes Ironmonger's¹⁸ successor as headmaster. Furthermore, it is also through Munira's first-person narration that the intended reader learns about how this strike leads to the expulsion from school of Chui, Munira and some other schoolchildren.

It is instructive to point out that Munira's story assists to make other characters speak; for example, it motivates Wanja to tell about her childhood: "The Siriana incident had touched a chord in her past" (*POB* 36). Re-lived also in the first-person, the story of Wanja's school days recounted to Abdulla and Munira (36-41) tells of her seduction, pregnancy and eventual abandonment by Kimeria, who is later to feature prominently among the opportunist-capitalistic class in Ilmorog. The intended reader also catches the first glimpse of the kindly lawyer who is later to be quite helpful to the stranded group of Ilmorogians while on their "eventful" journey to the city through Wanja's narrative to Karega and Munira (129-34). This begins with Wanja's re-enactment of her life as a barmaid in various places when she, frustrated with poverty, decides to plunge into prostitution with Europeans in the hope of making a little money. However, her first attempt, with a German, proves to be a frustrating experience because he, apparently, wants her to sleep with his dog. As she flees the house into the road, she is rescued by the magnanimous and politically perceptive lawyer who, on learning of Wanja's story of deception by the German (he had originally posed as a tourist) lashes out at the government's tourism policy: "[t]his is what happens when you turn tourism into a national religion and build shrines of worship all over the country" (134). Note that the lawyer's observations to the Ilmorogians assist the superreader to construct Ngugi's authorial ideology, for both the lawyer and Karega are what Palmer describes as "the embodiments of Ngugi's moral positives in the novel"; they are, Palmer adds, "the spokesmen for ... [Ngugi's] socialistic solution" (301).

Other first-person narrations include Abdulla's story to Karega, Wanja's to the entire Ilmorog group, including the children (on their journey to the city) about the "Mau Mau" struggle, told in direct response to Karega's question about Dedani Kimathi (*POB* 140-3). And there is Karega's account to the lawyer, Abdulla, Munira and Wanja of Siriana's history, which touches on issues such as Freudsham and the strike, Chui's arrival at the school, the first black headmaster and the betrayal of the students' aspirations for change to the curriculum (168-73).

However, a more striking and sustained deployment of the narrator to narratee technique is over the first night of contact with *theng'eta* -- the drink which is brewed from the plant that

gives the novel its title. This “holy water” (211), which “gives you sight, and for those favoured by God it can make them cross the river of time and talk with their ancestors” (210), is usually prepared and taken in a spirit of comradeship. On this particular occasion Nyakinyua, Munira, Wanja, Abdulla and Karega take it and, consequently, their tongues are loosened; they, then, each in turn open themselves up to talk, reminisce and recollect their experiences. The ultimate effect of such intimate discussions is that the passages provide the narrative with an objective perspective. This is true when Nyakinyua talks about the effects of the First World War on the Ilmorogians (212-14) in response to their animated questioning. It is also true when Karega “confesses” his intimacy with Mukami (Munira’s late sister) in an involved recollection of his background in which he also reveals his kinship with Nding’uri -- Abdulla’s comrade-in-arms during the “Mau Mau” struggle (216-20). The same objectivity in the narrative is also achieved when Abdulla recounts to the group Nding’uri’s capture and hanging when the mention of his dead colleague and friend affects him (220-3). And, lastly, the narrative continues to achieve its objectivity with Nyakinyua’s continuation of the narrative “of the vision passed to her by her man” as presented through Munira’s perspective (224-6). This ends the eventful night.

Indeed, another interesting variation of this technique, which, perhaps, points to the level and extent of Ngugi’s experimentation with narrative technique in general, occurs in Nyakinyua’s reported narration of the historical-sociological background to Ilmorog. This information is given to the delegation at the beginning of their journey from Ilmorog to the city (120-3). Re-created in the third person, Nyakinyua’s information apparently reads as a direct narration to the intended reader until page 123, when it is revealed that Nyakinyua, in fact, is talking directly to the Ilmorogians on the journey: “[t]hus Nyakinyua talked to them, keeping up their spirits with stories of the past.”

Nevertheless, the authorship of this narrative, in spite of the foregoing statement, seems to be a medley of voices ranging from that of a peasant to that of an intellectual/ perceptive observer familiar with the social, economic and political history of the community. Consider the informed and analytic quality of the discussion of the First World War with its typically Ngugian interpretation of its effects on the Kenyan people in the following:

A prosperous farmer Munoru was then. But the walking metal bewitched Him. His hands were for ever numb at the sight of hoes and pangas. He only wanted to walk on the new metal to the acclaim of crowds. For a time he lived off demonstrating his skill on the machine

He was again the first among the very few who actually volunteered their

services in the carrier corps of guns and food supplies to warring Europeans ... Across the Ilmorog plains they went, clearing roads, towards the Tanganyika border to ferret out the Germans. Wonder of wonders: Wazungu were actually killing one another, over what the native could not quite understand: how could they tell that they and the division of their land and labour were the object of the War? Munoru came back, a wreck ... Even some of the others, when they came back, were not interested now in making the land yield to their fingers as the founders had done. A metal more deadly than the one which walked on legs had bitten them. In search of it, to pay their taxes, but also to buy useless things of the [f]oreigners, they went to work on farms stolen from the Kenyan people and on the network of roads connecting the farms to the capital and the sea. (122-3)

To begin with, the tone of the first two and last sentences suggests an informed third-person narrator's report, while that of the third and fourth sentences implies that of a villager's/peasant's witness account. As it is, then, the total impression which the technique of multiple voices gives is that the story of *Petals of Blood*, according to Palmer, "is told in the form of reminiscences" (289). This is to say that the story, Palmer adds, "really takes the form of Munira's recollections as he sits in his cell, writing copious notes" (289). The purpose that Munira has in writing what Palmer describes as the former's "copious notes" in prison, Palmer adds, is for Munira "to clear his own mind about the significance of the events and satisfy the demands of *the probing chief inspector*" (289; emphasis mine). For the purposes of the arguments of this chapter, it is critical to note that Palmer in this comment implicates the intended reader in Munira's "copious notes," while in the next, narrative technique, as follows: "[in Munira's 'copious notes'] narrative method consists for the most part of reminiscences which none the less *progress sequentially* ... to help condition the [intended] reader's responses to the characters" (289; emphasis mine). Useful as Palmer's observations may be, the problem with them, though, is that Palmer neither attempts to relate the implications of the intended reader in Munira's "copious notes" to the one in Ngugi's novel, nor does he also suggest any relationship between narrative technique in the "notes" with that in *Petals of Blood*.

The informational dialogue that Ngugi deploys in *Petals of blood* is critical to the purposes of this study because the method assists in constructing the local superreadership in Ngugi's novel. In this way, *Petals of Blood* achieves this purpose in the deliberate provision of exclusive private information, or what might be loosely called local colour. In fact, this method is also a consequence of the other method just discussed -- the use of multiple voices. This information is "private" because it is immediately familiar and significant to the Kenyan community, while

narrative technique in *Petals of Blood* suggests that writing/ story-telling is a collaborative effort aided by the readers'/ listeners' imagination. For this reason, it is easy to see why one finds that in *Petals of Blood* the novel does not lend itself to frequent explanatory passages and illustrations. This is to say that in Ngugi's novel issues, happenings and personalities are cited only as they make a frame of reference to an argument or analysis, and their background is never wholly explored. In fact, some details of significant political interest are merely hinted at and left for the local readership to provide. The assumption is that the local readership is already familiar with the issues the novel raises.

For example, the poignant reference to Jomo Kenyatta, which subtly links the so-called nationalist leader ("father of the nation") to the ill-conceived, tribally organized "tea-drinking" ceremonies, that sought to unite the Kikuyu following the death of J. M.¹⁹ in the following:

It turned out that most teachers and their wives had been invited to tea at Gatundu For Munira the Saturday would remain tattooed in his mind so that he would pass it alive to his children: he, Munira, was going to tea with a *living legend* which had dominated the consciousness of a country for a century. (*POB* 91; emphasis mine)

The reference to the "living"/ "legend[ary]" figure implicates a particular audience; it suggests a contemporary readership, in whose memories this figure may still exist." This reading constituency is, therefore, likely to be the local/ Kenyan one. Or, take the unnamed lawyer's reference to Bildad Kaggia²⁰ in a re-created exchange with Karega: "[t]hey can't fault me on property They can't say I am a Kaggia" (*POB* 301). This reference is certainly used as a figure of speech, for in *Petals of Blood* personalities such as Kaggia can only take on important social-historical implications to the local superreadership that is familiar with Kenya's political history. In addition to all this, there is also the liberty that Ngugi takes (almost with careless abandon) is using non-English terms, which easily stands out as the clearest pointer to his intended local superreadership: these are the local variations of English words and names of places, which are often rendered in Kikuyu (and Kiswahili).

It has been implicitly suggested in the previous chapters of this thesis that this study does not primarily concern itself with themes in African fiction. This is to say that although themes such as gender and language in the African novel may assist to explore narrative technique and intended readerships in certain African texts, these themes have already been extensively dealt with in many thematic studies of African literature. Yet, Ngugi's use of indigenous African languages such as Kikuyu and Kiswahili in *Petals of Blood* may require comment once more. It

appears that the use of these languages in Ngugi's novel only raises a contradiction in Ngugi's authorial ideology, an interesting aspect in Ngugi's latter writing which, surprisingly, commentators have not sufficiently explored.

In order to meaningfully explore this contradiction, one needs to examine what Ngugi (1986) describes as the intellectual/ literary crisis, which, according to him, he once experienced in his literary career, as follows:

The English language opened the door to a wide range of fiction and it was this that eventually led me to Makerere ... and hence to the kind of writing which climaxed in *Petals of Blood*. But I [Ngugi] was becoming increasingly uneasy about the English language. After I had written *A Grain of Wheat* I underwent a crisis. I knew whom I was writing about but *whom was I writing for?* The *peasants* whose struggles fed the novel [*A Grain of Wheat*] would never read it. (72; emphasis mine)²¹

Ngugi claims that the question of his intended readership begun to trouble him after the publication of his third novel. He further points out that the level of *literacy* with respect to what he thinks is his intended *peasantry* constituency also begun to trouble him at the same time. What is critical here is that although Ngugi raises these valid concerns at this point in his career, the attempts he makes at the time to negotiate the issues seem to be unhelpful.

To begin with, it has already been noted that *Petals of Blood* deploys "extra-fictional structures", an aspect of the novel which implicates a superreadership that consists of both the national and international "interpretative communities." Secondly, it is worth emphasising that *Petals of Blood* is a *written* text; that *writing* in itself presupposes and subsumes *reading* as a necessary corollary.²² This, then, is to insist that Ngugi could only reach his intended peasants if this constituency *reads* at all, a situation which is doubtful indeed.²³ For these reasons, it is, therefore, important to say that during the writing of *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi's authorial ideology is only *beginning* to drastically change at the level of *language*, where he uses English²⁴ as well as Kikuyu and Kiswahili. The point to make, then, is that even when Ngugi was engaged in writing *Petals of Blood*, he was *still* writing for a *literate* Kikuyu/ Kiswahili constituency.

A few instances of how Ngugi uses Kikuyu and Kiswahili to construct his literate readership in *Petals of Blood* are as follows:

She shrieked out, *auuu-u*, *Ndwi ici mutiuke muone*, and fled in fright (7).

They also sang: *Kamau wa Njoroge ena ndutu kuguru*: and thought of their own jiggers eating their toes and scratched them against the floor in earnest (10).

He tells me: *Baada ya kazi, jiburudishe na Tusker*. Won't you have another ? (25).

...

[B]ut what kind of *Mswahili* are you to believe such things? *Mswahili Mwislamu wa Bara*, eh? (32-3)

...

"You know such affairs -- Abdulla talked about it the other night -- a gift of a pencil, a stolen sweet, love-letters copied from books ... all ending in the same way ... *maingi ni Thumu: manyinyi ni cukari* ... tear drops on paper circled with xx -- kisses." (37)

...

Ya tatu umpaienjembe! Not so? (177)

What happens here is that *Petals of Blood* is deploying the aspect of *abrogation*, as was discussed in Chapter II of this study; it is what B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin (1989) claim is commonplace in postcolonial literatures, in which there is the "denial of the privilege of 'English' which involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication" (38). This is to say that in Ngugi's novel the process of selective lexical fidelity which leaves some Kikuyu/ Kiswahili items untranslated in some of the above passages is suggestive of the conveyance of the sense of cultural distinctiveness in the setting in *Petal of Blood*. Put differently, one could say that in Ngugi's novel "[t]he use ...of untranslated words is a clear signifier of the fact that the [English] language which actually informs the novel is an/ Other language" and that "[w]hat is significant about the use of untranslated terms ... is that they constitute a specific sign of a postcolonial discourse rather than a specific ... [Kenyan] usage" (Ashcroft *et al*, 64, 65).

It is instructive to note that the question of the local superreadership in *Petals of Blood* is intricately connected with a number of narrative methods related to the two main ones already mentioned. In fact, in some instances, the relationship is so intertwined that it shows that it is a consequence of Ngugi ceasing to be a bystander, an observer, and his spirited endeavour at "homecoming". This is to say that as Ngugi gets involved on the side of the "majority", the "masses", the exploited "have-nots", against their middle-class, capitalist-exploiters, and the comprador class, he continually devises various narrative modes to make his points. Take one aspect of the first-person narrator technique in the first and last quarters of *Petals of Blood*, in which the narrator-participant surfaces. It will be seen that in these chapters two broad categories of what should be designated as the "internal" narrator could be identified.

First, there is the simplistic one, who characterizes himself as an Ilmorogian through his close identification with issues and happenings in the peasant community/ environment. This narrator embodies “the voice of the people,” or “the voice of the collective consciousness”; that is, he speaks *for*, and on behalf of the “majority”, or the “masses”. It is through this voice of an Ilmorogian peasant that the superaudience is afforded an insight into the sceptical and hesitant attitude which the inhabitants of this “rural wasteland” had for Munira on his arrival into the community, before he is finally accepted:

But Munira stayed on, and after a month we were all whispering -- was he a little crazed -- and he not so old? Was he a carrier of evil? -- especially when he started holding classes under the acacia bush near the place *rumoured* to be the grave of the legendary Ndemi, whose spirit once kept watch over Ilmorog country before imperialism came and changed the scheme of things.

...

He became one of *us*. The children sang *a e i o u i u* in loud voices.
(6, 10; emphasis mine)

The same narrator-participant introduces Abdulla’s arrival, registering the mixed reception he received on account of the very useful shop he established, on the one hand, and the alarming appetite his donkey had, on the other:

Abdulla was also a newcomer to Ilmorog. He and little skinny Joseph had come into our midst in a donkey-cart full of an assortment of *sufurias* and plates and cheap blankets tightly packed into torn sisal sacks and dirty sheets knotted into temporary bags *We used to crowd* his little shop and look curiously at his stumped leg and his miserable face and listen to his stream of curses at Joseph. Soon *we were glad* that at long last we had a place from which we could get salt and pepper. But *we were rather alarmed* at his donkey because it ate too much grass and drank too much water. (7-8; emphasis mine)

Similarly, on pages 31-32, the superreadership follows easily Ilmorog’s tremendous mood of fascination and excitement for Wanja at her arrival -- particularly the second time when she returns to this “rural cloister” in a “*matatu* Peugeot car loaded with her things.”

From then on, this Ilmorogian peasant voice is shut off until the beginning of Chapter Nine in *Petals of Blood* (241-3) when the narrator-participant re-surfaces in a more elevated persona of an Ilmorog historian, who, with “tongue-in-cheek” details the village’s “string of good luck” that followed the “epic journey” to the city and also registers their admiration and appreciation for the heroic roles played by Munira, Karega, Abdulla, Wanja, and the donkey. And, lastly, the voice of the Ilmorogian peasants, embodying the sentiments and philosophy of the local Ilmorogians, takes over from yet another Ilmorogian voice on pages 264-8, Part Four, as it

explains the “rise” of Ilmorog as promised by the Trans-Africa High Way which now passes through the “once forgotten village.”

Secondly, the other Ilmorogian voice referred to above constitutes the second aspect of the internal narrator. At the beginning of Chapter Four (67-9), there appears a marked variation in the force, quality and tone of the novel’s first-person narrator, who suddenly “develops” from a not- too-informed Ilmorog peasant to a perceptive and an informed analyst of his people’s history. All at once he begins to discuss issues as a Kenyan nationalist and reveals an enquiring mind that could only have been shaped through some institution of higher learning -- “out there” (to borrow the novel’s own term for the world outside Ilmorog). The superreadership gets the same analytical narrator on page 88, quite revealingly, explaining the advance of colonialism in characteristic Ngugian terms:

The missionary had traversed the seas, the forest, armed with the desire for profit that was his faith and light and the gun that was his protection. He carried the Bible; the soldier carried the gun; the administrator and the settler carried the coin. Christianity, Commerce, Civilization: the Bible, the coin, the gun: Holy Trinity.

However, if one returns to the analytical nationalist historian in Part One, Chapter Four and consider him alongside the perceptive pan-Africanist, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist commentator of Part Four, Chapter Eleven, one might perceive yet a further level of the novel’s intended audience. It is worth noting that Ngugi, in the first paragraph of the excerpt below, is devoted to parodying the “solemn” historical studies undertaken by Kenyan academics such as Ogot, Muriuki, Were and Ochieng, through building the “history” of a fictional Ilmorog/ Kenya. The Ilmorog joke apart, the narration progressively poses a number of pertinent questions on the “unanswered” aspects of Kenyan history in quite a scholarly manner:

Results of the researches on the recent archaeological finds in Ilmorog may well add to the theories of Ogot, Muriuki, Were, and Ochieng about the origins and the movement of the Kenyan people: they may tell us whether the river is one of those referred to in an ancient Hindu and Egyptian sacred literatures or whether the walls that form the ridges are any part of Ptolemy’s *Lunae Montes* or the Chandravata referred to in the Vedas.

For there are many questions about our history which remain unanswered. Our present day historians, following on similar theories yarned out by defenders of imperialism, insist we only arrived here yesterday. Where were all the Kenyan people who used to trade with China, India, Arabia long before Vasco da Gama came to the scene and on the strength of gun powder ushered in an era of blood and terror and instability -- an era that climaxed in the reign of imperialism over Kenya? (67; emphasis mine)

This is one of the critical passages in Ngugi's novel which suggests the intended local/ Kenyan superreadership in *Petals of Blood*. The passage does this in the way it suggests *who* should address the "unanswered" questions, and *how* they should be answered. According to the narrator, it is only *Kenyan* scholars/ intellectuals/ historians *who* are likely to raise such "unanswered", but meaningful, questions; it is *they*, in turn, *who* could satisfactorily answer these questions. Although "our [Kenyan] present day historians" have failed to raise and, then, answer such questions, the narrator says, it is, nevertheless, hoped that *nationalist/* future Kenyan historians/ intellectuals/ scholars would one day do so. Still, although contemporary Kenyan academics have failed to problematise Kenyan history, it is, nevertheless, hoped that some future generation of Kenyan intellectuals/ scholars/ historians would do so.

The narrator also proposes, in tandem, how these "unanswered" questions should be addressed, as has already been noted. He proposes a radical history of Kenya, which will *re-write* contemporary accounts of the same history; he proposes a Kenyan history, which, in fact, privileges the contributions of the Kenyan people themselves. In this way, the contribution Ngugi's novel makes to this debate about the relevance/ validity of contemporary accounts of Kenyan history is to raise the questions once more to the intended local constituency in *Petals of Blood* -- the Kenyan scholars/ intellectuals/ historians, who may share the narrator's vision.

It is important to emphasise that at the beginning of Part Four, Chapter Eleven, the narrator-participant emerges as *a politically aware pan-Africanist* who is equipped to *see through* the Trans-Africa road and dub it as an international capitalist ploy to exploit and rob Africa further, as follows:

Well, well ... we are of the road now, part of the beauty of the ... achievement of the vision which gave rise to it and also of the hollowness and failed promises of which the road is a monument Untroubled by memories and doubts ... and despair in the eyes of the elders, little boys and girls prance about the banks, trying to spell out LONRHO, SHELL, ESSO, TOTAL, AGRIP beside the word DANGER on the side belly of the tankers. They sing ... of the road which will surely carry them to all the cities of Africa, their Africa, to link hands with children of other lands. (262-3; emphasis mine)

The force of the irony and biting satire in this passage could be appreciated only by the intended superreadership in *Petals of Blood*, as will be seen. First, the superreadership will immediately recognise that the irony/ sarcasm suggested in "[w]ell, well ... we are of the road now, part of the beauty of the ... achievement of the vision which gave rise to it," in fact, serves only to underscore Ngugi's own disillusionment with neo-colonialism; that the statement precisely

demonstrates Ngugi's characteristic vision of a future Africa, free from the exploitation of international capitalist multi-nationals in most of his discursive essays. Secondly, this superreading is further underscored when the superreadership interprets (by adding to "danger" the suffix "ous") the condemnation of multi-nationals as being "DANGER[OUS]" (emphasis mine). The warning, "DANGER", it must be emphasised, is, in fact, pointedly associated with the big international oil companies. Significantly, too, is the implication of the change in the tense pattern from the past to the simple present that the superreadership is likely to take note of: this change begins in the penultimate paragraph quoted above, and its significance is that it injects a sense of immediacy and underscores the unfortunate continuity of the capitalist exploitation of the Kenyan masses.

Still, the superreadership is likely to take this passage as another instance of Ngugi's aversion towards monopoly and international capitalism. Ngugi's ire towards monopoly and international capitalism, the superreadership will note, has been steadily growing. In fact, they are likely to bring to bear on this passage Ngugi's (1997) thesis on the exploits of monopoly and international capitalism, which is as follows:

I [Ngugi] had gradually come to realize that Kenya was poor, not because of anything inherent in Kenyan people and their landscape, but because *the wealth produced by Kenyans ended up in developing the Western world*. I had worked it out this way: for every one unit of capital invested from Germany, France, Britain, Japan and America, *the imperialist bourgeoisie took away nine units of wealth back to their countries*. (90; emphasis mine)

This critique of monopoly and international capitalism is not new; commentators²⁵ often point out that there is often a relationship between monopoly and international capitalism, and companies such as ESSO and TOTAL who seem to dominate the supply of fuel at once in individual countries such as Kenya and other countries both in and outside Africa; that the profits which such companies make are *not usually re-invested in the African countries* in which they operate, for as a rule, that profit goes back to the owners of the companies. The profit goes back, in fact, to the owners' countries in which it is invested.

From the foregoing, it is, therefore, arguable that the first-person narrator in the opening sections of Chapter Four and Eleven in *Petals of Blood* could not have been projecting himself to a casual readership. In fact, given the academic/ intellectual level of the economic, historical and political analysis of Kenya's/ Africa's "unanswered" questions and problems as presented in these sections, there is little doubt that the politically perceptive commentator could be a



veiled authorial intrusion that is aimed, specifically, at the local Kenyan superreadership. In fact, the references to named historians (Ogot, Muriuki, and Were) and the explicit questions that the narrator-participant puts to them in the Chapter Four excerpt, for instance, should provide a fair indication of this explicit and direct authorial communication to Ngugi's then Senior Common Room colleagues at the University of Nairobi. This is further borne out in the correspondence between Karega and the unnamed lawyer (198-200), through which Ngugi deplores the state of research and output of "Black professors", "men of letters", and "intellectuals" -- specifically singling out those in the history and political science departments at Nairobi University. These people are singled out, it seems, for their pseudo-scholarship, which, far from attempting to analyse the "unanswered" questions about the people's condition, about colonialism and imperialism, merely skirt over them and end up considering what Ngugi thinks are issues of no relevance or consequence. There is no doubt that this spirited exchange between Karega and the lawyer -- two characters imbued with Ngugi social-political awareness -- is fashioned to provide a platform for Ngugi to challenge his colleagues at Nairobi University. Indeed, the fact that Ngugi is addressing himself to colleagues, contemporaries, and intimates, renders it easy for him to inject comic elements in *Petals of Blood*, an aspect which augurs well for this, otherwise, very serious critique of contemporary Kenya. For example, there is the occasional straight humour like, "[a]ccording to Ruma Monga" (344), which the local super-readership will recognise as a linguistic joke by transliteration; that the phrase seems to present "Ruma Monga" (a corrupted/ localized version of "rumour monger") as either an individual, or newspaper/ magazine/ radio station.

It is, however, in the expository passages that *Petals of Blood* exhibits its humour to the utmost. As already indicated, one of the most strikingly humorous episodes in the novel is the parody of Kenyan historians (Chapter Four, 67) in which the perceptive first-person narrator carves out a weighty argument around the "history" of a fictional Ilmorog against which he counterpoints the theories of real (named) scholars at Nairobi University. Then there is the elevated persona of an Ilmorog historian/ social commentator of Chapter Nine, whose presentation of the "epic journey" to the city is done with an acute undercutting sense of humour which lends it an almost mock epic quality. Yet, "Part Four: Again ... *La Luta Continua!*", particularly the opening chapter (Eleven), which strongly marks itself out as a straight piece of authorial narrative, offers a more consistent/ long drawn illustration of the novel's humour and irony. This important part of the novel opens with a focus on "the road"

and its immediate (negative) consequences, which is done with a gentle sense of a comic-satiric voice: not a matter for anger or indignation, however righteous, but one for serious consideration. This is followed by a survey of the long term effects (268 and 280-81), which “development” and “progress” wrought in Ilmorog: a total and tragic displacement and destruction of the local population by the onslaught of international capitalism and its local allies. This, too, is executed with irony and humour.

It is significant that in plotting this story of betrayal and exploitation, the narration makes a consistent attempt to present issues from the point of view of the victims, in which process Ngugi fulfils his earlier charge to African novelists to be “committed to the side of the majority” (1972a: 46). The narration in *Petals of Blood* is, consequently, informed by a multiplicity of view points, which is the cornerstone of Ngugi’s “experimentation” and is expressed in, quite frequently, unorthodox methods. In fact, the sections in the novel that are in the first-person narrative read like disguised versions of authorial view points in which some of the novel’s salient issues are raised through the perspective of its characters.

It is also important to note that the multi-faceted point of view is made possible through the novel’s avoidance of a single hero who would otherwise have claimed/ necessitated individual attention/ focus. Significantly, the fact that *Petals of Blood* has four central characters affords its narration a multiplicity of voices, both numerous and various, which in their additional symbolic roles of representatives of the “have-nots” powerfully render it a novel *about* the people, but not *for* the people, as has already been noted. In this way, *Petals of Blood* is a novel about the *peasants*, but it is not for *them* because they are *illiterate*, as this contradiction has already been noted.

However, the point could still be made that the limited omniscience the novel achieves through the avoidance of a single hero enhances the novel’s planned multiple points of view, and is expressed in a variety of methods, including the narrator to narratee(s) technique, as already explained, by which characters from time to time, recollect or reminisce about their past experiences to selected audiences. For example, Munira’s confession is significant to the novel’s narrative mainly in as far as it is utilized as an historical retrospect of the twelve years -- but, even then, it does not quite stand out as the basic narrative it may purport to be. The main thrust of the narrative in *Petals of Blood* remains a third-person omniscient narration.²⁶

Perhaps it would be useful to turn to the evidence in the text: Munira’s statement is first mentioned at the beginning of Chapter Three (*POB* 41), but this is immediately followed by the

prisoner's stream of inward reflections as he attempts to reconstruct mentally Wanja's story of her seduction by Kimeria, as part of the statement. Then it is not until page 43 that the narrator mentions that "[h]e [Munira] tried another approach: he begged for a pen and appealed for time: he would write a statement in his own hand and his own way." However, this is only as far as it goes, for the next couple of pages are taken up by a third-person narration, followed by a brief interview between Munira and Inspector Godfrey, until the bottom of page 44, when the latter says: "[n]ow, Mr. Munira, we shall provide you with pen and paper." And, whereas the next ten pages (45-54) record Munira's first-person account, which, among other things, re-lives Karega's first arrival in Ilmorog, there is no explicit evidence to indicate that it is part of the written statement and it must be supposed that it is only a mental re-creation. However, it is implied in a couple of instances that Munira is pleading before an audience of some kind -- whether it is to the police or the intended reader, is not made clear in the following:

For that one week I [Munira] would picture Wanja laughing at our frail efforts to extricate ourselves from her vast dreams and visions; for I now knew, God is my witness, that all she wanted was power. (45)

...

I [Munira] suppose you can say that Karega had chosen to confide in me on the claims of some shadowy connections in our past. Shadowy, I say, because for a long time after our first meeting in Ilmorog I thought that our paths had only previously crossed once in that impersonal territory of a teacher and pupils. (46)

...

I [Munira] was never one for the public limelight or really interested in the affairs of others. My life was a series of unconnected events. I was happy in my escape-hole in Ilmorog, at least before Wanja came. (49)

The first explicit evidence from the written statement appears at the end of Chapter Three at the bottom half of page 66, and the second (actually the first significant one), in the last subsection of Chapter Five (99-105), to be followed by a third "instalment" -- no more than one quarter of a page -- at the end of Part One (117-18), which record the significance of the "journey" to him. All these three "evidences", together with others appearing in Part Three, Chapter Seven (195, 226-7), and Chapter Three (243-7), are presented in Munira's own first-person voice. It is worth registering also that throughout the whole of Part Two (120-87), there is no reference to the written statement.

The section at the start of Part Three and opening of Chapter Seven (190-5) perhaps provides the best illustration of the author's ploy of seemingly presenting the story through Munira's notes. The chapter opens with a quotation from Munira's written statement: " '[y]es,

Ilmorog was never quite the same after the journey,' wrote Munira years later, echoing Nderi's words" (190). However, instead of continuing with Munira's "testimony", the narration is taken up by an unconnected report of the prisoner's condition in his cell (190-1), which is followed by a re-created exchange between Munira and a policeman (191-3). Interestingly, in the course of this basically third-person narrative, there are references invoking the "written statement" such as "[e]very evening one of the policemen on guard -- either the short one or the tall one -- would collect the day's instalment and take it away" (190), and, "[h]e was beginning to get slightly weary of the daily routine: porridge in the morning; the writing desk; lunch of *ugali* and *sukuma wiki*; the writing desk" (191), which might create the impression that the information in the narrative is gleaned from Munira's prison notes. Yet, it is not; in actual fact, apart from the single opening statement illustrated above, the only reference in the section which is related to Munira's written statement is the brief paragraph quoted in the first-person on page 195. In fact, this entire section is more or less fashioned in a similar way to the first six pages of Chapter Twelve (295-300), in which a single statement from Munira's confession, "[O]h, a new earth, another world?" (295) is thrown in, apparently, as a basis for Inspector Godfrey's interrogation of the prisoner, as the third-person narrator reproduces it. The only instance, therefore, when the story is faithfully presented through Munira's statement/ prison notes (that is, as different from those occasions, as already noted, that present the background in Munira's first-person voice) is on pages 224-6 -- and this, perhaps, is only made possible because the story is told through Munira's perspective, as he "remember[s] that night of *theng'eta* drinking" (224).

The foregoing evidence indicating the relative scarcity of material relating to the written statement is not meant to minimise the significance of Munira's first-person contribution. As indicated earlier, the confessional is particularly important as a retrospect of Ilmorog's twelve years, following Kenya's attainment of Uhuru (December 1963). Secondly, it lends an exciting dimension to the crime and detection plot that is basic to the novel, and also affords this otherwise conservative "outsider", "watcher" and "spectator" some active role. It should be appreciated that in counterpointing this grim Kenyan story of post-independence betrayal and exploitation, it is Ngugi's apparent intention to construct the narrative as a communal story. Therefore, Munira's confession, apart from being "the spinal narrative of the book," as A. Gurr (1982: 167) argues, is basic to the novel's narrative in so far as it forms an integral part of the four victims' well-documented struggles for existence in their symbolic roles of the "have-nots" in the capitalist/ exploitative Kenyan system.

4. Evaluating African Political Fiction

It is noticeable that African political texts often court the risk of receiving double critical standards. This is to say that African political texts get both negative criticism and applause for the way in which their narrative technique usually implicates their intended readerships. This is precisely what happens to *A Man of the People* and *Petals of Blood*, respectively.

A useful early critique of narrative technique in *A Man of the People* is Ngugi's (1972a) attack that in this novel Achebe neglects the socio-didacticism that characterizes his regional fiction. To Ngugi, in *A Man of the People* "the teacher no longer stands apart to contemplate." Rather, he says, Achebe "has moved with a whip among his pupils, flagellating himself as well as his pupils." Ngugi interprets the satire in Achebe's novel as a negative prospect in the development of African fiction with respect to the local/ African readership. For according to him, *A Man of the People* "make[s] it impossible or inexcusable for other African [political] writers to do other than *address themselves directly to their audiences in Africa* -- not in a comforting spirit -- and tell them that such problems are their concern" (54; emphasis mine).

Ngugi's criticism of Achebe's novel is meaningful because it privileges the relationship between narrative technique and intended readership. It raises the important aspect of the *relevance* as well as *significance* of appropriate narrative technique to the intended readership in African political fiction. Ngugi's critique is still useful because it further interrogates the extent to which the African author becomes either *involved*/ implicated in, or *distanced* from, his own work. The point to make, then, according to Ngugi, is that for the African novel to be forceful at all, the African political novelist should make a deliberate effort to work out appropriate narrative technique; that it is significant for the African political novelist to realise how his intended readership may affect his own narrative technique.

Cooper (1992b) praises *Petals of Blood* because of the way in which the novel manipulates the symbol of "petals" for both thematic and stylistic purposes. Still, she applauds Ngugi's novel precisely because of the way in which it uses this symbol to suggest its intended superreader. She says that "[t]he petals of blood which give Ngugi his title *are, and have been, in other contexts*, an evocative symbol of the racism experienced by blacks in different times and places" (47; emphasis mine). Significantly, Cooper *superreads* the deployment in Ngugi's novel of the symbol of "petals".

In her chapter, “Evaluating Popular Poetry and Fiction”, from which this last section of this chapter borrows the language of its heading, Cooper begins by insisting that the most fruitful way to evaluate a work of fiction is to examine how narrative technique assists to construct the intended readership in a text. For this reason, Cooper is struck in Ngugi’s novel by the way the author *localises* the *global* symbol of “petals”. She finds that “in *Petals of Blood* Ngugi successfully realises in *poetic form* both the *urgency* for a *national* culture to combat cultural imperialism and the realities of economic exploitation” (49; emphasis mine). Cooper’s point, then, is that narrative technique in *Petals of Blood* is appropriately *compelling* because it at once suggests and intensely engages the *local* superreadership.

The significance of a meaningful relationship between appropriate narrative technique and intended readership seems to continue to haunt the African novelist to the extent that the very notion/ institution of the intended reader becomes a problematic. This is precisely what happens in African texts such as Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons* and Ngugi’s *Matigari*, in which the authors attempt to resort to aspects of African orature for narrative technique, as will be seen in the next chapter of this study.

NOTES

1. Although Howe's and Trivedi's comments are based on the American political novel, they, nevertheless, provide a meaningful starting point for any useful discussion of narrative technique and intended readership in African political fiction.
2. Chakava was one of the participants at the International Conference on Publishing and Book Development held at the University of Ife, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, 16-20 December 1973. He attended this conference as Assistant Manager, Heinemann Educational Books (East Africa) Ltd., Nairobi, Kenya. In Oluwasanmi, Mclean & Zell, 362.
3. Chakava adds that after he had advised Ngugi to remove a number of incidents from Wanja's journey, Ngugi
responded to these criticism by leaving all the incidents intact but 'moving' Ilmorog so that it was now much further away from Nairobi, and its new description had changed from the lush green of Limuru to a drier place *resembling* Nyandarua, Kinagnop or Lari, or somewhere deeper in the Rift Valley. (18; emphasis mine)
4. Kristeva's concept of *inter-texte* is useful here. According to Abrams (1988), Kristeva has popularised the "term intertextuality to signify"
the multiple ways in which any one literary text echoes, or is inescapably linked to other texts, whether by open or covert citations and allusions, or by the assimilation of the features of an earlier text by a later text, or simply by participation in a common stock of literary codes and conventions. (247)
Significantly, Erapu points out that the epigraphs in *Petals of Blood* suggest the international superreadership in Ngugi's novel:
This is reinforced by the concept of the second coming from Yeats' poem and the epigraphs to the four divisions which all serve to place it on a timeless scale and on a canvas larger than Kenya, Africa and the Black Diaspora. (106)
5. In discussing Achebe's novel as satire, one needs to take into account Abrams' definition of this genre:
[Satire] differs from the comic in that comedy evokes laughter mainly as an end

in itself, while satire 'derides'; that it uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt existing outside the work itself. That butt may be an individual (in 'personal satire'), or a type of person, a class, an institution, a nation, or even ... the whole human race. (166)

A Man of the People ridicules political leaders (the "haves") and heightens the moral dangers that intellectuals are likely to face when they get attracted to the glitter/ glamour of political life.

6. Abrams (1988: 4). He further points out that:

An allegory is a narrative in which the agents and action, and sometimes the setting as well, are *contrived* so as to make coherent sense on the 'literal,' or primary level of signification, and also to signify a second, correlated order of agents, concepts and events. (4; emphasis mine)

7. Fanon says that:

From the beginning, the native [African] intellectual[... group] directs its efforts towards activities of the intermediary type. The basis of its strength is found in its aptitude for trade and small business enterprises, and in securing commissions. It is not its money that works, but its business acumen. It does not go in for investments and it cannot achieve that accumulation of capital necessary to the birth and blossoming of an authentic bourgeoisie. At that rate it would take centuries to set on foot an embryonic industrial revolution, and in any case it would find the way barred by the relentless opposition of the former mother country, which will have taken all precautions when setting up neo-colonialist trade conventions.

If the government wants to bring the country out of its stagnation and set it well on the road towards development and progress, it must first and foremost nationalize the middle-man's trading sector. The bourgeoisie, who wish to see both the triumph of the spirit of money-making and the enjoyment of consumer goods, and at the same time the triumph of their contemptuous attitude towards the mass of the people and the scandalous aspect of profit-making (should we not rather call it robbery?), in fact, invest largely in this sector. (145-6)

This is an important passage because what Fanon says about the African bourgeoisie foregrounds the concerns of most latter day post-independence African political texts. What Fanon says is that African intellectuals seem to have straddled both the politics and economics of their countries in a very particular manner. This is to say that, according to Fanon, at the beginning of the post-independence era, the African intellectual was commonly a nebulous figure who belonged simultaneously to local politics, on the one hand, and to international monopoly capital as a local agent, on the other.

8. Achebe has had a methodical way of writing. He demonstrates, in fact, quite early in his career his intentions. He begins with an explanation of his aims in his first two novels and, then, provides a tentative framework of his subsequent fiction, as follows:

I [Achebe]’m trying to ... oscillate between the past -- the immediate past -- and the present: *Things Fall Apart* is about a hundred years ago; *No Longer at Ease* is today; and I want to go back now to not quite the time of *Things Fall Apart*, but a little later, because I think there’s a lot of interesting material there; and the fourth one would be present day. And that’s the way I intend to work. (1972: 4)
9. Achebe, 1966: 15. Subsequent references to this edition, preceded by *AMOTP* where appropriate and are incorporated into the text.
10. I have been unable to locate the work of both Clay and Correlli due to circumstances beyond my control. For this reason, I must thank F. A. Abban, Department of English and Classical Culture, University of the Free State, for bringing to my attention the characteristic narrative technique and intended readership in the work of these two writers. His discussion with me, particularly of Clay’s *Beyond Pardon*, was illuminating.
11. It is interesting that elsewhere Achebe (1975) cites the same authors as being “the literary background of today’s African intellectuals” (39). He further explains that he once taught in a private school in Nigeria where he discovered that:

[T]he school ‘library’ consisted of a dusty cupboard containing one copy of the *Holy Bible*, five pamphlets entitled *The Adventures of Tarzan*, and once copy of a popular novel called *The Sorrows of Satan*. (40)
12. Although Masoga says this in the context of intellectuals/ academics in South African universities, the force of his argument is comparable to that of Achebe’s concern about the “silence” of intellectuals in post-independence Africa.
13. Abrams, 1988: 56.
14. Achebe explains his shift from politics to art, as follows:

Having fought with the nationalist movements and been on the side of the

politicians, I [Achebe] realized after independence that they and I were on different sides because they were not doing what we had agreed to do. So I had to become a critic. (Cited in Gikandi 1991a: 104)

15. Cooper (1992a) makes the important observation that in discussing narrative technique in certain African political texts, it may often be necessary to “[t]hink about the urgency writers in terrible times of political crisis may feel, and the painstaking process of producing a polished, highly skilled literary product” (4).
16. This technique is variously designated in critical/ literary theory as “Free Indirect Speech”/ “Style”, “Narrated Monologue”, “Erlebte Rede”, “Style Indirect Libre”, Quasi-Direct Discourse” or “Substitutionary Narration”. In some usages these all represent the same general narrative technique, subdivisions within which are indicated by distinguishing between “Narrated Speech” and “Narrated Thought”, or between “Free Indirect Speech” and “Free Indirect Thought” (thus making the former phrase slightly ambiguous as it can either represent the umbrella term or a subdivision within it). Cohn has a useful definition of “Free Indirect Discourse”: “[it is] the technique for rendering ... character[s]’ thought[s] in their own idiom[s] while maintaining the third-person reference and the basic tense of narration” (100). However, in *Petals of Blood* it is instructive to note that free indirect discourse is not just thought that is represented, but also speech and, furthermore, the characters’ attitudes and ideological presuppositions.
17. Ngugi, 1977: 27-30. Subsequent references to this edition, preceded by *POB* where appropriate and are incorporated into the text. The spelling *Kikuyu* instead of *Gikuyu* is used throughout this study to refer to both the language, and people to whom it is their first language. Similarly, *Swahili* is spelt *Kiswahili*.
18. The Dickensian symbolism in such names as Fraudsham and Hallows Ironmonger, as commentators rightly point out, is striking indeed (Gurr, 1981: 111, 1982: 167; Treister, 1984: 268-9).
19. A useful study of Kenya’s political history is Bailey’s *Kenya: The National Epic*. Much of

the historical information this study employs to discuss Ngugi's work is from that account. J. M. are the initials for Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, author of *Mau Mau Detainee*. He was a wealthy businessman and popular politician (he was M. P. for Nyandarua North), and was abducted from a Nairobi hotel by agents of the Kenyatta regime in 1975. His body was later found abandoned "for the hyenas" in Ngong hills. His mysterious death is supposed to have created a split in the Kikuyu community -- thus posing a dangerous threat to Kenyatta's political power base. Ngugi has great regard for this nationalist politician and champion for social reform. He has written in praise of J. M.'s contribution in *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (95), and there are also two chapters on him in *Writers in Politics: A Re-Engagement with Issues of Literature and Society*: "J. M. Kariuki -- A Writer's Tribute to a Kenyan Hero" (95-8) and "The Price of Freedom: The Story of a 'Mau Mau' Detainee" (99-112). It is instructive to note that information such as this is much more meaningful to the Kikuyu superreadership in *Petals of Blood*.

20. A veteran politician and freedom fighter who was detained together with Kenyatta and others by the colonial administration. He later got disenchanted with the ruling KANU party, and together with Oginga, and some other notable veterans, formed the opposition KPU. Distinguished among the very few Kenyan politicians that did not "grab" or "amass" wealth after independence, he was, according to Kidubuka (247), "once publicly humiliated as Kenyatta taunted him":

'What have you done for yourself?' In this way, Kaggia naturally fitted the bankrupt clichés like 'disgruntled politician' thrown about by Kenyatta's henchmen -- the comprador class of politicians -- in a typical neo-colony, to those (like Kaggia) who consistently challenged them over the 'betrayal of the people'.

21. Ngugi (1986) earlier discusses this crisis when he was a student at Leeds University:

In an interview in 1967 with *Union News*, a student newspaper at Leeds University, I [Ngugi] said: 'I have reached a point of crisis. I don't know whether it is worth any longer writing in English'. (72)

22. Kotei (1981) points out that "the ultimate aim of all writing and publishing activity is reading" (147).

23. It is significant to state that whether Ngugi writes in English or in indigenous African languages such as Kikuyu and Kiswahili, his readership in Kenya will still be determined/ limited by the level of literacy, which is usually low in most African countries, as commentators point out. Kotei (1981) says that “African nations are aware that one of their most disabling conditions, tending to slow down development in all directions, is their low literacy percentage, in fact, the lowest among all the regions of the world” (124). With respect to Kenya, Booker notes that “[a]bout eighty percent of the people live in rural areas; most live as farmers or herdsmen in small, dispersed settlements” with “[a]pproximately fifty percent of the adult population ... [being] literate ... mostly in English and Kiswahili (181). This means that a large percentage of the population in Kenya are likely to be *illiterate* in Kikuyu. Chakava adds another problematic with respect to the supposed intended peasant readership in *Petals of Blood*:

[T]he majority of mother-tongue speakers were poor peasants who lived below the breadline, and only a small percentage of whom had achieved literacy beyond the three RRRs. As a publisher, how was I [Chakava] going to produce and distribute ... [*Petals of Blood*] in view of the fact that the majority of the readers would be people from rural areas where the roads were non-existent or impassable for most of the year? (16)

24. This contradiction in Ngugi’s novel is further articulated here: it is worth emphasising that *Petals of Blood* is, in fact, largely written in the language (English) of the very economic system (imperialism), which the novel supposedly seeks to attack.
25. An earliest critique is what Baran describes as “Lenin’s *famous*” book -- *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (63; emphasis mine). Indeed Baran himself, Amin and Frank provide similar critiques of monopoly and international capitalism. It is instructive to point out that Ngugi (1993) is aware of Lenin’s study; he shows this when he explains his attraction to Conrad, especially to Conrad’s portrayal of the dynamics of finance in the colonial empire:

Notice for instance the dominance of the images of ivory in *Heart of Darkness*; of coal in *Victory*; of silver in *Nostramo*. *Nostramo*, in particular, was among the earliest novels to develop the coalescence of industrial and bank capital to create finance capital: what Lenin in ... *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* once described as one of the crucial characteristics of modern imperialism. (5-6)

And in the chapter entitled “Standstill and Movement Under Capitalism,” Baran points

out that:

Yet it is frequently believed ... that the concentration of profits in the hands of a small number of firms is of little significance, since these giant firms themselves may be owned by a very large number of individuals. This picture of a shareholders' democracy is, however, a myth. As a number of investigations have shown, the control of the few corporations that hold the lion's share of these assets and earn a correspondingly large share of the aggregate profits is vested in a small number of individuals who in turn receive the bulk of distributed profits [T]his reflects itself fully in the distribution of personal income and savings [of the top management]. (59-60)

26. The main thrust of the narrative in *Petals of Blood* remains the third-person omniscient narrator technique, as Stratton (1983) points out:

Petals of Blood has another first-person narrator, Munira, through whose prison notes some of the story is presented. Most readers, I [Stratton] believe, are left with the impression that a great deal of the story has been presented through these notes. In fact only twenty-three to twenty-four pages have been presented in this manner. To create this effect, Ngugi once again begins and concludes parts, chapters and subsections with Munira's notes; inserts occasional excerpts from the notes (for example, 226-7) and refers to what, in fact, has been presented in the third person as if it had been contained in the notes. For example, 'Munira leaned over the table to see what the officer was pointing at, what it was that he had picked out of all the things that Munira had scribbled'. (295)

CHAPTER V

ORATURE, LITERACY AND THE AFRICAN QUEST NARRATIVE/ TALE/ NOVEL: THE INTENDED READER AS A PROBLEMATIC IN AYI KWEI ARMAH'S *TWO THOUSAND SEASONS* AND NGUGI WA THIONG'O'S *MATIGARI MA NJIRUUNGI (MATIGARI)*

Two Thousand Seasons was published ... by the East African Publishing House Before it came out in book form, I'd tried to make it available to a large African audience by getting it serialized in newspapers. This was part of an experiment -- unsuccessful so far to see if I could effectively break out of the colonialist stranglehold of Western publishers such as the Heinemann African Writers' Series.

A. K. Armah (1977: 41)

I have an ... African audience in mind, at least those *who can read*.
Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1980: 29; emphasis mine)

1. The African Quest Narrative/ Tale/ Novel: Orature as Site for Narrative Technique

This study has so far shown that its main concern is a quest for a critical approach to the study of the African novel, which particularly privileges narrative technique and intended readerships in African fiction. Thus the main argument of the thesis has been that such a method is likely to lead to an understanding of how African authors conceive of *writing* in their societies. That such a critical approach should, in fact, be able to demonstrate how African writers conceive of their *role(s)* in their various communities, in so far as these communities are implicated both in the themes and intended readerships in African fiction. It is important to emphasise the point about how African authors, especially the ones this study examines, conceive of their work, for they often make huge claims about what they think is the function of African literature in the development of the African continent. For example, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) argues that his work is partly about what he describes as "the destiny of Africa" (1), while Ayi Kwei Armah (1977) asserts that "African creative activity is the highest instance of human intelligence at work and at home in Africa" (34).

The conception of both the novel and role of the writer in Africa has often made African writers to make a constant search for appropriate narrative technique, as the previous chapters of this study have shown. Nowhere has this search been so pronounced as in African *quest* texts such as Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Matigari*, in which the authors show that they are "[l]onging for [an appropriate] form," to use the language of the title of Timothy Brennan's (1990) essay, whose implications in the context of the African novel were discussed in the first chapter of this study. In *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari* this quest/ longing for form becomes, in fact, a problematic, as there is recourse to African oral forms that are removed from the novel genre both in conception and delivery. This quest, as this chapter shows, has not been an easy task for both Armah and Ngugi.

Kelwyn Sole (1978a) is apt when he notes the enormity of this problem in African literature, as follows:

The African writer is also faced with the problem of trying to *translate his own oral tradition*, which takes place to the accompaniment of dance, mime, song and audience participation, *to written words on the page*. In his position between European culture and his own people, choice of literary form and audience is a problem. He has to use social imagery to create as wide a nuance of meaning in his work as possible, which is particularly difficult given the European nature of his literary education. He has to realize that if he writes outside of his potential of experience, naive or phoney situations will result. He has to '*tame and traditionalise*' imported literary forms. He has to choose whether to adapt English, French or Portuguese to local usage or direct his utterance to the African intelligentsia and a foreign audience. He must realize that *most educated Africans possess a mind largely trained away from their own cultural background*. (4-5; emphasis mine)

Sole problematises the importance of African traditional sources as site for narrative technique in written African texts when he puts this process -- "to 'tame and traditionalise'" -- in scare quotes. He puts this process in inverted commas because he wants to acknowledge the difficulty in designating this process. Lewis Nkosi (1981) has a similar problem: in his case he is aware of the problem and, as such, only problematises the results of the process when he uses the phrase "queer effects" (54) in describing the result of *translating oral forms onto the printed/ written/ published page* in African literature. However, "queer effects" is neither satisfactory, nor conclusive both in explaining *what* actually the *new* "text" is, and in offering a commensurate concept that is accurate to describe this new phenomenon. Be this as it may, Nkosi's notion of "queer effects" is useful in the context of this study as it implies the *ultimate effect* on the

intended reader; it suggests that in the *process of reading* African texts in which African traditional forms are merged with the novel, the reader will perceive narrative technique that is extra-ordinary/ strange.

Walter Ong (1982) attempts to account for this problem of stating precisely what happens when oral genres are merged with written ones, and suggests the concept of “secondary orality”.¹ According to him, “[t]oday primary oral culture in the strict sense *hardly exists*, since every culture knows of writing and has some experience of its effects” (11; emphasis mine). In fact, he adds that today “[t]he purely oral tradition or primary orality is not easy to conceive of accurately and meaningfully” (11) because, “writing,” according to him, “has taken possession of the psyche” (14) of the writer in contemporary cultures of secondary orality.

It is interesting to note that Ong traces the etymology of the word *text* to what he terms “preliterate” cultures; that, according to him, the root of “text” is traceable to *texere* (“tissue”, to “weave”, “plait” [13]). It is revealing, too, to observe that Western ideas which suggest that a literary text should be seen as “tissue” and that text-making translates into weaving and interweaving are similarly rooted in African orature, as this chapter shows.²

However, to negotiate the problems of explaining in meaningful terms what *it is* that happens in African literature when aspects/ forms of African orature are merged, Isidore Okpewho (1992) suggests the concept of *adaptation*,³ while Adeleke Adeeko (1997) coins that of *writing oralists* to designate, according to him, African novelists “whose relationships to one another and to their ancestral traditions can be most usefully mapped with the use of oral traditions” (38). Adeeko’s and Okpewho’s efforts are needful, but they do not go far enough to explain what Nkosi suggests as the process whereby African writers are experimenting with new literary forms, and their achievement in this regard owes much in their “returning *us to African traditional sources and by exploiting certain aspects of native languages*” (54; emphasis mine).⁴ It is instructive, then, to note that part of this problem manifests itself in the attempts commentators have to actually *designate* specific African texts such as *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari*, in which the merging of orature with the novel takes place.

Take K. D. Rao (1993) who says that “*Two Thousand Seasons* ... in its sweep and presentation ... defies classifications” (89), and Derek Wright (1989) who has a similar problem, as follows:

Two Thousand Seasons does not purport to be a ‘novel’ in any sense of the word and to approach Armah’s daring experimentation with the techniques

of indigenous African narrative forms with the critical assumptions governing discussion of European fiction is to mistake both the formal design and the spirit of the book. (222)

As was the case with Sole earlier, Wright uses scare quotes to suggest the extent to which it is problematic to describe *what* happens when the oral and the written merge. He puts the term novel in inverted commas to show how unsatisfactory it is to give any conventional literary/critical description to Armah's text.

Perhaps it is Nkosi (1995) who first notes the problem of characterizing *Matigari*.

According to him:

In so far as *Matigari* ... represents a *search* for a solution to the problem of, or what has turned out to be, a crisis of representation for all post-independence African novels, the work bears all the *hallmarks* of this new development. (202; emphasis mine)

Nkosi notes that in *Matigari* Ngugi attempts to write what could be designated as the "new novel" in African literature. He, however, fails to explain both the characteristic "hallmarks" of this fresh effort, and how this endeavour impacts on the intended readership in Ngugi's novel that Ngugi himself speaks about in the second epigraph at the beginning of this chapter. To be sure, Ngugi, like Armah, is "search[ing]" for fresh narrative technique to "represent[...]" the post-independence dilemma in Africa; but, again, like Armah, Ngugi does not regard this search as a "crisis." Ngugi, in fact, regards this search as one⁵ of the few *best ways* now in which to write for the intended local/ African readership, as this chapter shows.

It is significant to note that the interest African writers have in orature is often necessitated by the need to construct a particular readership; that they want to give the novel genre that *communal* experience which is the essence of orature. As Ong puts it, "[p]rimary orality fosters personality structures that in certain ways are more *communal* and externalised" (69; emphasis mine). What Armah and Ngugi, respectively, attempt to do in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari* is, therefore, to create the impression that these texts are communal performances/ events,⁶ in which both the narrators and readerships/ audiences are involved/ engaged, both in the simultaneous *creation* and *telling* of the story. For this reason, the term "speakerly" text could, probably, be used to describe African texts such as *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari*, for narrative technique in these texts seems to render them what the writers of the essays in *Artist and Audience: African Literature as a Shared Experience* describe as "a *shared* experience" (emphasis mine), a feature, according to them, of many African texts. In fact in the

Preface to that anthology, the editors, R. K. Priebe and T. A. Hale (1979), quote D. Kunene, who claims that:

[African] literature *is* a shared experience ... that is its very soul. This is, of course, a great deal more obvious in an oral narrative situation where artist, audience and art merge into one explosion of creative energy in which the very process of creation is itself art, where there is no distinction between becoming and being [African literature] is of necessity, participatory, for who is not involved in its becoming can never be able to experience it.
(Emphasis in text)

In addition to this, the editors also reproduce Kunene's reference to Goody and Watt, who point out that "[i]n non-literate society every situation cannot but bring the individual into [conflict] with the group's patterns of thought, feelings and action," and that "the choice is between cultural tradition -- or solitude." As it turns out to be, this view -- that African literature is a communal activity -- has a tendentious anthropological bias. It says more about orature than it does about literature. It does not demonstrate *how* written texts such as the African quest novel *evinces* its intended *readership*. This point is critical in any meaningful discussion of African literature, for what is often meant by the *audience* in an oral performance is that the audience is effectively a part of the performer's *resources* because of the function it plays in the course of a *performance*. Put in other words, the audience of an oral performance comprises people who are critically and imaginatively *involved* in its production. In fact, this is to argue that the audience of a performance is composed almost entirely of both *actual* and *potential* performers. For these reasons, *Artist and Audience: African Literature as a Shared Experience* lacks aesthetic-philosophic backbone:⁷ indeed one would have thought that the prominence of "audience" and "shared experience" in this anthology could but lead to a useful discussion on theories of Reception, reader-response and aesthetic experience.

The aim of this chapter, then, is to explore the ways in which *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari* attempt to merge orature and novel writing in order to give the impression that these texts are communal performances/ events, albeit the attendant problems that have just been raised. The useful starting point to do this is to examine the problems commentators have raised concerning the achievement of these two African quest novels, in which form and content are claimed to arise out of the merging of certain aspects of orature with those of the novel.

Nkosi (1981) says that African writers achieve the process of merging aspects of orature and novel writing "by *returning us to African traditional sources* and by exploiting certain properties of [African] *native languages*" (54; emphasis mine). Nkosi's notion of a "return"

suggests a problematic for both African writers such as Armah and Ngugi; the notion also raises similar problems for the readerships in both *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari*, as this chapter shows. To begin with, there is the issue of *literacy*: both Armah and Ngugi, together with their readerships are all literate. And, as already noted, it is also practically impossible for Ngugi and Armah to merge incompatible imaginative/ creative/ artistic forms -- oral performances and written texts. Still, it is also almost impossible for their intended readerships to meaningfully realize/ define the end-products, which they may have initially attempted to produce in this merging of incompatible artistic forms.

It is instructive to observe that Armah and Ngugi are familiar with the particular African oral forms and languages that are respectively deployed in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari*. This is to say that these oral traditions and languages are Akan and Kikuyu. This, again, by implication means that the readerships that may meaningfully grasp what Armah's and Ngugi's texts attempt to do must, needs be, familiar with Akan and Kikuyu.. In tandem, it is, therefore, critical to point out that any fruitful discussion of the intended readerships in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari* must *initially* take cognisance of the relevance and significance of *who* is familiar with Akan and Kikuyu; it must bring to bear on these texts *which* readerships have a *knowledge* of Akan and Kikuyu.

Kofi Owusu (1989) argues that "Armah's experimental linguistic and textual strategies" in *Two Thousand Seasons* allows Armah to "make no apologies for ... [his] indebtedness to indigenous [Akan] oral sources" (21). From the critical procedures of this study, it is arguable that Owusu is only short of saying that the same "experimental linguistic and textual strategies" in Armah's novel are equally indebted to the Akan language. Okpewho (1983) goes further to suggest another oral source from which *Two Thousand Seasons* gets its conception, when he distinguishes narrative technique in the novels of the "older" and "younger" generations⁸ of African writers. According to him, the younger generation of African novelists is often inclined to the re-working of African orature:

We may therefore wish to call the tendency here revealed tradition *revised*. Perhaps no recent work better demonstrates this urge to review the old mythic tradition and furnish new hopes than Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*. (3; emphasis in text)

What Okpewho says about Armah's novel holds for Ngugi's; in both *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari* there is an urgency of purpose, "an intensification of the critical spirit" that is foregrounded in myth as a method of confronting the problems/ reality of contemporary African

society. Nowhere is this “critical spirit” more articulated than in Ngugi’s (1997: 53-64) notion of the *return to the roots*,⁹ which, according to Gitahi Gititi (1995), is “not only of writing in African languages and with an anti-imperialist attitude but, more importantly, in *searching* for modes of writing that reflect the dialectic of social change” (214; emphasis mine).¹⁰ Thus Ann Biersteker (1995) rightly observes of *Matigari* that “[i]t is easy to read the novel as an allegory”

in which surviving memory of struggle that has become individualized confronts contemporary social reproduction and workers’ struggles, is liberated by praxis that has repudiated idealism, and becomes the source that informs a revolutionary *quest* for truth and justice based in praxis and social reproduction. (143; emphasis mine)

Biersteker’s notion of “quest” to discuss *Matigari* is critical, for it suggests the aspect of *travelling* to *seek* something as the central action of the plot in Ngugi’s novel; that travel and seeking provide both the development and unity of action in Ngugi’s novel. This is instructive because Ngugi himself says in the author’s “A Note to the English Translation” that narrative technique in *Matigari* is based on a Kikuyu oral tale, a story of an old man called Ndiiro, which is “simple and direct, and it dispenses with fixed time and place,” while for its essence the story “depends on the rhythmic restatement of the *motif of search*; and for suspense, on the urgency of the man’s need for a cure” (emphasis mine).¹¹ In fact, “[a]s the story *progresses*, old man Ndiiro, *whom we never actually meet*, looms large and dominant, a force, a destiny” (M 9; emphasis mine).

It is instructive to point out that Ngugi’s deployment of travel/ seeking in *Matigari* as narrative technique is not new as it is found in other cultures in sub-Saharan Africa. In particular, H. Scheub (1975) uses his notion of the “expansible image” to explain the implications of the *physical travel* with respect to both the plot and theme in the stories/ tales in Southern Africa in which travelling is the primary motif. He says that:

[P]hysical movements in the form of interlocking and transitional images and details carry the expansible image forward and reveal plot. A change in the form or direction of this physical movement means a shift from the image-set to another, or from conflict to resolution. (135; emphasis mine)

According to Scheub, then, travelling in most African orature has a specific goal as its main objective. Significantly, he says that travelling assists the story-teller to have control over the episodes/ events in the narrative/ story/ tale. For this reason, it is important to understand the way in which *Matigari*’s journey directs the audience to the most important aspects of Ngugi’s novel.

Ngugi draws attention to the aspect of the plot in *Matigari*; he insists, too, on characterization in the story. Significantly, he explains that the story should be interpreted as *myth*. It is, therefore, instructive to read *Matigari* as a quest narrative/ tale; that it will be more rewarding to interpret most of Matigari's actions in the novel as characteristic of the *travelling* hero in a quest tale *seeking* a goal.

The notions of travel and seeking are also central to a meaningful reading of *Two Thousand Seasons*. Ato Sekyi-Otu (1987) reads Armah's novel as a journey "[t]owards Anoa ... [n]ot to Anoa," arguing that:

The figural structure of *Two Thousand Seasons* bristles with formal and semantic enigmas. Invoking the 'remembrance of the way' as its principal intention, the narrative is ostensibly an epic account of the African experience *from* a pre-exilic era, through 'two thousand seasons' of disintegration and wandering occasioned by the demonic work of alien 'predators' and 'destroyers,' *to* the final triumph of African humanity over these agents of 'white teeth' and their *return*, prompted by a perdurable racial genius, to the sources of the organic community. (192; emphasis mine)

This is apt; in *Two Thousand Seasons* physical *movement* is basic to the plot. The "people of the way" engage in an ubiquitous journey for "the rediscovery of ... [their] way,"¹² which is defined, as follows:

Our way is reciprocity. The way is wholeness. Our way knows no oppression. The way destroys oppression. Our way is hospitable to guests. The way repels destroyers. Our way produces before it consumes Our way creates. (TTS 39)

Thus *travelling* becomes the established *action* in Armah's novel, while the plot will partly revolve around conflict between the people of "the way" and the destroyers. This chapter, therefore, reads both *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari* as written *adaptations* of quest *oral* narratives that have a similar ideological programme -- a *search* for ideal African societies that could be alternatives to those available in contemporary Africa. From the foregoing, the intended readerships in both *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari* begins to be problematic: they cannot be merely localised. Since the aspect of *travel/ seeking/ quest* is not restricted/ peculiar to African literature/ orature, as was pointed out in the first chapter of this study the intended readership in these two African texts is likely to be wide indeed. It is likely to be both local and international.

Rand Bishop (1982) says of *Two Thousand Seasons* that "[t]he *impact* of ... [Armah's] novel will be immense, once its *form* is fully *appreciated* and its *message* is widely disseminated" (523; emphasis mine). Now, it is instructive to state that to raise the critical issue

of “form” with respect to Armah’s novel is to precisely bring the aspect of *narrative technique* in *Two Thousand Seasons* to such a discussion. Similarly, to raise issues of “impact”, “appreciation” and “message” with respect to *Two Thousand Seasons* is, again, to explicitly bring the critical aspect of readership to such a discussion of Armah’s novel. Yet, although Rand raises these issues in his discussion of Armah’s novel, he does suggest the requisite critical procedures with which to discuss them.

Ngugi (1986) seems to be aware of the importance of these issues in African literature. He is aware of the implications of appropriate narrative technique in a work with respect to the work’s intended readership. In fact, he shows this when he wonders “*how ... the [African] novelist [could] capture and hold the interest of the reader when the reality confronting him is stranger and more captivating than fiction*” (79; emphasis mine). For an African writer to raise such critical issues with respect to both narrative technique and intended readership in African literature is to precisely implore fellow African writers to take cognisance of these issues in their work. It is exactly to emphasise the point that the aspects of narrative technique and intended readership in African fiction are critical indeed. It is to further suggest that it is critically important for critics of the African novel to explore the relationship of narrative technique and intended readership in African fiction.

It is significant to emphasise that Ngugi identifies these issues as being equally central to any meaningful criticism of the postcolonial African novel. He says that if there has been a moment in the history of African literature in which narrative technique and intended readership has been critically important, it is now; it is now, he says, that “the reality confronting the reader is stranger and more captivating than fiction”; it is now because this is the moment in which a strange reality “is what confronts ... [the African quest] novelist in a neo-colony vis-à-vis *the audience most adversely affected by that very reality of a neo-colony* (79; emphasis mine).

Ghana and Kenya are, in Ngugi’s definition, neo-colonies; that the dialectic of social, economic and political change in these nations signifies that of other African nations. This is why, in the epigraphs at the beginning of this chapter both Armah and Ngugi no longer discuss their intended readerships in terms of national boundaries; they discuss them in rather international/ continental terms indeed.

The dynamics of publishing have occasionally been the concern of most African writers. In fact, they have been the subject of discussion in some of the discursive work of the African writers this study examines. These issues have concerned writers such as Ngugi and Armah

precisely because of the *intentions* which these writers have with respect to their intended readerships. Armah (1977) demonstrates this with respect to the reasons he gives for the initial efforts he made to publish *Two Thousand Seasons*, as follows:

I [Armah] tried two newspapers, the Tanzanian *Daily News* and the Ghanaian *Daily Graphic* My attempts to reach my *optimum* audience failed. But a second attempt, to find an African publisher as opposed to a neo-colonial coffee owned by Europeans but slyly misnamed 'African', resulted in the publication of *Two Thousand Seasons* by the East African Publishing House ... based in Nairobi Its editorial and other staff are African. *Its readership is African.* (41; emphasis mine)¹³

It is significant to emphasise that Armah attempts to publish his novel with two newspapers from *two* different *nations* in Africa. The critical point, nevertheless, is to explore the extent of the achievement of this attempt to reach a wide/ an "optimum" African readership, as he says; to find out from Armah's novel itself how it attempts to be accessible to a wide African readership.

Armah shows significant interest in the newspaper as a medium of engaging his "optimum" readership. It is important to stress this point, for the newspaper has a distinguishable audience indeed. As a publication, it is relatively cheap and can be enjoyed with a minimum of expense. In fact, it appeals to both the superreader and the casual one, who may have a precarious literacy and might also find more sophisticated literature such as the novel cumbersome. This is the point S. I. A. Kotei (1975) explains in the African context, as follows:

A fact which cannot be ignored by the modern ... [African writer] is that the newspaper ... continues to be an important stimulant to the reading habit Whereas the average African literate in an urban area may read a ... newspaper every day of the week he may not glance at a book the whole year. (179-80)

The newspaper, then, enjoys a wide readership over the book; indeed this will continue to be the case since the size/ composition of the readership for African newspapers increases overtime due to the often steady growth in the levels of literacy in African countries. Armah's interest in serialising *Two Thousand Seasons* in order to reach a wide readership was, therefore, a shrewd attempt indeed. Yet, the issue still needs to be raised: it is still necessary to explore the extent to which Armah's "optimum" readership is implicated in *Two Thousand Seasons* after the novel had been published in book-form. It is still necessary to find out what narrative strategies Armah deploys in his novel in order to reach his intended wide readership.

Eilen Julien (1992: 141-153) and F. Kidubuka (1985) make important assumptions about narrative technique in *Devil on the Cross*. For example, Julien attempts to demonstrate the range

and variety of the aspects of orature in *Devil on the Cross*. In particular, Julien discusses how some of these forms of orature are deployed in Ngugi's novel to "read" like an oral tale particularly to a Kikuyu readership. Kidubuka makes a similar observation: he claims that *Devil on the Cross* is "deliberately written in the fashion of a folk narrative so as to be enjoyed by illiterates when *read* to them" (302; emphasis mine). While these observations may appear useful, it may be important to insist that after Ong's persuasive argument, it is important for critics of African literature to be careful with the language/ terminology that they employ to explore the relationship between orature and literature, and the differences between them.

Julien says that:

Now, 'oral' language in any written text is neither oral nor -- were such a thing possible -- a transcript of standard speech, characterized by rhythms, pauses, tone, and conventional sounds What is usually meant by ... 'orality' ... are the proverbs, analogies, and the cadences of phrasing, which literary convention holds to be oral In the case of *Devil on the Cross*, as Ngugi describes it, the intended audience and the probable means of distribution and consumption of the novel in Kenya seemed to require 'oral' language *Devil* was written to be read aloud for people schooled in oral stories. Here orality is not 'preyed upon,' a resource for the narrative, inside its frame, 'possessed' by it. Oral language is thus not the object of representation that can be read as quaint and *passeiste* [of the past]. Orality here means the language and the tradition in which this narrative is articulated, the medium in which Ngugi's audience will hear this story. Intended for telling or reading aloud, *Devil* does not showcase a neat orality. Proverbs, repetitions, riddles, 'songs,' and so on reveal the addressee and are not uniquely referential. (14; emphasis mine)¹⁴

These observations should serve as a meaningful entry point to a meaningful discussion of narrative technique and intended readership in *Matigari*. In fact, Julien's point about the non-existence of a "neat orality" in literature reiterates, once more, the problem of describing what happens when there is an attempt to merge oral forms with the written medium.

Matigari's opening is complex. It is difficult partly because of the problematic dual intended audience that it signals -- the "reader"/ "listener". Ngugi himself is aware of this difficulty because he is, in fact, unable to accurately designate/ specify this problematic audience. For this reason, he offers it merely as a double-edged audience, as follows:

This story is imaginary...
The country is imaginary -- it has no name even.
Reader/ listener: may the story take place in the country of your choice. (*M ix*; emphasis mine)

Perhaps the most rewarding way in which to construct the intended audience in *Matigari* is to discuss Ngugi's novel as a written text. Ngugi (1993) says that "in 1983/ 84 ... [he] wrote *Matigari*, a novel of return, in the Kikuyu language";¹⁵ that after he had written *Matigari* he "felt a sense of belonging such as I [Ngugi] had felt when in 1978 at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison in Cell No. 6, I had written ... *Devil on the Cross*," which was, according to him, "an attempt to reconnect myself [Ngugi] to a *community* from which I had been brutally cut" (106; emphasis mine). To begin with, it is instructive to note that the way Ngugi relates the Kikuyu language to his own work has a problem; he thinks that to write in a mother-tongue/ African vernaculars necessarily enables *Matigari* to be accessible to its intended wide ["community"] readership. This is not true. Indeed commentators object to this kind of approach to writing. A. Gerard (1990) points out that:

The African writer who uses his own mother-tongue is *handicapped*, as we know, in many ways, not least because his language is not likely to be understood outside his own country, or even his *own* ethnic group. (65; emphasis mine)¹⁶

The issue of *literacy* which Gerard raises is pertinent to the development of African fiction. It is *material* to the African novel precisely because it implicates the *size* of the intended readership in African fiction. The problem, however, is that it is an issue over which, unfortunately, African writers have little control. The point to emphasise, then, is that *Matigari* is intended for the *literate* community; it is intended for *only* the *reading* Kikuyu community, which, in Africa/ Kenya, is a relatively small population indeed. In this way, Ngugi cannot claim that in *Matigari* he attempts to link himself back to the "community from which ... [he] had been ... cut." What could be said, though, is that in *Matigari* Ngugi is, in fact, connecting himself only to the *literate* Kikuyu audience.

One point about narrative technique and intended readerships in African fiction which this study repeatedly makes is that it is possible for a text to have more than one readership. The way in which *Matigari* opens emphasises this point once again. The opening is likely to appeal both to the Kikuyu readership as well as to *any* other reading constituency that may be familiar with the journey/ quest motif. Take the description of the hero/ Matigari at the beginning of the novel:

He [Matigari] rose, turned and one more time looked at the spot where he had buried his weapons, murmuring to himself, 'It's good that I have now laid down my arms.' He tore *a strip of bark from a tree and girded himself with it*, once again murmuring, 'Instead, I have now girded myself with *a belt of peace*.'

I shall go back to my house and *rebuild my home.*' *He crossed the river* and came out of the forest. (*M 5*; emphasis mine)

This passage is a familiar opening to readerships whose oral and literary cultures have quest tales/ novel. In this passage such readerships will see that the dynamism and goal-seeking enterprise of the plot in Ngugi's novel is given right away. They will note that this will be a lone-man's story with a tone that has urgency: Matigari has to attend to a crucial matter instantly. Wearing the cloak of the shin (the "belt of peace"), he has to rush into the world to reconstruct a symbolic home that has been destroyed.

However, there is in this quest story another part to the rebuilding of the symbolic home: in this story the crossing of the river implicates the culmination of a rite of passage.¹⁷ The earlier stage of struggle is ended and the hero is now adequately prepared to take on the responsibilities of a new life that is demanding in its own right. This kind of reading, then, is no longer an activity of only the Kikuyu readership.

From the foregoing, one critical point stands out about narrative technique and readership in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari*: that while Armah and Ngugi are keenly interested in aspects of African orature, they are, paradoxically, trapped/ caught up in the twin processes of *writing* and *reading*. Furthermore, it is also arguable that the very existence of *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari* as written, bound texts/ books places them in dialogue with the Western novelistic tradition. For this reason, it is instructive to note that these two texts will continue to be *read* as *lone* acts of single/ individual readers, but not to be performed as communal events, even as they seem to make attempts to draw heavily upon orature. This is a pertinent problem to which there is no easy solution. Indeed this problem will haunt both African writers and critics of African literature for some time as long as they continue to *write* as well as to discuss *written* works.

2. *Two Thousand Seasons*: The Narrator as “Rhetor”

One important aspect of *Two Thousand Seasons* is the type of narrator that is deployed to tell the story. He comes out distinctly quite early in “The Prologue”:

Would *you* lock *your* gift away in pallid silence? Know then that in the absence of the utterers’ work the carnage will be long and pure and not the wisest mind can in the absence of the utterers’ work trace in all *our* flowing blood even one broken ring of meaning. For those returning, salvaging blistered selves from death, and those advancing still hypnotized by death, in the absence of the utterers’ work what ill they be but beasts devouring beasts, zombies fighting zombies, a continuation along the road of death in place of regeneration, the rediscovery of *our* way, the way? (xvii; emphasis mine)

Perhaps it is critical to note that the significance of “The Prologue” is in the fact that it introduces both a *communal* narratorial voice as well as an equally *communal* intended audience. Indeed, the opening in Armah’s novel suggests that the interest of *Two Thousand Seasons* is an entirely collective experience; that the communal story the communal voice seeks to tell is an experience that has *wide* social and political ramifications indeed. In this way, the contestable notion of African literature as a “shared experience,” as has already been noted, could, probably be applied to Armah’s text.

The communal narratorial voice which Armah’s novel employs is quite new in African fiction. For this reason, S. Gikandi (1987) comes with a new description of this type of narrator: he designates this narratorial voice the term “rhetor” (22). As Gikandi explains, the qualities of the rhetor assist to explore most of the aspects of narrative technique in Armah’s novel; he also suggests that the same type of narrator helps to define the intended readership in *Two Thousand Seasons*. For instance, the rhetor suggests both public speaker and orator; in fact, the rhetor also belongs to the realm of *rhetoric* in the sense that it implicates an audience, as Terry Eagleton (1983) explains:

Rhetoric in its major phase was neither a ‘humanism’, concerned in some intuitive way with *people*’s experience with language, nor a ‘formalism’, preoccupied with analysing linguistic devices. It looked at such devices in terms of concrete *performance* -- they were means of pleading, persuading, inciting and so on -- and at *people*’s responses to discourse in terms of linguistic structures and the material situations in which they functioned. It saw speaking and writing not merely as textual objects, to be aesthetically contemplated or endlessly deconstructed, but as forms of *activity* inseparable from the *wider* social relations between writers and readers, orators and audiences, and largely unintelligible outside the social purposes and

conditions in which they were embedded. (206; emphasis in text)

The key critical words here are: “people”, “performance”, “activity” and “wider”. The point to note here is that the intentions of rhetoric are often pointed, and should be explained and understood in collective terms. It is, therefore, significant, Eagleton instructs, to emphasise that some of the aims of rhetoric directly implicate an intended audience. The aims that tie up with the audience, according to him, are objectives such as to “plead ... persuad[e] and incit[e].” In the context of Armah’s novel, it will then be seen that as the narrative unfolds, the practical orientation of the narrator in *Two Thousand Seasons* is that this narrator is a *voice* that at once speaks on behalf of, and to the same, particular racial group.

Eustace Palmer (1979) seems to be unaware of the problems that were raised at the beginning of this chapter about what happens when attempts are made to translate an oral text into a written one. He shows this when he observes that the language of *Two Thousand Seasons* demonstrates that there is in Armah’s novel what Palmer describes as “the talking voice -- the African talking voice -- with Armah deliberately manipulating the structure and idiom so that the prose has a genuine African ring” (223). To be sure, Palmer indicates what he considers to be representative passages in Armah’s novel, which he thinks have the “genuine African [/Akan] ring.” The problem, however, is that he does not attempt to pinpoint the “African” ring, “the talking voice” in the typography on the pages in *Two Thousand Seasons*. What he does though, is to complain that:

Armah finds it *impossible* to sustain this illusion through language of an African oral narrative. When he gets really immersed in absorbing episodes, especially those describing the exploits of the idealistic group of initiates or the schemes of the white destroyers, the style tends to lose its African oral quality and approximates to *something like* normal standard English. (223; emphasis mine)

Palmer is trapped in his own discussion of narrative technique in Armah’s novel; “[s]omething like” means *nothing*. It is not that Armah finds it “impossible” to “sustain” what Palmer thinks is an “illusion of an African oral narrative” in *Two Thousand Seasons*; that in his novel Armah uses English that is non-descript (“something like”). What is problematic is that, try as he may to create a genuine oral text through writing, Armah *cannot*, in fact, achieve what he wants to do. And just as Palmer himself fails to identify the instances of what he describes as “something like normal standard English” as well as the “African ring” in the written passages in *Two Thousand Seasons*, so does Armah fail to merge what he thinks are oral forms with the novel

genre. Thus the novelist and critic are both failures in their respective endeavours. Significantly, too, Palmer does not explain the crucial implications of a *talking* narrative; he does not point out the fact that such a *voice* would inevitably implicate a “listening” audience.

The following passages are some of the few in *Two Thousand Seasons* in which Armah attempts to suggest a “listening” audience:

Beware of the destroyers. It is their habit to cut off fingers from the hand itself uprooted from its present body, calling each fallen piece a creature in itself, different from ears, eyes, noses, feet and entrails, other individual creatures of their making. (1-2)

...

You do not understand how the destroyers turned earth to desert? Look around you. You are ignorant of death, but sleep you know. Have you not seen the fat ones, the hollow ones now placed above us? (7)

...

Hear this for the sound of it. The men and among them especially the elders, had seen the way the destroyers used women, turning them into animals for their pleasure. (34; emphasis mine)

It would appear that the particular effect these passages want to achieve is that of “sound”; it seems that the passages have a particular diction, which has its own force and energy. This is to say that these passages are intended to be “hear[d]” for their particular *diction/ rhythm*. This rhythm, it must be pointed out, is the result of the constant *repetition*¹⁸ in these passages of a particular syntactical pattern, which could be designated as the *inversion*. The point, then, is that the repetition of the inversions in the passages in Armah’s novel ultimately results in what Sekyi-Out describes as “anaphoric cadences” (197). They have the quality of an incessant resonance indeed. Notice that in the first and third passages some of the likely/ meaningful deep structures of the sentences are “(you should) [b]eware [of] the destroyers” and “(you should) [h]ear this for the sound of it,” respectively. In this way an implied *addressee* is suggested in these passages as a supposedly/ assumed “listening” audience. The achievement of such statements is, therefore, the illusion of *immediacy*. It is as though the communal voice is addressing an audience which is *there* and *now*. Yet, Palmer is silent on these subtle “speaking” qualities in these passages.

There are passages in *Two Thousand Seasons* whose rhetorical properties (as has been shown) may suggest that Armah’s novel is a “speakerly” text; that it attempts to have a “speaking” voice, as was suggested in the first chapter of this study. Significantly, the tone of such passages also often suggests the thematic *urgency* of the text as well as the assumed

immediate/ intended audience in the novel. In the end, the thematic force of these passages, as will be seen, add up to what Sekyi-Out, again describes as a “discourse of ‘connectedness’,” which is, in fact, “a critical invocation of extra-ordinary meanings” (197). Consider the following:

The disease of death, the white road, is also unconnected hearing, the fractured vision that sees only the immediate present, that follows only present gain and separates the present from the past, the present from the future, shutting each passing day in its own hustling greed.

The disease of death, the white road, is also unconnected hearing, shattered hearing that listens only to today’s brazen cacophony, takes direction from that alone and stays deaf to the whispers of those gone before, deaf to the soft voices of those yet unborn.

The disease of death, the white road, is also unconnected thinking, the broken reason that thinks only of the immediate paths to the moment’s release, that takes no care to connect the present with past events, the present with future necessity. (8; emphasis mine)

Language in the above paragraphs demonstrates that it provides various style markers¹⁹ in *Two Thousand Seasons*. It shows that generally in Armah’s novel style markers are often at the levels of word-order, personal pronouns, adjectives and verbal nouns. In particular, word-order in clauses and sentences in *Two Thousand Seasons* is often critical to the themes in Armah’s novel. For example, in *Two Thousand Seasons* the most emphatic place in a clause or sentence is the end. This is to suggest that the end in most clauses and sentences in *Two Thousand Seasons* is often the focal point, which is intended for the audience to consider. It is, indeed, usually the climax; and, during the momentary pause that follows, that last word continues, as it were, to reverberate in the reader’s mind. The point being emphasised here is that a meaningful reading of *Two Thousand Seasons* should closely examine the linguistic items which often occur either at the beginning or end of clauses and sentences in Armah’s novel.

Take the formal/ *lexical repetition* at the beginning of each of the above paragraphs. The repetition of the same phrases seem to implicate one of the themes in *Two Thousand Seasons*. This is to say that the repetition of the noun phrases at the beginning of each of the paragraphs implicates *parallelistic emphasis* for thematic purposes. This is, again, to say that the repetition, in fact, suggests both the diction (what Palmer describes as the “ring[ing]”/ “rousing call” to the intended audience in Armah’s novel [238]) and one of the important themes in Armah’s novel -- the consequences of the onslaught of colonialism on the African continent.

Commentators have noted the use of the first-person plural pronoun in Armah's novel. Indeed Robert Fraser (1980) claims that in *Two Thousand Seasons* "[b]y and large, the first-person plural is used to denote the 'people', an entity synonymous with the book's *audience*, a group moreover with which *the narrator strongly identifies*" (68; emphasis mine). He further explains that in instances such as "all *our* flowing blood", "the rediscovery of *our* way" (xvii; emphasis mine), "*we* considered the paths still open," "[b]ut *our* people were no longer of one heart" (38; emphasis mine) and "[w]hat an utterance of the coming together of all the people of *our* way, the coming together of all people of the way" (206; emphasis mine), the first-person plural pronoun significantly suggests both the communal narrator as well as the wide intended audience in *Two Thousand Seasons*. According to him:

By implication, the writer [Armah] further seems to claim membership of a more select group, the *hearers* These '*hearers, seers, imaginers, thinkers*' at first seem barely defined until one recalls the fact that they possess a discernable ancestry in Armah's work, being none other than the 'lunatic seers' referred to in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* They form in effect a vanguard, and consist of *all those whose gifts are predominantly artistic, spiritual, or intellectual*. The relationship between these and the wider community is hence that between a responsible *intellectual elite* and the mass towards whom their whole obligation lies. (68-9; emphasis mine)

Now, if the communal narratorial voice in *Two Thousand Seasons* is that of a *select* group, then, perhaps, the *size* of the intended audience in Armah's novel also needs to be problematised. That the intended readership in *Two Thousand Seasons* is also likely to be an equally select group, for according to Brenda Cooper (1980), "Armah has increasingly come to rely on the efforts of a *specifically chosen, isolated band* to provide any positive content to his creative work" (70; emphasis). The critical issue this section of this chapter, then, raises, is that there is, again, a contradiction in Armah's scheme of writing; there is a contradiction between what Armah *says* and what he *writes*. Furthermore, the contradiction is in the fact that *Two Thousand Seasons* is addressed to only the "intellectual elite"/ "specifically chosen, isolated band" of "utterers", "hearers" and "seers", "thinkers" and "imagers", but not to an "optimum" African audience, as the author claims. This is to argue that it is primarily this *minimal* audience that Armah's novel addresses, for it would seem that the narrator has faith in the African intellectual elite to bring to the African continent what Fraser describes as "a sense of direction to the supreme task of reconstruction" (104).

It is instructive to emphasise that it is in the first chapter in *Two Thousand Seasons* that the narrator justifies his authority by either falling back on his knowledge of a past already lost, or drawing on his learned understanding of Anoa's prophecy and its implications. At this early stage in the novel, it is also evident that the narrator adopts a retrospective point of view, highlighting events that will be dramatized in the subsequent chapters of the novel. Therefore, it is significant to mention that, as rhetor, the narrator is actually engaged in the art of invention, seeking out evidence to set the case he wants to defend in the novel. In this way, Gikandi (1987) is to the point when he observes that "Armah's [collective] narrator is *interested*, not *neutral*" (21; emphasis in text)

Quite early in the first chapter, the narrator refers to Anoa's prophecy, as follows:

Of the two thousand seasons of destruction what was it the first voice of Anoa said? This:

"Turn from this generosity of fools. The giving that is split from receiving is no generosity but hatred of the giving self, a preparation for the self's destruction. Turn."

...

"Slavery -- do you know what that is? Ah, you will know it. Two thousand seasons, a thousand seasons going into it, a thousand seasons crawling maimed from it, will teach you everything about enslavement, the destruction of souls, the killing of bodies, the infusion of violence into every breath, every drop, every morsel of your sustaining air, your water, your food. Till you come again upon our way." (16-17)

These passages illustrate a particular narrative technique, which Madelyn Jablon (1997) describes as the "co-conspiratorial address." She points out that such a technique is often a "variation of the call-and-response and ... antiphonal interaction" (150). Put differently, this is a technique which at once implicates both the speaker/ addresser and the listener/ addressee in the same situation. In the case of *Two Thousand Seasons*, the technique is effective in the way both the narrator and Anoa raise what could be described as *teaching* "questions". This is to say that in Armah's novel the narrator and Anoa do not ask what are commonly described as rhetorical questions. These teaching "questions" are, in fact, designed to engage the audience in the answers which are subsequently provided by the narrator himself. In this way, this "question"-and-answer technique is used to bring the audience to accept the narrator's point of view, as in the following:

You do not understand how the destroyers turned earth to desert? Look around you. You are ignorant of death, but sleep you know. Have you not seen the fat ones, the hollow ones now placed above us? These the destroyers have already

voided of their spirits, like the earth of its fertility. Barren, unproductive pillars have been driven into their brains. Then, left to walk the land, they do their zombie work, holding up the edifice of death from falling in vengeance on the killers' heads. (7)

In *Two Thousand Seasons* the “question”-and-answer technique assumes broad agreement between the narrator and audience. Significantly, the use of “you” also brings a measure of *empathy* between the narrator and the audience. Notice also that the narrator addresses the audience in the *present tense*: the use of this particular tense, as was explained in the third chapter of this study (with regard to Solo’s commentaries on the note-books), is effective in establishing a measure of *intimacy* between the narrator and the audience, while at the same time it also establishes the quality of *immediacy* between the material being presented to the audience, and the audience itself.

However, despite the broad agreement between the narrator and the audience, it must be emphasised that the former always exists above the latter, that the former is always privy to historical secrets which the audience is not aware of until the narrative is almost concluded. As a character in the narrative, then, the narrator is primarily the spokesman of the group of visionaries who bear the ideals of “the way” through different phases of the historical process, and seem to have witnessed Anoa’s prophecy come to pass.

It has already been noted that *language* in its broad aspects as a communicative process is critical in any meaningful discussion of narrative technique and intended readership in *Two Thousand Seasons*. This is to say that language in Armah’s novel is critical in the way it attempts to achieve some of its aims and objectives. The language in Chapter Two in Armah’s novel provides a meaningful illustration of the point being made here. For example, in that chapter language is aptly deployed as a method of characterization. It is effectively used to explore the experiences of the visionaries -- children of Anoa -- in their contact with the Europeans, as in the following:

The predators, their first appearance among us was that of beggars. Haggard they came, betrayed and lonely in their hunger of soul and body. We pitied them, for *is it not a part of the way that the stranger shall be given sustenance and helped along his road?* But the way is not a partial remembrance only. How was it forgotten then that it is also a part of the way, inseparable from every other part, that *the guest who turns contemptuous is a guest no longer but a parasite?* How was it forgotten that hosts who spread a welcome for parasites prepared their own destruction? (19)

This paragraph is typical of many in *Two Thousand Seasons*, for it provides a good example of how the narrator exercises control over both his material and the intended audience. Consider the pejorative nominal adjectives “haggard”, “beggars”, and “parasites”, which are used both to describe the whites, and to contrast them with some of the norms of the way: it is “part of the way that the stranger shall be given sustenance and helped along his road”. What is happening here, first, is that the narrator is shaping the intended reader’s reaction to the predators by casting the latter in a negative way; that the predators became “guest[s] who turn[ed] contemptuous” as they were among “the people of the way.” Secondly, the last two rhetorical questions are intended to establish *concordiality* between the narrator and the audience, for by their nature, rhetorical questions usually implicate truths that are already assumed and accepted. They are often asked only to make a statement or to produce an *effect* rather than an answer.

However, for the narrator to confirm the negative view to the “predators”, which he has the novel uses a technique that is highly effective: he deploys in the story a *carefully* selected string of episodes, in which the predators are implicated. Such episodes, as will be seen, are tendentiously bizarre and derogatory. Take the section in *Two Thousand Seasons* which describes the Arab Faisal’s joys and sexual activities on “the night of nights,” as follows:

He [Faisal] strode forward at the urgent call and in a moment was *naked* upon his master’s back *ploughing* the predator’s open *arsehole* while the master tried to keep his forgetful *penis* in Azania And Azania herself, she slowly, lovingly helped him to slide off her, so gently she did not disturb him or the askari *pumping manseed* into his Arab master. (23; emphasis mine)

This event is almost an orgy, for the characters seem to be having wild uncontrolled sex. There is no involvement of either emotions of love or of sexual intimacy. What is, then, striking here is that Armah’s narrative technique in this passage is close to what Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1983) describes as “direct definition,” for, according to him, such a method has the “capacity to guide the reader’s response” to the characters (60). Note that the language in the above passage in Armah’s novel is pointed and purposeful; it vivifies the horrid act as it is designed to be evocative. Indeed, its intention is to arouse in the readership a hatred for the predators.²⁰ What is critical here is that to a large extent, as E. Ngara (1982) observes quite correctly, the credibility of the episodes he presents or describes to the reader does not seem to be an issue to the narrator. In fact, “the [fruitful] question [to ask],” according to Ngara, is “whether the reader is not more shocked by such evocative description[s] than by the act[s] themselves” (30).

It is instructive to point out that Armah uses the same narrative technique to describe what Gikandi describes as one of the “archetypal” figures in *Two Thousand Seasons* -- Anoa (24). This character, Gikandi explains, is, in fact, “the embodiment of ‘the way’, its seer and visionary” (24). Indeed it would appear that right from her childhood, Anoa is insightful; that her mind had always been characterised by “an intensity of hearing, a clarity of vision and a sharpness of feeling marked her character even in childhood, the time when most knowledge sprang from play” (*TTS* 14). In this way Gikandi says of Anoa that:

Her spirit clamours for the highest peaks of communal endeavour, while the colour of her skin typifies the beauty of her race and her movements are like those of a goddess. In terms of rhetorical form, her prophecy is predicted action; it suggests the possible movement of the story and the probable course of its characters. (24)

The point Gikandi makes is that in *Two Thousand Seasons* Anoa is presented with “moral authority”; that “her character is [so] endowed [with this authority to the extent that] we have no option but to believe Anoa’s utterance” (25). The following is one instance in which Anoa is presented as a perfectly rounded figure:

She was *slender as a fale [sic] stalk, and suppler*. From her forehead to her feet her body *was of deep, even blackness* that could cause the chance lookers to wonder how it was that even the surface of a person’s skin could speak of depths. *Her grace was easy in the dance*. In the work of every initiation *she was skilled* enough she would have chosen to be a *fundi*. Men not commonly known for their lechery grew itchy-eyed looking at her. Her voice was torture to the greedy ear. In her twentieth-fifth season there were askers for her in marriage. Anoa knew *her soul was shaped for other things*. It was not that she was scornful of the wife’s, of the mother’s life. Her ears heard other voices, other thoughts visited her spirit. (15; emphasis mine)²¹

Now, to define Anoa with tropes such as the metaphor -- “her body was of *deep, even blackness*,” and the simile “[s]he was *slender as [p]ale stalk, and suppler*,” heightens Anoa’s superlative beauty that attracts the audience to her. The other details, such as the positive traits of Anoa’s character, then, merely serve to signify her consummate physiognomy. This is why Sekyi-Otu points out that Anoa should significantly be portrayed as she is because:

Anoa: she who would give voice to the peculiar excellence of female being in the world only to denounce all separatist relations to the world and to the other. Anoa: figure of female principle as affirmation of difference and renunciation of the absolute otherness of self and other. (195)

With such an “archetypal figure of vatic activity,” as Sekyi-Otu (119) describes Anoa, the stage is set for a prophetic interrogation of the relations of irreciprocity in which, according to Sekyi-

Otu, the “perverse and perilous relations to being and time are implicated” (195), as in the following prophecy in *Two Thousand Seasons*:

Know this again. The way is not the rule of men. The way is never women ruling men. The way is reciprocity. The way is not barrenness. Nor is the way this heedless fecundity. The way is not blind productivity. The way is creation knowing its purpose, wise in the withholding of itself from snares, from destroyers. (27)

Anoa’s message is couched in an effective narrative technique indeed. The sentences in the above passage are measured. In fact, they are simple. In this way, the ultimate effect that Anoa strives for in the above passage is *clarity*. This is to say that Anoa wants to make her audience to clearly understand the tenets and ethics of “the way.”

It was noted in the third chapter of this study that various ideologies inform the texts which this thesis examines. It was also emphasised in the same chapter that the trajectory of Armah’s fiction has increasingly become propagandistic. It is, perhaps, for this reason that Ngara (1985) observes that “[n]o study of ideology in the African novel would be complete without a reference to Armah” (51). This study would, therefore, be incomplete if it does not discuss how Armah relates his authorial ideology in *Two Thousand Seasons* to the novel’s audience.

Ngara explores what he describes as Armah’s “radical authorial ideology,” especially in the way that Armah uses the English language in his fiction. He begins by emphasising what this study has already discussed in Chapter III and, then, concludes with remarks on *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*, as follows:

Armah’s ... ideology is matched by an equally revolutionary aesthetic ideology which manifests itself in various forms, including his handling of the English language. He is unusually blunt and even vulgar in his description of sex and other physical appetites, his tone is charged with intense feelings and ... moulds the English language so that it becomes a fit medium for promoting the African revolution. Indeed, Armah’s revolution is an African-centred revolution. Starting with *Why Are We So Blest?* we see an increasing pre-occupation with African values until in ... [*Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* where] there is a definite appeal for a return to African traditions. (115-16)

Ngara discusses Armah’s ideology without focusing on particular linguistic items, say, in *Two Thousand Seasons* to support his assertions. What he could have done is probably to identify specific passages in Armah’s novel and, then, subject such passages to incisive critical analyses. In fact one way in which Ngara could have proceeded is to examine the use of the first-person pronoun in Armah’s novel.

It has already been noted that the first-person pronoun in *Two Thousand Seasons* is often used to implicate both the narrator and the intended audience. Yet, in the instances in which both the first-person and third person pronouns are deployed, the third-person pronoun is often used for racial bracketing, as in the following:

That we the black people are one we know. Destroyers will travel long distances in *their* minds and out to deny you this truth. We do not argue with *them*, the fools. Let them presume to instruct us about ourselves. That too is in *their* nature. That too is in the flow of *their* two thousand seasons against us. (3; emphasis mine)

In the above passage the first-person plural pronoun “we”/ “us” and the second person singular/ plural pronoun “you” belong to the same racial group -- the *black* people/ Africans. Put in other words, both the addresser and the addressee belong to the same race of black people/ Africans. However, these black people must be distinguished from the other people/ race implied in the third-person plural pronoun “them”. In fact, the third-person plural pronoun here, as in most passages in *Two Thousand Seasons*, significantly refers to a race/ people that is without feeling, a people who cannot think. In short, “them”/ “they” usually refers to people/ whites who are “fools”. Therefore, this narrative technique of linguistic bracketing/ distancing ultimately becomes critical to Armah’s ideology.

3. *Matigari*: A Search for an Ideal Kenyan/ African Nation State

Matigari has three parts which cover a quest for a symbolic family, land and house. It opens with the initial re-assembling and comforting of the scattered family (Part One -- *Ngaruro wa Kiriro: Wiping Your Tears Away*), and, then, extends the quest throughout the land (Part Two -- *Macaria ma na Kihooto: Seeker of Truth and Justice*). Finally, it leads on to the ultimate confrontation over the house and the bequeathing of the legacy of the struggle (Part Three -- *Guthera na Muriuki: The Pure and the Resurrected*). The first part of the novel covers the return of the warrior defender of the people's rights, as was noted at the beginning of this chapter. *Matigari* seems to be the last survivor of the "Mau Mau" freedom fighters. His identity is cast as a patriot. He is also an ageless man. In fact, he is endowed with the powers of rejuvenation and showing messianic qualities of humility and compassion.

Commentators point out that there are similarities between *Matigari* and the usual traditional folk hero. They further suggest that what makes *Matigari* different from the other, nevertheless, is that, as the story develops, he is seen to blend the qualities of the other with those of the modern revolutionary leader, who has a mission to change the socio-political order of the day. *Matigari* is marked as an extra-ordinary man -- in fact a superhuman individual -- by the fact that he possesses magical powers, which either protect him from being hurt, or enable him to recover unnaturally when he is hurt in the course of his quest. His general appearance changes with the moods he is in: showing old age when he is troubled by the suffering of others (M 29) and showing youthfulness when he is touched by hope and courage (31). Additionally, *Matigari* has great capacity for endurance: he is physically untiring and is able to go indefinitely without food or drink. He is a fearless man, a man of integrity who will face up to any challenge or anyone in his relentless quest for truth and justice. He is initially not diverted or affected in any way by the people's recurrent failure to recognise him for what he is. His story, stripped to its bare outline, becomes a recurrent quest motif that permeates the narrative, thus suggesting its oral dimension in which repetition is part of the established pattern of story-telling. What, then, emerges in *Matigari* is the symbolic and communal experience of a representative figure rather than the biography of a unique individual. *Matigari*'s story is recurrently explained, as follows:

[H]ow he had cleared the bush; how he had cultivated and sowed; and later he had built a house [H]ow, when he had finished building the house, Settler Williams had grabbed it [H]ow he had fought Settler Williams; and how John Boy saved the settler's life [H]ow he had run to the forests and up

the mountains, with Settler Williams and John Boy in pursuit; and how thereafter they had hunted one another across all the mountains and valleys. (38)

Significantly, to the readerships (both Kikuyu and non-Kikuyu²²) that are familiar with the quest narrative, this is indeed a familiar story.

As already indicated at the beginning of this chapter, Ngugi makes his intentions obvious with regard to both narrative technique and theme in the “Note”. He states that *Matigari* is based on a story that has a song. This song, in part, is, as follows:

Tell me where lives old man Ndiiro
Who, when he shakes his foot, jingles.
And the bells ring out his name: Ndiiro,
And again: Ndiiro. (15)

It is instructive that Ngugi provides this detail to alert the audience to the fact that a song such as this is a performance that has a potential plot, and that this plot will be developed through a quest for an answer. The implications of this song, then, are critical to any meaningful discussion of *Matigari*. This song is significant precisely because throughout the novel this song allows Ngugi to move from a concern for plot to a conscious preoccupation with style and detail; the song provides the dynamism of the plot, its movement and development: the motivation for action, or an insight into character without the necessity for analytical comment.

Like the song, versification in *Matigari* is a prominent narrative technique. It is often used in the novel to depict major statements in a heightened lyrical form that would render numerous rallying calls memorable. Indeed, the novel opens with a poem, which is, in part, as follows:

So say yes, and I'll tell you a story!
Once upon a time, in a country with no name. (ix)

Note that this, in fact, purports to be the real beginning of the tale. Yet, as it turns out, it is only a false start that enhances the story-teller's invitation to the audience to suspend their prosaic awareness of the real world, time and space and let their imagination guide them through the make-believe world of the narrative. What is important to note with respect to the songs and poetry in *Matigari* is that the recurrent refrains/ choruses in the novel do not necessarily make a profound statement about society: they are, however, a reflection of the everyday experience of the peasantry and the working class people whose plight is the author's central concern, as in the following:

The tailor makes clothes.
The one who does not even know how to thread a needle
wears clothes.

The tailor walks in rags.

The tiller tends crops in the fields.

The one who reaps-where-he-never-sowed yawns for having eaten too much.

The tiller yawns for not having eaten at all. (113)

The technique of *contrast* and *negation* is critical here: those who actually work and produce are pitied against those who do not at all. The point here is that the product of the workers often goes to those who do not work at all. For these reasons, the above aphorisms are formulated into a fuller expression leading to the question that Matigari ultimately puts to the Minister of Truth and Justice, when everyone else fails to give him an adequate answer: “[w]here are truth and justice on this earth?” (113)

It is worth noting in the above how in each verse the second line about exploitation has a run on and, as such, goes on almost *ad infinitum* as if to reflect the great length to which the agents of exploitation will go to exploit ordinary Kenyans. As it is, this exploitation knows no limits; it also seems that the church is blatantly perverted to serve the ends of the rulers and the wealthy as these people use religion to try and pacify the dispossessed into accepting their lot on earth without questioning the justice of it. It is for that very reason that at the meeting with the Minister, the preacher is ordered to read the Ten Commandments to the agitating workers. In fact, it is arguable that the preacher deliberately chooses the Ten Commandments to try to counter the influence of the Matigari myth that had spawned songs of unity and sowed images of revolt in the people’s minds. In this way, the Ten Commandments are made to sound like a good antidote for reducing any political fevers and making the cowed workers return to the state of passive acceptance of the status quo.

The antidote, however, ultimately fails when the epidemic that Matigari’s story lets loose spreads like a wild fire, fanned by the new generation that he has succeeded in inspiring into taking up the banner of liberation. It all starts with the symbolic baptism of fire in the inferno that Matigari unleashes to burn down the old order that had refused to yield to the cry of truth and justice. His anguished cry is taken up like a litany which is chorused by the multitude gathered to witness the miracle to make them finally believe in his mission:

Everything that belongs to these slaves must burn!

Yes, everything that belongs to these slaves must burn!

Their coffee must burn!

Yes, their coffee must burn!

Their tea must burn!

Yes, their tea must burn! (168)

This becomes a song that inspires the crowd to join in and start the destruction of all the capitalists' "sacred cows" that had been enshrined at the expense of the down-trodden. The story-teller sums up the extent of the destruction in a refrain that endlessly echoes and re-echoes the battle-cry of the people:

They burned down the houses.
They burned down the tea-bushes.
They burned down coffee-bushes.
They burned down the vehicles. (167)

Thus poetry merges with song to give inspiration to the beginning of the revolution that will bring about an *ideally* more just society.

While Ruth Finnegan's (1970) discussion of "Political Songs" in various African British colonies during the struggle for independence should provide a useful starting point to any discussion concerning the way Ngugi uses the song in *Matigari*, Ngugi's (1997) own comments about the way in which the "Mau Mau" adapted Christian hymns is worth noting. According to him, the "Mau Mau" brought to the Christian hymn the *immediacy* that often characterises the song in its appeal to the intended audience:

Rooting themselves [the "Mau Mau"] in popular traditions of song ..., they created a very powerful oral literature that *spoke to the present* while looking to the future. They rejected the colonizer's interpretation of reality. Christianity, for instance, had always been used by the colonial system to rationalize inequalities: the colonial state encouraged that brand of Christianity that abstracted heaven from earthly struggles. So 'Mau Mau' took the same Christian songs and even the Bible, and interpreted them for themselves giving these values and meaning in harmony with the aspirations of their struggles. Officially approved Christians sang a host of angels in heaven. They sang of a spiritual journey in a spiritual, intangible universe where a metaphysical, disembodied evil and good were locked in perpetual spiritual warfare for the domination of the human soul. They called on the youth to arm themselves spiritually and take up arms against the invisible Satan. Led by Jesus, they would be victorious.

The 'Mau Mau' took up similar hymns but now turned them into songs of actual political engagement in an actual universe. They called for visible material freedom They called on the youth, asked them to hearken to their leaders and take up real arms against a visible colonial state They urged the youth to step up political agitation among the masses Christians sang of a second coming to bring about judgement and universal justice. The 'Mau Mau' sang of the return of their imprisoned leaders to lead the people to a political kingdom of social justice It was as if the people of Kenya had done to colonial Christianity what Marx had done with Hegel's dialectics: made them stand firmly on their feet. (20-21;

emphasis mine)

Urgency, then, seems to have been the hallmark of the “Mau Mau” hymns-cum-songs. In this way, Finnegan adds a critical point about the re-working of familiar songs, and especially hymns for what she describes as the immediate “religious and political sanction.” This is because, according to her, the hymns were composed in such a way that they, in fact, “could speak quite explicitly to the audience for whom they were intended” (288-9; emphasis mine).²³

Finnegan’s remarks raise a critical point with respect to the intended audience in *Matigari*. It is, of course, true to say that during the colonial period in Kenya the “Mau Mau” songs “could speak quite explicitly to the audience for whom they were intended.” This is because the “Mau Mau” songs were intended to be *heard* and *listened to*. In fact, the “Mau Mau” songs were able to achieve their intentions precisely because the *singing* of such political/ religious songs was essentially a collective/ choral/ group/ communal activity. This is to say that both the composition/ rendering of, and the response to, the “Mau Mau” songs were similarly a group/ choral/ collective/ choral/ communal activity indeed. In this way, it is significant to point out that the “Mau Mau” songs were intended *for the local/ ordinary* Kenyan people. Yet, the songs in *Matigari* are *written*; they are, in fact, intended to be *read*. And, as has already been suggested, both *writing* and *reading* are primarily individualistic/ lone acts; it is difficult for them to be communal/ collective/ group activities. For these reasons, the songs in Ngugi’s novel cannot, therefore, be intended for a wide audience. Furthermore, it may also be stressed that this difference between the *vocal* medium of the “Mau Mau” songs and the *written* medium of the ones in Ngugi’s novel raises, once more, the problem this chapter earlier raises -- the issue of the African writer’s being unable to translate oral forms into written texts. The point, then, is that Ngugi’s songs in *Matigari* cannot be claimed to achieve the same effects as that of the “Mau Mau” songs.

However, it may be useful to explore the reasons why Ngugi extensively deploys songs in *Matigari*. In orature as performance, songs are critical to the tri-partite relationship of the teller/ narrator, the tale and the intended audience. For instance, in orature as performance, songs are usually a device to break the monotony of the verbal narrative, giving the audience breathing space to absorb the nuances of a tale. In this way, like poetry, songs provide the audience with an easier form to commit to memory certain important aspects of a tale, with the additional advantage that songs are also an open invitation for audience participation, usually accompanied by dance -- thus adding to the theatrical aspect of the full realisation of orature. Thus in

Matigari Ngugi uses songs²⁴ extensively on the assumption that what songs often do in orature as performance, they are likely to do the same in the novel. This may not necessarily be true; this is, in fact, a complex problem to which there is no quick solution.

It is important to mention that apart from the poetry and songs, passages of local colour largely in the form of proverbs and riddles, which also assist to construct the audience, inform *Matigari*: all these devices of traditional orature are not mere embellishments added for entertainment value. They are, in fact, integrated into the fabric of the tale to add to its thematic implications. However, it needs to be pointed out that proverbs and riddles often serve the same purpose in *Matigari*. The first proverb in *Matigari* -- which refers to time and transition as the normal order of things -- is a case in point. This proverb is used to set the pace in the first quarter of the novel, as follows:

There was no night so long that it did not end with dawn. (3, 11)

There is no night so long that will not end with dawn; and no day dawns like another. (46)

Significantly, these proverbs are used to illustrate the transitory nature of power. They serve as a warning to leaders in postcolonial states in Africa. For just as colonial rule had come to an end and given way to the neo-colonial era of pseudo-independence, the latter, too, would sooner or later give way to a more just society like that which preceded the colonial era. It is, therefore, critical to stress the point that some of the most effective proverbs in *Matigari* seem to originate from the basic wisdom of the Kikuyu people -- the audience of the original Kikuyu edition of *Matigari*. In fact such proverbs seem also to be gleaned from the ordinary everyday experience of the peasantry as they are very much related to farming, and extol the virtues of perseverance such as is shown by Matigari himself in his futile quest for ideals which no longer exist. Many of these proverbs are presented in clusters which also include universally accepted dictums on virtues such as wisdom, knowledge, truth and justice.

It may be instructive to explore the reasons why Ngugi in *Matigari* includes universally accepted dicta needs comment. One important suggestion is that Ngugi's own political ideology requires him to do so. This is to say that, according to Ngugi, the experiences/ problems of the workers/ peasants are universal; they are not limited to Kenya. In this way, *Matigari* could, therefore, be said to have more than one intended *literate* audience.

For the purposes of the main arguments of this study, it instructive to mention that proverbs and riddles can be opaque to outsiders since these forms of speech are perhaps the most

distinctive markers of a particular people's culture. This is why to be a member of a specific cultural community, then, is the surest way of understanding the proverbs of such a community. It is also important to add that proverbs and riddles are clipped speech, which is partly characterised by the conciseness of these forms of orature, and partly by their moral import. Take the aphorical language, for instance: aphorisms are proverbial and, as such, they contain an accumulation of a community's wisdom over the ages. To the Kikuyu readership, the use of these forms in *Matigari* emphasises the fact that the narrative is *about* them, but *not necessarily for only them*, as was noted at the beginning of this chapter.²⁵

It is important to observe that Matigari's quest for Truth and Justice is by peaceful means. Yet, Matigari sets out with a single-mindedness and fearlessness that brooks no discouragement from constant rejection and repeated failure to find the answer to the central question about Truth and Justice. Apart from the fact that he is not recognized by the very people he has set out to redeem, Matigari's mission is further complicated by the smear campaign against him, which the radio service -- Voice of Truth -- carries. (Notice that in the world of *Matigari* this radio station acts as the supreme agent of mass corruption and deceit.) Significantly, it is among the oppressed and exploited workers that Matigari finds his family: the abandoned street kids who are left to fend for themselves in refuse dumps in competition with dogs and vultures; the factory employees who are penned in like inmates of a concentration camp; and the barmaids and prostitutes who are preyed on by policemen who act more like pimps than lawmen. Matigari's first encounter with his arch-enemies -- the heirs to the colonial legacy that had robbed him of his own heritage -- only comes after he has reassembled his family in readiness for battle.

With Matigari's enigmatic character already in broad outline, the reader is sufficiently prepared to see this mysterious character search for what Matigari himself describes as the Truth and Justice in the second part of the novel. However, Matigari's mission is not a single day's work, though the events in the novel appear to be structured within the framework of a progressing day. The actual passage of time is signalled to the audience by the innocuous diary-like entries recording routine weather conditions which are also lacklustre, sterile and oppressive like the political climate (5, 40, 71, 137-8).

The "mythification" of Matigari goes hand in hand with a deliberate down-playing of his messianic stature through the realistic and explicatory narrative that characterises much of the story. The children's unquestioning acceptance of the mythical (in being the first to change their

attitudes towards Matigari) is contrasted with the adults' lack of faith as a generation that had lost the struggle and, then, meekly given in to the betrayal of independence. The children, who symbolize the future generation whose heritage has been compromised naturally turn to Matigari. And, in a Christ-like fashion, Matigari welcomes them (73). On the contrary, the audience is not surprised to see that the adults turn away from Matigari when he appears on cue whenever they wish for him -- for they are only wishing for make-believe, whereas the reality Matigari confronts them with makes them so uncomfortable that they reject him. The adults and the government (through the ubiquitous Voice of Truth) promote the myth because it is more comfortable to deal with and poses no real threat to the status quo.

It is instructive to point out that it is not only Matigari's personality which is mystified in Ngugi's novel; even the events such as Matigari's encounter with John Boy and Robert Williams and his escape from jail are also embellished and transformed to the status of folklore. Matigari's message can only penetrate their defence and reach them through the disciple, Ngaruro wa Kiriro, who immediately becomes a target for execution as a warning to others.

The Biblical parallels between Matigari's mission to that of Christ are often clear. In fact, these parallels suggest the intended audience in Ngugi's novel. To begin with, just as Christ was the answer/ solution to the problems of his time, so is Matigari to those in his own society. The parallels can also be seen in the temptation Matigari gets to save himself and forget about the blind and cynical community which persists in failing to rise to his challenge. Corruption in high places has penetrated deep into the fabric of a society where even the usually simple shepherds are depicted as being conditioned by the pervasive Voice of Truth and the gospel according to His Excellency Ole²⁶ Excellence.

The intended audience in *Matigari* is also suggested in the remarks of the old woman, who Matigari finds "collecting rubbish outside her shelter in the wilderness" (86). It is important to emphasise this point, for it means that the lone voice of wisdom in all Matigari's search is that of the old woman who redirects Matigari's quest away from the wilderness *back to the urban centres*. Indeed, the old woman tells Matigari to "[g]o to the wise men, those who know *how to read the stars*" (87). *Intellection* and intellectuals, then, are what the old woman suggests to Matigari. According to her:

'Go then and plead with those who study books. Books are the modern stars. *Those who study them are the wise men of today*. Why do you [Matigari] think they are being harassed so much? Why do you think they are being asked to sing only the tune of the one person?' (87; emphasis mine)

The old woman has faith in intellectuals. She shows confidence in the African/ Kenyan intellectual to solve Africa's/ Kenya's social, economic and political problems. She thinks it is the African/ Kenyan intellectual who has the answer to the current question of truth and justice in Africa/ Kenya. Indeed, she is of the view that it is Matigari and the intellectuals who are able to meaningfully interrogate contemporary social, political and economic problems in Africa/ Kenya. Put differently, the old woman argues that the audience of Matigari's questions should be the African/ Kenyan intellectual. In this way, it is arguable, therefore, that the intended audience in Ngugi's novel is the African/ Kenyan intellectual. Yet, to *what* extent, and *how*, the African/ Kenyan intellectual could actually address the contemporary issues of truth and justice in his immediate environment, Ngugi's novel does not suggest. For on Matigari's return to the city, both the student and the teacher (and the priest) to whom Matigari directs his questions all turn away from him in fear. This is precisely because for now, the great epidemic that had silenced all opposition is in full force in the world of *Matigari*. As Matigari himself acknowledges the fact, "[f]ear ... has descended on this land" (171).

Matigari shows that the Ministry of Truth and Justice is a senior ministry indeed. However, the novel laments the fact that the Minister of Truth and Justice is not alone in the corruption of state: he is only one of a long line of sycophants who take their cue right from His Excellency Ole Excellency, the President. The Parratologists, as the narrative satirically describes them, include the Provincial Commissioner who wears an outmoded attire dating to the colonial days. Then there is the Party Chairman -- a caricature of the blind follower -- who also displays his ignorance by promptly outlawing Karl Marx and Mao, whom he assumes to be expatriate meddlers, proposing that they should be denied work. (119). There is also the Member of Parliament who makes a number of preposterous proposals banning "dreams and desires for ... about two years" (120) and also calls on the President to pass a decree which will stop poor people from having sex so that the responsibility of having children can become the privilege of the wealthy. "No more children for the poor! Let us give that responsibility to the wealthy" (119), he advocates. Such are the people who -- in the interests of Christian democracy -- mete out instant justice on Ngaruro wa Kiriro, who is bundled off to the lunatic asylum where he is later killed in an alleged attempt to escape, and Matigari, who is also declared insane for allegedly imitating Christ and sent to the same mental institution. It is in the asylum that the teacher-pupil/ messiah-disciple relationship between Matigari and Ngaruro wa Kiriro is

consolidated and rounded off on a didactic note in a brief summary which follows the tradition of the oral tale:

In the mental hospital, Matigari ma Njiruungi and Ngaruro wa Kiriro talked nearly the whole night about the workers ... peasants ... freedom fighters ... revolutionaries ... about all the forces committed to building a new tomorrow for all our children ... Amen.

They became like student and teacher. Each was both a student and a teacher to the other. (126)

The confrontation in which Matigari almost disorients the Minister of Truth and Justice and his entourage of sycophants is significant to the audience. This confrontation, in fact, is critical in that Matigari is making a statement which underlies his representative role and also puts his mission on a wider canvas which transcends the present. Laying claim to the symbolic land and house which define the selfhood of the dispossessed Kikuyu people, Matigari turns on Williams -- the agent of neo-colonial domination -- saying:

And you imperialist, and your servant Boy -- with all your other lackeys, ministers and leaders of the police force, the army and the courts, the prisons and the administration -- your days are numbered! I shall come back tomorrow. We are the patriots who survived: Matigari ma Njiruungi! And many more of us are being born each day. John Boy, you shall not sleep in my house again. It's either you or me and the future belongs to me! (124)

This marks the end of the peace mission: it is a declaration of war. Matigari's threat to "come back tomorrow" is not simply a reference to the final showdown in Part Three of the novel: it is also a reference to the subsequent social revolution that Matigari seeks to set in motion with the return of the spirit of revolt which he represents -- the spirit that had previously given rise to the birth of the "Mau Mau" movement which he aims to resurrect.²⁷

The last part of *Matigari* takes the narrative to its resolution in a violent confrontation -- literally a fight to the death. The messianic Matigari, whose attempt to find peaceful means to restore truth and justice for all fails, is forced to accept that words alone, without the force of arms, are not enough to bring change in a society where there are so many vested interests. Matigari's change of tactics is symbolized by his exchanging the belt of peace he had girded himself with at the beginning of the story for the sharpened spear. However, this is only a symbolic expression of his intent for, when Matigari mysteriously escapes from the mental hospital and heads for the confrontation with John Boy and Robert Williams in the house, he goes armed only with words and it is the opposition which is armed to the teeth with weapons of destruction. Yet, in spite of all the odds staked against him, Matigari is determined to bring his

mission to a meaningful conclusion, no matter what the consequences. Matigari realises that he had made a mistake to return in peace to try and resolve a class struggle between “the messengers”²⁸ and the true workers which could never be resolved by peaceful means and that unity and peace are impossible ideals in such an uneven struggle.

This change of heart and the decision to abandon peaceful means of resolving the conflict poses problems for the audience if they are tempted to view the extensive use of Christian imagery as evidence of Ngugi’s ultimate reconciliation with Western religion. In fact Ngugi’s flirtation with Christian ideology in *Matigari* goes only as far as it serves to promote the messianic role of the promised saviours who have always been a feature of Kikuyu mythology.²⁹

From the foregoing, it is arguable that in *Matigari* Ngugi attempts to come to grips with the mythical hero by placing him firmly within the context of a *realistic* situation, and he finds out that the people are irredeemably blind to the actuality of salvation, traditional or Christian. The startling reality which emerges, as Abdulrazak Gurnah (1991) points out, is that “Ngugi’s use of the Christ metaphor reveals that the mythical redeemer is a fantasy” (171). And for all his forbearance, Matigari almost comes close to giving up. His only consolation is in the disciples he has recruited: Guthera, who forsakes everything to become his helpmate -- at a realistic level securing his release each time Matigari is jailed and at a symbolic level labelled “the pure” for the superhuman role she assumes in order to rise to the level of becoming his partner; Muriuki, the resurrected youth who takes over Matigari’s mantle in perpetuation of the struggle that goes on beyond the life of any one individual; and the children whose brave act in giving him temporary refuge testifies to their readiness to carry on the struggle, which their elders have given up.

4. Problems with a “Neat Orality” in the African Quest Novel

African writers who wish to merge aspects of African orature and those of the novel genre have insurmountable problems. The quest for a meaningful narrative technique for purposes of the immediate/ local readership is important, but to use African orature as site for narrative technique in the African political novel for an assumed African audience seems to be incompatible with the phenomenon of writing. The two African political novels/ quest narratives/ tales/ texts that this chapter examines demonstrate this problematic. This problematic arises from the fact that it is practically difficult for writers that have been exposed to writing to sufficiently capture and, then, convey the nuances of orature in cold print. Indeed, this is precisely because the aspects/ qualities of an oral tale are uniquely particularised to orature, while those of the novel to writing. Therefore, an oral performance cannot be transmuted into novelistic practice.

However, the chapter notes, first, that the effort to merge aspects of orature with those of literature in African political novels/ quest narratives/ tales/ texts such as *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari* must be acknowledged because the attempt marks an important phase in postcolonial African fiction. Significantly, it is instructive to point out that although the effort in itself does not result in what Julien terms a “neat orality” (14), the attempt, in fact, demonstrates one important argument of this study: this is that African writers often go to great lengths to explore appropriate narrative technique for purposes of intended readerships. Secondly, the chapter argues that the problems with the non-existence of a “neat orality” seem not to deter African writers from *experimenting* with borrowed forms from orature. Furthermore, the chapter suggests that this persistent effort to merge forms of orature with writing seems to be the result of an immediate pressing need to explore equally pressing immediate/ contemporary social, political and economic problems in Africa. The point to emphasise here is that Armah and Ngugi consider contemporary social, economic and political problems in Africa as being particularly *new*. For this reason, they then argue that perhaps the best way to write about such problems is to employ equally *new* narrative techniques. In their view, such new methods could only be borrowed from African orature. Yet, what kind of African readerships would appreciate Armah’s and Ngugi’s efforts in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari*, respectively, also need problematising. For although these two writers would argue that their two texts are intended for a wide African audience, this chapter shows the opposite: the chapter explains that contrary to

Armah's and Ngugi's much talk about the average African audience as being their target, what narrative technique in the texts themselves shows is that it is particularly the *literate* Africans who are likely to appreciate the achievement of these two writers in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari*.

CONCLUSION

This study has argued for a case to privilege narrative technique and readerships in African fiction. Drawing from important strands of Reception, and the comments of several novelists from Anglophone sub-Saharan Africa on both narrative technique and intended readerships in their own work, the thesis theorises the centrality of style and the institution of readership in the African novel. In this way, the study argues for what it designates as *intentional* criticism in any meaningful discussion of the African novel. The critical point the study emphasises is that a consideration of the twin aspects of narrative technique and intended readerships in postcolonial African fiction yields a viable approach to fruitful discussions of the historical, social, and political relevancy of the contemporary African novel.

In arriving at the above conclusions the thesis begins in Chapter I with the argument that the more African writers have continued to write, the more critics should have been attentive not only to the themes and ideologies of African fiction, but also to both narrative technique and the particular readerships that African writers often target. In demonstrating the relationships between narrative technique and readerships in African fiction, and between the themes in particular African texts and the ideologies of their authors, the thesis discusses the African regional novel in Chapter II. In that chapter, it is shown that Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* writes for both national and international readerships, while in *Wand of Noble Wood* Nzekwu primarily targets an international one. It is further shown in Chapter II that the criticism which often tends to discuss the institution of readership in African literature as a dichotomy needs to be questioned. The criticism of the “insider”/ “outsider” readership needs to be problematised precisely because there are usually more than one readership in most African texts. This is, in fact, what this study demonstrates with respect to *Things Fall Apart* and *Wand of Noble Wood*.

The study further demonstrates that African writers often have particular expectations about their readerships. For example, Chapter II shows that in engaging their readerships, Achebe and Nzekwu assume that these readerships are already familiar with the conventions/ demands of the novel genre. Furthermore, what is interesting about the regional novel, it is observed in that chapter, is that a writer such as Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* is, in fact, not trying to adapt an alien traditional narrative form, as such. According to the critical procedures of this study, it would seem that Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* is, in fact, looking for -- and finding -- a form and

structure most expressive of the society he is describing. This makes narrative technique in *Things Fall Apart* good both with regard to the national and international readerships.

However, it is pointed out in Chapter III that a strain in narrative technique in the African novel begins with the African metanovel. It is argued with respect to Armah's *Why Are We So Blest?* and Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* that in these two texts Armah and Aidoo begin to show disillusionment with the novel form. It has also been shown that it is usually in African metafiction that African writers seem to begin to flout the conventions of the novel form and, as such, invite a superreading. What Armah and Aidoo do in their respective texts is, in fact, to attempt to merge aspects of the novel form with those of other genres: in the case of *Why Are We So Blest?* Armah blends aspects of the novel with those of the diary/ notebook, while Aidoo in her text goes further. In *Our Sister Killjoy* Aidoo seems to incorporate literary forms such as poetry and the letter, with aspects of African orature. This merging in African metafiction of a range of forms from both the written and oral traditions results in complex texts, especially at the level of language and symbolism, which only superreaders can appreciate. Significantly, this readership also cuts across both national and international categories. In this way, Chapter III emphasises the critical point this study makes: that it is possible to have more than one readership in an African text.

The positioning of African texts through narrative technique to make them cut across various groups of readerships within both the national and international larger categories is further demonstrated in the African political novel in Chapter IV of this study. In that chapter it is shown that the African intellectual is at once the subject and object of African political fiction such as Achebe's *A Man of the People* and Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*. It is further demonstrated in that chapter that because African writers themselves are also intellectuals, what they then do in the African political novel is to make an inward self-examination. In fact Chapter IV further shows that the ability of the African intellectual to solve Africa's social, political and economic problems is problematised in African political fiction. However, it is also noted in Chapter IV that the primary target for criticism in African political texts is not only the intellectual; that the African political leader as well as some members of the educated elite are also the target of the satire in African political fiction.

It is instructive to emphasise that although narrative technique in African metafiction is highly inventive, that of African political fiction is not: in both *A Man of the People* and *Petals of Blood* the authors fall back on Western narrative forms. Put it in other words, in *A Man of the*

People Achebe writes satire, while Ngugi in *Petals of Blood* draws from Western psychological narrative. For these reasons, these two African political texts interrogate contemporary social, economic, and political problems in Africa, while targeting both national and international readerships. However, the achievements of these two political novels are not similar: Achebe's achievement seems to be more rewarding, while Ngugi's is rather contradictory. The problems that Ngugi encounters in *Petals of Blood*, become, in fact, more pronounced in the African political/ quest novel, which is the subject of the final chapter in this thesis.

Lastly, the final and fifth chapter of this study argues that it is in African political/ quest texts such as Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* and Ngugi's *Matigari* that the African writer's desire for a national readership is clearly very intense. Significantly, this longing for a particularly local readership is occasionally characterised by an equally ardent desire to borrow narrative technique from aspects of the African writer's own indigenous orature, with startling stylistic effects in postcolonial African fiction.

However, although this effort in itself could be acknowledged, the chapter points out that its intended results/ effects do not come out very well, both at the levels of narrative technique and intended readership. The reason for this failure, the chapter argues, is that merging aspects of orature and those of the novel is impractical/ impossible because the novel is primarily a phenomenon of literate cultures/ a product of literacy, while orature belongs essentially to oral cultures/ oracy. In tandem, then, the novel, therefore, can never adequately capture the nuances of an oral performance. Significantly, too, the psyche of the African writer today is already highly literate, as it has interiorised the phenomenon of writing in the same way as that of the intended readership of the African novel. However, what this problematic means ultimately, is, in fact, to assert the fundamental position of the thesis, which is that African writers seriously take both narrative technique and intended readership as critical responsibilities in their work.

NOTES

1. Ong defines this term by contrasting it with what he designates as “primary orality”:

I [Ong] style the orality of a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print as ‘primary orality’. It is ‘primary’ by contrast with ‘secondary orality’ of present-day high-technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print. (11)

It is instructive to point out here that this study uses the notion of “orature” as Sunkuli and Miruku define it to mean a word that is “formed by compounding *oral* and *literature* [It was] coined and popularised by Austin Bukonya and Pio Zirimu” (67; emphasis in text).

2. The problems that commentators have to explain what happens when oral forms are merged with the written medium would begin here. For Ong says that:

Oral discourse has commonly been thought of even in oral milieus as weaving or stitching -- *rhapsodein*, to ‘rhapsodise’, basically means in Greek ‘to stitch songs together’. But in fact, when literates today use the term ‘text’ to refer to oral performance, they are thinking of it by analogy with writing. In the literati’s vocabulary, the ‘text’ of a narrative by a person from a primary oral culture represents a back-formation: the horse as an auto-mobile without wheels again. (13; emphasis in text)

3. Okpewho outlines a thesis which locates two parallel strands in the uses of orature in African fiction, which he describes as “adaptation” and “exploitation”:

In adaptation, both the matter and the manner of the tradition [orature] are quite recognizable. For instance, the fantasy world of Tutuola’s works appears much as it is in the tales of oral tradition In exploitation, however, the modern writer makes only a selective use of elements of the oral tradition. The form of presentation bears a limited relationship to the oral tradition, and even when familiar characters are used, they are deployed in an unfamiliar setting and in somewhat altered order of relationships. What appeals to the writer in his or her recourse to the oral tradition is not so much the physical factors of performance as the essential concepts and ideas contained in it which are seen as enduring relevance. (314-15)

4. It is instructive to note that “[o]ral cultures,” says Ong, “produce powerful and beautiful verbal performances ... [that] are no longer ... possible once writing has taken possession

of the psyche” (14). Finnegan makes the same point when she says that in oral performances certain aspects “cannot come across at all in a written version”:

[T]he framework, the detailed course of the plot, even the implied evaluations of the characters are very different. The subject-matter and literary structure ... [of such performances] can only be appreciated ... with a detailed knowledge of the social and *literary experience* from which ... [they] spring[...] All this, too, is not to mention the aspect of the actual performance which, it is worth repeating, cannot come across at all in a written version, but may appear on the actual occasion of telling as the most noticeable distinguishing characteristic of the story. (342; emphasis mine)

This, indeed, is a complex experience. As can be seen, Finnegan herself is also trapped in the problem at hand; she uses “literary” to discuss orature.

5. It would seem that another method which is increasingly becoming popular with African writers with which to engage an optimum African audience is the attempt to merge the novel with the filmic technique, as Ngugi (1986b) explains with regard to *Matigari*:

I [Ngugi] am very interested in film as a medium I think that ... in film I can combine my interest in theatre and in fiction ... to create *something*. In ... *Matigari* ... I have been influenced by film technique. (166; emphasis mine)

Elsewhere, he also claims with respect to the illiterate audience that “[t]heater and film ... are the ideal means for breaking through the barriers of illiteracy” (71). Although Ngugi’s interest in the film (and theatre) could be explained in terms of what commentators consider as the interface between spectatorship and readership (Austin 1989, Bayun 1985, Mayne 1993), he, nevertheless, fails to explain what the result is when Kikuyu orature and the novel are merged with film. “Something” in Ngugi’s remarks says nothing.

6. Okpewho’s explanation of “performance” is useful here:

By the term *performance* is implied the total act as well as the context or the role of the audience ... or of music but also to the narrator’s use of the movement of the face, hands and other parts of the body in giving life to the narration. (16; emphasis in text)

7. Note that in the same year (1977) when the African Literature Association Meeting took place in Wisconsin, “The Jahn Symposium on Modern East African Literature and its Audience” was also held at the University of Mainz, West Germany. Trenz’s report of this

conference shows that the institution of audience was not systematically discussed there either.

8. According to Okpewho (1983), the “younger” generation of African novelists are guided by a certain revolutionary conscience and do not think the old mythology provides sufficient answers for the problems of contemporary African society. In their works we find an intensification of the critical spirit, an urge to overhaul the foundations on which the old social outlook was erected, and consequently an energy directed at creating a new mythology that would offer for the projected or emergent society a firmer road to self-realization than could be found in the older traditions. (3)

In the context of this study, Achebe and Nzekwu would belong to the “older” generation, while Aidoo, Armah and Ngugi to the “younger” one. In a related context, Peters suggests what he designates as the “first” and “second waves” of African fiction. According to him, to the “first” wave belong the early works of Achebe and Nzekwu, in which “a limited number of themes emphasised either colonialism and its clash with autochthonous cultures or village life” (23). For Peters, to the “second wave” belongs African fiction that deals with the problems of postcolonial corruption and disillusionment. Significantly, Peters notes here the works of Aidoo and Armah, such as *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Why Are We So Blest?*, and Achebe’s *A Man of the People*. Although Peters’ scheme focuses on West African writing, Ngugi’s work could also easily fit in the pattern.

9. The notion of the “return to the roots” raises a critical problem for both *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari*, which the authors seem to ignore: the problem, as Loubser notes in another related context, is that:

[T]here are hardly any communities left that participate in a ‘pure’ oral culture. On the oral-literate continuum, the *mass of people is gravitating toward the literate* and semi-literate middle classes. (34; emphasis mine)

It is, therefore, very unlikely that many of Armah’s and Ngugi’s intended readers will easily/ immediately recognise and appreciate the efforts to “return to the roots” that Armah and Ngugi claim to make in their two texts.

10. Okpewho (1992) makes the point that:

On a more subtle level ... the basis of [the] exploitation of the oral literary tradition by modern African writers lies in the understanding that times

have changed. Although they are driven by cultural pride to identify with the legacies of their people, the painful facts of contemporary life require that they *reorder* these cultural legacies in a way that represents sometimes a slight, sometimes a radical, departure from the tradition, especially if the tradition itself presents an outlook with which the writer does not necessarily agree. At any rate, at this level the oral tradition is turned to metaphorical or symbolic use rather than slavishly mirrored. (316; emphasis mine)

11. Ngugi, 1987: vii. Subsequent page references to this edition, preceded by *M* where appropriate and are incorporated into the text. As was earlier the case with *Our Sister Killjoy* in the third chapter of this study, the typology of all passages/ poetry cited from *Matigari* is also the same in the thesis as in the original.
12. Armah, 1979a: 9. Subsequent page references to this edition, preceded by *TTS* where appropriate and are incorporated into the text.
13. Mphahlele makes similar remarks. He explains both the relevance and effectiveness of the newspaper in communicating with an optimum African audience. In particular, he says the following with respect to his own writing:

I [Mphahlele] keep hammering on this. If newspapers knew there was a growing market for this kind of ... pamphlet prose, and that market grew, you would see ... newspapers reprinting ... these [Mphahlele's] stories and bringing them to the doorsteps of the reader Africans want things to be brought to their doorstep. They don't read the book reviews in newspapers and then go [to] buy the books. It's a question of economics If we had an enterprising publisher who could do that in Africa, I can see that we could create a larger audience. (100)
14. It is instructive to stress that although Julien attempts to identify the oral form that Ngugi equally attempts to deploy/ capture in *Devil on the Cross*, he, nevertheless, does not provide a meaningful explanation of the *new* result/ text/ form; he does not characterise/ describe the essential distinguishing qualities/ nuances of this supposedly fresh result. This point is critical, for what Ngugi, as Julien notes, describes as "oral" language in *Devil on the Cross*, in fact, still belongs to the *spoken* medium. Julien shows his awareness of this problematic in his statement that "[i]ntended for reading or read aloud, *Devil on the Cross* does not showcase a neat orality." The failure for the African writer to meaningfully translate oral/ spoken forms into literature is a real problem; it is a problem which will remain unresolved

for some time. In tandem, the failure for the critic of African fiction to find appropriate terminology to designate the attempts of African writers to capture the nuances of oral forms into cold print is equally a real difficulty which will continue to haunt African criticism. From the foregoing, it should be accepted that much of the criticism of African political texts such as *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Matigari* is questionable indeed. For the purposes of the arguments about African/ European languages/ audience raised in Chapter IV of this study, and now here about African/ European languages/ translation/ audience, it is curious that Ngugi (1982) points out the following about *Devil on the Cross*: “[i]n the original work ... in Kikuyu, certain words and phrases appear in English, French, Latin and Kiswahili” (10). There is a serious contradiction/ problem here in Ngugi’s literary programme: it is very unlikely, almost impossible, in fact, that the ordinary Kenyan would understand the English, French and Latin vocabulary in *Caitani Mutharaaba-ini*, even when it is supposed to be read aloud to them in Kikuyu. Therefore, as was the case with Nzekwu in Chapter II of this study, Ngugi is still trapped in his Western education, and thus limits his intended audience to the Western educated readership. Commentators have also observed the limitations African writers have even when they attempt to write in their indigenous languages. Using what he describes as the “contextual approach” to African literature to discuss Ngugi’s writing in Kikuyu/ Kiswahili for what Ngugi claims to be his East African readership, Gerard makes the following remarks, which point to the constraints this readership is likely to have in decoding Ngugi’s texts:

It is difficult to understand even such a major, internationally reputed writer as Ngugi ... in a proper perspective unless one has acquired a fairly sound familiarity with the distinctive qualities of Kikuyu culture: the historical experience of the Kikuyu people, their traditional beliefs and customs and the way these have evolved in the modern urban environment of the new state. All these things are relevant to Ngugi’s ideas and to the way he transmutes his ideas into imaginative fiction. (163)

Mazrui and Mazrui also add another dimension to the constraints East African writers such as Ngugi may have with their intended readerships. According to them:

More interesting, however, is the possibility that popular literature from the West, from the writings of James Hadley Chase and Harold Robbins to those of Sidney Sheldon and Danielle Steele, are in much higher demand than the ‘more serious’ works of creative writers like Ngugi wa Thiong’o Literary works by African writers, whether in English or in local languages, seem to be read mainly when they are set texts in school syllabuses. (152)

15. Ngugi (1986) reiterates this point as follows:

In 1977 I [Ngugi] published *Petals of Blood* and said farewell to the English language as a vehicle of my writing of plays, novels and short stories However, I continued writing explanatory prose in English *Decolonising the Mind* ... is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Kikuyu and Kiswahili all the way. (xiv)

16. On the complexity of literacy in African indigenous languages in Africa, Kotei (1981) raises the following curious point:

A ... language specialist has made an observation ... (about) how ‘brutally difficult it is for the ordinary adult literate African to achieve a conscious understanding of the grammar of his own language’ The explanation is simply that native language skills are not always inculcated in the educational system from childhood owing to lack of the requisite literature for teaching in primary schools. (123-4)

17. Erapu points out that:

The idea of the second coming ... is not confined to Christianity, for it is discernible in the Kikuyu liberation mystique as currently rendered in Ngugi’s earlier novels and later explored more fully in *Matigari*. (106-7)

However, as a member of the national interpretative community, Gikandi (1991) captures very well *Matigari*’s odyssey. He provides a meaningful account of the name *Matigari*, and the significance of the full title of the original Kikuyu publication -- *Matigari ma Njiruungi*. Another good example of the novel’s member of the national interpretative community is Erapu, who draws parallels between *Matigari* and Ngugi’s other texts, as already noted, and adds that the river which *Matigari* crosses is reminiscent of “the Honia river in *The River Between* and, therefore, symbolic of the divide between hostile sides as well as reconciler and healer -- positive elements which negate destruction” (320).

18. Repetition is here understood to mean a rhetorical device that writers use merely for stylistic effects such as emphasis or musicality. In this respect, what Leech and Short describe as “lexical repetition” (96) is worth noting. This is to say that this study does not use repetition, say, in the manner that Miller discusses it in *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*, in which he proposes two types of repetition. One version of repetition, according to him, is, as follows:

Platonic repetition [that] is grounded in a solid archetypal model which is untouched by the effects of repetition The validity of the mimetic copy is established by its truth of correspondence to what it copies. (6)

In his view, this would seem to be the major concept underlying much of Western literature, including nineteenth- and twentieth-century English realistic fiction and the aesthetic standard by which commentators as diverse as Aristotle, Auerbach and James measure works. By contrast, “the other, Nietzschean mode of repetition posits a world based on difference.” It assumes that “each thing ... is unique, intrinsically different from every other thing [Repetitions] are ungrounded doublings which arise from differential interrelations among elements which are on the same plane” (6). What Miller seems to be doing is describe the artistic process of writing and the perceptual process of reading in terms of mental processes -- voluntary and involuntary memory -- common to all. The first kind of repetition recalls, according to him, “wild memory” which “works logically, by way of similarities which are seen as identities, one thing repeating another and grounded in a concept on the basis of which their likeness may be understood” (8). The second recalls what Miller designates as an “involuntary form of memory” which replaces the world of life with that of fiction and imagination in the form of dream: “one thing is experienced as repeating something which is quite different from it and which it strangely resembles” (8). In this kind of repetition, the emphasis is more on similarity within difference than upon total resemblance.

19. According to Leech and Short, “style markers” are usually identified by “[c]ombining literary discrimination and linguistic discrimination.” They say that this combination is likely to enable readers to “become alert to those particular features of style which call for more careful investigation. Such salient features of style may be called *style markers*” (69; emphasis in text). Leech and short further explain that “[t]he heuristic notion of ‘style marker’ is the key to [a writer’s] method” (69).
20. The treatment of sex in *Two Thousand Seasons* needs comment; as was the case with *Why Are We So Blest?* in Chapter III, it is arguable that in Armah’s fiction the sexual imagery and symbolism often signify the character of a particular racial group. In the case of *Two Thousand Seasons*, explicit sex is meant to illustrate the decadent character of the invaders,

which, curiously enough, the zombies inherit.

21. Aidoo provides a dramatic rendition of this female mythical character in *Anoa*. In that play Anoa also prophesies about the coming of the Whites to Africa.

22. Finnegan refers to three Kikuyu tales (two of them are quest narratives [338-40, 347-50, 358-60]), and makes the following important point about the institution of the intended audience:

Amid all the theorizing about the possible functions of stories there is one point which, it seems to me [Finnegan], is too often overlooked. This is the likelihood that within a culture stories are likely to have many functions. They will probably vary with the content and tone Even more important are the details of the occasion on which a story is told -- including *the audience ... and recent events in the locality*. (377; emphasis mine)

The contemporaneity of the political dimension of *Matigari* is, therefore, worth noting.

23. Finnegan explains a critical point about the re-working of familiar songs, and especially hymns for what she describes as immediate “religious and political sanction” by the “Ma Mau”, as follows:

Thus to the tune of ‘Here we suffer grief and pain’: Here we suffer thumb-printing and grass planting. ‘T’won’t be so when the land is ours. The warrior hut is set up, one brave leader is already here, the other on his way’ The results of these hymns as propaganda can be seen in the spread and tenacity of the ‘Mau Mau’ as a political movement. Because the ideas expressed were considered subversive by the government they could not be publicized openly. (288)

24. The potential of the song as a mobilising factor in *Matigari* is also illustrated in the resistance song that the imaginary “he-who-sows” composes; this resistance song echoes the words of the poem at the beginning of the novel. It is as follows:

I will not produce food
For him-who-reaps-where-he-never-sowed to feed on it
While I go to sleep on an empty belly.
I will not build a house
For him-who-reaps-where-he-never-sowed to sleep in it
While I sleep in the open.
I will not sew clothes
For him-who-reaps-where-he-never-sowed to wear them

While I strut about naked.
 I will not make goods
 For him-who-reaps-where-he-never-sowed to grow rich
 While I remain empty-handed.
 I have refused to be like the cooking pot
 Whose sole purpose is to cook and never to eat! (97-8)

The observations Scheub (1975) makes about the song as an “expansible image” in the Xhosa *ntsomi* that could be apposite to the way Ngugi deploys songs at particular moments in *Matigari*. According to him:

Their [the songs’] most portent use is at the height of crises, when the artist seems to have no recourse but to express herself in song. Spoken words alone do not sufficiently communicate the feelings the artist is attempting to express.

...

[S]ongs ... occur at critical moments in performances.

...

The rhythmic use of language binds the song and prose together as surely and as effectively as action and idea blend (and are blended by) the words of the real and the fantastic. In performance, they become the same, both imaginatively ... and intellectually. (50, 53, 57)

Thus the spare, but incremental repetition of songs in *Matigari* renders the narrative more forceful as it suggests the hero’s constant travelling.

25. Erapu suggests what, perhaps, the Kikuyu readership is likely to do with the proverbs and riddles in *Matigari*, as follows:

Ngugi uses a wealth of proverbs [and riddles] to bring his message home to his audience. It is in the subtle use of proverbs [and riddles] as much as in his narrative technique that Ngugi’s talent would be judged by the Kikuyu audience in whose idiom he was writing. (306)

26. According to Erapu:

Apart from the pompous word play implied in this satirical title turned into a name, the ‘Ole’ (though it is Masai) would be viewed by the target [Kikuyu super]audience as an obvious substitute for the Kalenjin [another Kenyan ethnic group/ language] ‘arap’ which has been popularised in Kenya by the ... [former] President’s appellation: His Excellency Daniel *arap* Moi. (319; emphasis mine)

27. The mystification of the end of this episode is only a façade, which, according to Erapu, the author uses to mask the reality of the transition from the meek acceptance

of the status quo to the active revolt which was very evident to the readers of the Kikuyu novel when it was published. (302)

28. Erapu says that:

‘[T]he messengers’ is a derogatory term which covers the full range of “traitors” going back to the earliest converts to Christianity who also received Western education and became servants of the colonial administration [in Kenya]. Later, the collaborators who sided with the colonial government in fighting against the ‘Mau Mau’ rebels also came from the same class which was eventually rewarded with the reigns of political power and economic control at the time of independence. (320)

29. Maughan-Brown (1991) points out the parallels between the mystique surrounding Matigari and that surrounding the historical Elijah Masinde of the *Dini ya Msambwa* cult, as follows:

Ngugi might, in the 1980s, have reassessed the possible usefulness of Christianity to his revolutionary project, and, in particular ... the political mobilization inherent in the millenarianism embraced from time to time by sections of the Kenyan peasantry both under colonialism and in the postcolonial period. (174)

However, whether Matigari is modelled on Christ or on the legendary Elijah Masinde, what matters in terms of *Matigari*'s audience is that the audience would be receptive to the idea of such a hero, for, in fact, as Maughan-Brown himself points out, “Matigari’s mythical stature clearly depends on the people’s propensity for myth-making” (174).

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This bibliography is in two parts: the first part comprises the control texts such as novels, essays and interviews the select authors this thesis examines have written and given, while the second has all the other material that has been read with respect to this study. The fiction, interviews and criticism of other African writers as well as commentators, scholars and critics are also provided in the second part of the bibliography.

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