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REMAPPING AFRICAN LITERATURE

Olabode Ibironke

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Remapping African Literature

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For Boluwatito, Ikeolu, Niniolu

Preface

Abiola Irele, a prime witness to the birth of modern African literature, announced in one of the earliest reviews of Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart*[1] that what he thought then to be "Nigerian literature" was born. From his days as a founding editor of *The Horn*, in the late 1950s, Irele has been a constant presence in the development of African literary criticism. It was in the context of this unique profile that his remarks to Robert Wren, also a pioneer critic of African literature and an early Achebe scholar, impressed me with their immense gravity: "so far there has been criticism, the sort of secondary language, the secondary discourse on the literature, at the top end of the thing. Whereas, you need to also look at the early material conditions in which this literature was produced. So you need to do a secondary discourse again, at the other end, the bottom end."[2] This proposal for literary criticism informed by a bottom-up view of the interacting forces of the processes of literary production that affect writing and writers requires an archeological excavation of material conditions first and foremost as a basis for a theory of literature. Thus, the project of this book will entail the dual attempts to simultaneously produce an archeology: a history of the development of African literature in the immediate period after political independence; and a theory of African literature: an *archeotheory* that uses that peculiar history as the basis for recontextualizing and reformulating readings of literary texts.

My research into the archives of Heinemann Educational Books, the publishers of the widely known African Writers Series (AWS), led quite early to the uncovering of a lengthy piece by Wole Soyinka originally submitted as a preface to the paperback edition of *Poems of Black Africa, an*

anthology,[3] which he edited. In this piece, Soyinka espouses a withering critique of the activities of western publishers who were naturally expanding their operations into the emerging markets of newly independent nations in Africa. Soyinka expressed concern about what western publishers were putting out in the name of African literature, and about the rate at which this was done in what seemed to be a race among the major European houses to cultivate a niche in the business of African literary publishing. Because these publishers were also targeting school markets, Soyinka worried that the twin factors of foreign and pedagogical mediations could permanently define and impact the growth and development of African literature. The published version of the preface was ultimately cut down to a few innocuous paragraphs, but the discovery of the full version of the original preface in the Heinemann archive lends credence to Irele's discontent with top-end rarified theory, or "bloodless criticism," as Bernth Lindfors would tag it. *Remapping African Literature* harkens to Soyinka's critique. It does not hesitate to acknowledge direct methodological application between critical practices and literary history, or the sociology of literature; history and sociology remain largely extraneous to the analysis of texts themselves and to literary criticism. The hesitation in the field is evident in the divisions between digital methods and historiography of the book, which tend to be more invested in empiricism and material culture, and old-fashioned literary criticism, which is based primarily on the analysis of texts. In fact, in a recent lecture on the use of big data in the field of contemporary fiction, James English, when asked what the consequences of these quantitative results should be for understanding the literature as such, would only go as far as to suggest that these methods provide guidance for literary criticism. The studies of print culture or publishing history have significant implications for literary criticism and theory that cannot be ignored and they can provide new approaches for understanding the general politics of writing. As Peter Shillingsburg put it in *Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age*: "[C]ritics might profit from knowing what editors, who have traced composition, text transmission, and relations between publishers and authors, can tell us about the context that an author brings to utterance in the act of creating a work of art."[4] Shillingsburg succinctly articulates that literature must be understood through a study of the history and imperatives of the cultural relations, institutions, and industries that produced it. His approach is very much in line with that of G. Thomas Tanselle, whose important work tracked the material conditions of book production as integral aspects of intellectual and cultural history, with the aim of expanding the interpretive and

evidentiary basis for reading and performing textual analysis. This, indeed, is what is most frequently missed in contemporary theory, because literary criticism has been so little informed by editorial criticism and the history of publishing, or by an approach to literary history informed by Marxist dialectics.

Part of the impulse for this book is to demonstrate that old-fashioned literary criticism, based primarily on the analysis of texts, could interlock with the material history of textual production in such a way that the latter not only provides context but also defines expectations and questions, and sets the angle by which we approach texts. My aim aligns ultimately with that of Sarah Brouillette's *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Market Place*.[5] Brouillette makes two important arguments: one, that the material aspects of textual production are "*textual* in their own right";[6] and two, that reading this "textuality" of material production can be seen as "an interpretive practice that aims at insights into literature itself."[7] However, rather than viewing literary history and the sociology of literature as spaces for generating new ideas for literary studies, I take a more basic approach that views author–publisher, text–institution, subjectivity–materiality relations as operating dialectically, albeit along multiple axes of interlocking continuities and discontinuities. A connection could be established between the ideas and sensibilities expressed in Soyinka's letters and unpublished preface and his novel that could illuminate the meaning of the novel, but also significantly expand the scope of the issues the novel engages, as well as what is at stake in the novel. While context and methodological guidance are complicated and challenging concepts for generating literary value, and understanding, it is the interlocking aspect of the material conditions of the history of the book that I find the most exciting, especially as it goes beyond meaning and insight, to the actual possibilities of changing our scholarly orientation.

This book complicates our assumption that writers are all too eager to get published, and more so through a press that guarantees their works will reach a wider audience. Before my encounter with Soyinka's unpublished piece, I had shared the assumption that African writers had an undialectical relationship with foreign publishers. This assumption was in part an internalization and allegorization of Claude McKay's exchange with the great US editor, Frank Harris. And while there are strong geo-political and racial components to the relationship between African writers and western publishers in particular, my analysis in this book is not intended to be read dichotomously in simple black and/versus white terms. Frank Harris' reply to McKay clearly packs a lot more into it:

> "Now, tell me frankly," he said, turning the pages of my scrapbook, "what was the real underlying urge that forced you to come to America, after you had achieved a local success in your home? Was it merely to study?" I admitted that back in my mind there had really been the dominant desire to find a bigger audience. Jamaica was too small for high achievement. There, one was isolated, cut off from the great currents of life.
>
> "I knew that," Frank Harris said triumphantly. "Your ambition was to break into the larger literary world—a fine ambition."[8]

Another discovery was the manuscript of Chinua Achebe's "Publishing in Africa: A Writer's View," the published version of which I was later to find in the US edition of *Morning Yet on Creation Day*.[9] These essays by Soyinka and Achebe written in the very early period of the 1970s demonstrate that the writers were concretely concerned with material change, and not just success. While there can be no denying the ambition to break into a larger literary world, Soyinka and Achebe were not blinded by their ambition, or content merely with its fulfillment, but actively engaged in the deliberate transformation of the apparatuses of production that had brought them success. Achebe was much changed by the Nigerian civil war. It was during the war that he got together with the Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo in the secessionist state of Biafra to form the Citadel Press. After the war, and the defeat of the cause he had actively supported, he wrote in a letter to Heinemann during discussions about the publication of *Girls at War* in a tone that confirmed an activist turn: "in any case my career has been so devoid of complications that I am almost anxious to invent some!"[10] After the war, he was part of the initiative that formed Nwankwo-Ifejika Ltd., and the Okike magazine. These activities synchronize well with the ideology expressed in the essay referenced above. In this essay, he argues, "The publisher, must operate in the same historic and social continuum [with the artist and his people]. It stands to reason that he cannot play this role from London or Paris or New York."[11]

The call for a criticism informed by material conditions and historical archives of the lives of authors and texts acquires a more insistent tone in the work of Lindfors, who insists especially on the need for the preservation of the archives of African literature for future scholarship. *Remapping African Literature* attempts to fulfill these persistent demands in African literary criticism, but then goes on to assess the institutional and material effects of literary production that permeate creative and critical works. It explores a counter-question that is seldom asked, or until now unimaginable: to what degree have African writers and African literature fundamentally transformed the apparatuses of production and habits of reading?

This question challenges the general assumption that western material production has mediated and affected African literature in a unilateral and unidirectional way by suggesting that there is agency on the part of African writers themselves in the process. This is reflected in the central move of this book toward a theory of activist formalism. This is the basic notion that writers are thinking transformatively about the conditions of textual production. Such thought activates or compels technical mediations that motivate the formal and strategic posture of texts.

There are theoretical paths of book history that this book deliberately avoids because they address different questions, or what David Scott in *Conscripts of Modernity*[12] calls different "problem spaces." One approach is informed in part by the argument that we cannot write the history of the book in Africa without making the distinction between manuscript culture, and print culture—especially with the rediscovery of the manuscripts of Timbuktu.[13] Ngugi's story about how he literarily burned the midnight oil, writing his first couple of novels in longhand with light from the lamp or candle in his village sets up a scene of writing that was still in tune with manuscript culture. This also includes a focus on the transition from orality to Arabic and Latin scripts and spellings, the linguistic and scribal operations of divinatory systems and semiotic systems, petroglyphs, and so on, all of which suggest that, "All cultures produce signs and thus engrave their social existence on objects. Cultures possess writing, even if the writing is without letters."[14] Indeed, one can write the history of the book in Africa by tracing the parallel trajectory of the transformations of the book that Derrida describes in *Paper Machine*: from *biblos* or *liber*: "all writing, what is written down,"[15] to *codex*, "that gathering of a pile of pages bound together,"[16] and so on. However, because it focuses not on the traditional past but a more contemporary past, the problem space of this book does not reach deep into these forms of the pre/history of African book and literary production. Another road not taken is the approach that focuses primarily on the publisher's archive and/or western theories of circulation, even when the globalization of the process of book production and pattern of consumption is central to its claim.[17] The study of literature and the institutional constraints undertaken by literary and book historians focused on South Africa represent yet another problem space, given the unique social history of South Africa.[18] What *Remapping African Literature* seeks to overcome is the problem of how to show the enabling mechanisms and conditions of creativity without overdramatizing their influence.

It is indeed fortuitous that Heinemann directors such as James Currey have already provided volumes of institutional history and processes of

production of Heinemann and the African Writers Series.[19] This leaves us the freedom to focus more on the theory of production, while drawing on their works. Of the works on African literature and the AWS specifically, only James Currey's work is book length: it is an attempt to display the splendor of an enterprise in its prime by reproducing letters from major authors and sampling works from various regions. Graham Huggan's *Postcolonial Exotic*,[20] looking at the same conditions, labels African novels anthropological. The fact that 80 percent of sales between 1962 and 1982 were in Africa itself—and indeed, the role of Africa-based editors and directors and markets/audience—complicates Huggan's arguments. What curiosity or exoticism would account for the sale of 100,000 copies of Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child*[21] in Nigeria within a quarter in 1967? *Remapping African Literature* challenges the dominant presumption that African literature, the series, was primarily written for and marketed to a western audience who sees in it the cultural mirror of a remote time and place. It is within the context of these presumptions that this book examines the political economy of AWS.

As noted above, James Currey's *Africa Writes Back: The African Writers Series & The Launch of African Literature*[22] is the only book in the field that addresses the series as such in any substantive manner. Modeled after G. D. Killam's and Ruth Rowe's *The Companion of African Literature*,[23] Currey's book functions in an encyclopedic fashion as an elaborate compilation of archival letters and anecdotal sources deployed by him in portraying exclusive biographical sketches of wide ranging authors and regions of Africa, all of which are rich, fascinating, and invaluable. Currey has done the perfect work of a public archivist in bringing to the debate key resources. His work is a major contribution to and a departure from the mainly biographical, historical, and thematic overviews presented in the works of Heinemann directors before him such as John St John[24] and Alan Hill.[25] However, it is curious that the field of African literature has thus far relied on Heinemann directors for insight into the dynamics of African literary production, a responsibility that is rarely granted to the writers. Writers' commentaries on their own work are never fully trusted to tell us anything about their work that is not merely an extension of their corpus.

On one of those beautiful days of spring in England when I met with Currey at the archive in Reading, almost everyone else had come in to read the files of Samuel Beckett. Characteristically lively and unreserved, Currey exclaimed, "Mine is the case of Beckett studying Beckett!" Indeed, Currey's book could be read as a response to the criticisms of the series

that have built up over half a century, as a staunch defense of a life's work in progressive publishing, which he describes thus: "My ambition was to show the world that writers from Africa could use the imported form of the novel as inventively as the Irish, the Australians and other writers across the English-speaking world."[26] By bringing the archive to the public and by asserting authority over the history and discourse of African literary production on the basis of the publisher's archive, his work is similar to that of Bernth Lindfors who, over his career, advocated for the preservation of the archive of African literature as the only way of securing the future of African literary studies. The contentions generated by the work of Lindfors should provide a preview of the explosive struggle over the future of African literary criticism that the present grand opening of the publisher's archive will no doubt accelerate.

New Brunswick, NJ, USA Olabode Ibironke

Notes

1. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1958).
2. Robert M. Wren, *Those Magical Years the Making of Nigerian Literature at Ibadan, 1948–1966* (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1991b), p. 120.
3. Wole Soyinka, *Poems of Black Africa* (Essex, UK: Heinemann, 1975).
4. Peter L. Shillingsburg, *Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age Theory and Practice* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), pp. 26–27.
5. Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (Basingstoke, UK; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
6. Ibid., p. 2.
7. Ibid., p. 12.
8. Claude McKay, Gene Andrew Jarrett and Inc ebrary, *A Long Way from Home* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), p. 21.
9. Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day Essays* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975a).
10. (Achebe to Keith Sambrook May 21 1972).
11. Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day Essays*, p. 89.
12. David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
13. Robert Fraser, *Book History through Postcolonial Eyes: Rewriting the Script* (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), and indeed *The Languages & Literatures of Africa* (2005) by Alain Ricard, among others, show how "it

is possible to provide a parallel history of literature in the African languages up to the present day and to write another history, that of African literatures in European languages" (Ricard: 122). Even the history of African literatures in European languages has multiple trajectories.

14. Alain Ricard, *The Languages & Literatures of Africa: The Sands of Babel* (Oxford, UK; Trenton, NJ: James Currey; Africa World Press, 2004), p. 165.
15. Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 8.
16. Ibid., p. 9.
17. Also, Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers and the Global Literary Marketplace* (2007); Gail Low's *Publishing the Postcolonial* Anglophone West African and Caribbean Writing in the UK 1948–1968 Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, and to a lesser extent Caroline Davis' *Creating Postcolonial Literature: African Writers and British Publishers* and Gail Ching-Liang Low, *Publishing the Postcolonial : Anglophone West African and Caribbean Writing in the UK, 1948–1968* (New York: Routledge, 2011) attempt an understanding of publishing and editorial history from within.
18. For further discussion of these approaches see Andrew van der Vlies' *South African Textual Cultures*; Caroline Davis, *Creating Postcolonial Literature: African Writers and British Publishers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Peter McDonald's *The Literature Police*; Andrew Edward Van der Vlies, *South African Textual Cultures: White, Black, Read All Over* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2007); Sarah Nuttall, *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009); and Peter D. McDonald, *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and Its Cultural Consequences* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
19. James Currey, *Africa Writes Back the African Writers Series & the Launch of African Literature* (Oxford: James Currey, 2008b).
20. Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001).
21. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not Child* (London: Heinemann, 1964).
22. Currey, *Africa Writes Back the African Writers Series & the Launch of African Literature*.
23. G. D. Killam, *The Companion to African Literatures* (Oxford: J. Currey, 2000).
24. John St.John, *William Heinemann a Century of Publishing, 1890–1990* (London: Heinemann, 1990).
25. Alan Hill, *In Pursuit of Publishing* (London: J. Murray in association with Heinemann Educational Books, 1988).
26. Currey, *Africa Writes Back the African Writers Series & the Launch of African Literature*, p. 96.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Deconstructing Postcolonial Literary Production

African writers are operators of postcolonial transformation. They alter our perception of ourselves and of reality. More importantly, they transform regimes of taste and modes of reading, as well as the institutions and industries of cultural production. This work of transformation is however not obvious from that which currently presents itself as postcolonial literary and book history. Postcolonial theory and literary history have highlighted the enduring architecture of colonialism and its impact on culture and creativity. The argument of this book is grounded in the notion of reversals: reading texts through and against the history of their production, an analysis of texts informed by book/literary history but also the reverse determination of the *a priori* of fictional works that antecedes and anticipates relations of literary production.

The idea of African writers as operators of postcolonial transformation relies on the classic Marxian philosophy that superstructural advancements have transformational effects on the infrastructural base. At the core of Marxian dialectics is the notion of uneven development. The capital-labor conflict is embedded in differential growth factors of production. This applies to the conflict of institution and culture. Specifically, advancement in consciousness outstrips mode of production to set the condition for transition from one mode to another. The material conditions of postcolonial literary production, I hope to demonstrate, follow a similar dialectics

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in which modes of colonial production are disarticulated by advances in postcolonial creativity, consciousness, and culture. The operation of postcolonial transformation through literature, like all processes of historical transformation, depends on the teleological possibility of its fulfilment.

The production of African literature presents a unique problem space for African literary criticism that requires a study of institutional practices and effects that mediate and permeate texts, as well as texts' reflexivity on conditions of production and their capacity to transform institutional practices. This is another way of rearticulating the dialectics of "transformed content" vs. "operators of transformation" that in Alain Badiou's "The Autonomy of the Aesthetic Process"[1] constitutes the sticking point between his theory of aesthetic autonomy and that of Pierre Macherey. Macherey was concerned about the distinction and problem of ideology in general as a condition of historical reality, and ideology as it presents itself in the form of the work of art, the latter exposing the former, while also revealing its own insufficiency. Badiou however rejects this theory of art as reflection of/on ideology, of reflection as the passage from ideology to art. This formulation presupposes in addition to their separability, the exteriority and therefore passability of the process of ideological production to that of aesthetic production. He disputes that the state of reflection is a mere passage that reproduces ideology as art but rather that "An element is *produced* as ideological in the structure of the aesthetic mode of production."[2] This element is an effect of the process of aesthetic production as it is a metonymical repetition of the general process of ideological production. This effect that simultaneously produces and realizes ideology is "the transformed contents." Macherey's error is thus, according to Badiou, that "he places the autonomy of the aesthetic process within the *operators* of transformation, but not in the transformed contents."[3] At the end of this introduction, I will return to the question of why Badiou does not quite correct Macherey's "error" since he too concludes that the autonomy of the aesthetic process that is realized in the transformed contents "is not tied contextually to any subjectivity."[4]

By faulting Macherey for locating aesthetic autonomy in the operators of transformation, rather than transformed content, Badiou becomes a champion of aesthetic determinism. The emphasis on institutional infrastructure often overdetermines the understanding of African literature as "transformed content" and obscures the transformational nature of African literature as an aesthetic form and expression. Current works on African literary production that tend to promote the idea of how African writing was shaped or created through western and colonial institutions

fall within this logic. *Remapping African Literature* pushes against this trend by highlighting the counter pressures exerted on the consciousness and agendas of producers of culture, and on the institutions of literary production by African writers and texts. The book addresses questions concerning where and how the first generation of African writers got published and why that matters in our understanding of African, postcolonial, and global literary history and criticism. It draws the outlines of the African literature industry as the basis for a secondary analysis of selected texts. It uses the archive of the African Writers Series (AWS) published by the British firm, Heinemann Educational Books, in order to show how African writers, wrought change upon the apparatuses and relations of production through the mediation of literary techniques as forms of thought. The basic proposition of the book is that literary forms are conscious of their conditions of production, and to capture properly their relation to those conditions, they must first distance themselves from the relations of their production. By virtue of this essential literary act, the aesthetic form and representation supercede the state of development of institutions and infrastructure of production. These literary acts of technical mediation and aesthetic supersession enable me to develop a theory of activist formalism and to demonstrate how this advancement of literary forms creates the conditions for the transformation of the infrastructure of production.

A discussion of the autonomy of the aesthetic process in African literature that excludes subjectivity, as Badiou does, is not possible. African literary production takes shape within the objective visibility of difference, a difference that undergirded the very practice of Commonwealth Literature. It is embodied in the institutional norms represented by Heinemann. The claims of cosmopolitan production, the challenge of cultural patrimony, and the role of the English language constitute a deterministic field against which the very possibility of an Anglophonic African literature and its production could be measured. Of all the practices that define literary production, the practice of selection most directly involves discriminating among subjects, in both senses of the word. The format of the AWS and its "grouping" effect highlight the constraints of a collective project that co-opts individual authors and thereby minimizes or supplants the author function, and authorial subjectivity. The tension between what I term Heinemann's map principle and the aesthetic principle of selection underscores the assertion of authorial and aesthetic autonomy.

Similarly, the educational practice cannot be conceived without the notion of the subject, just as the notion of the subject is not conceivable without the constitutive work of institutions. If the educational criteria of

the AWS dictated the pedagogical imperative of Achebe's novels, how did those novels implement their pedagogical vision? And, how did the novels' pedagogical vision transform the educational criteria and commonwealth horizon into the moment of acculturation or actually transcend them. The riposte to educational criteria was the intertextuality of expressive and humanist aesthetics that marked a transformation of commonwealth practice to the pan-African practice. Intertextuality initially anchored by the reference to Soyinka's work authorizes a new criticism and history of the 1970s, while Ngugi's subsequent insistence on language redirects the pan-African practice as a mode of authenticating African literature in what we might call the *globalectical* moment of its circulation. Heinemann's support for Ngugi's project and promoting African language literatures symbolized the new direction the company had taken since it began its operations in Africa. African literary history is thus a dynamic of push and pull that is characterized by the relation of determinacy of production and authorial and aesthetic autonomy, what in this book's argument could only be captured and understood through the concept of auto-heteronomy.

Remapping African Literature offers a theory of the material imperatives underlying the cultural institutions and industries of literary production in relation to the development of a relatively new, and novel, body of African literature. It theorizes the making of modern African literature by specifically examining the roles played by the publishing house of Heinemann Educational Books and its African partners in the creation of "African literature" in the postcolonial period. By tracking the diffusion of African literature, this book seeks to demonstrate the ways in which the development of African literature in the postcolonial era was mediated by an Anglophone literary regime—represented by Heinemann. As a project situated in literary studies, the work ultimately undertakes new modes of reading major authors such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, framed by conditions in Africa, the diaspora, and the postcolonial world. These and other writers are examined within the optics of the contingencies of production and the counter-effects they generated in the nature of textual production, dissemination, and the regulating principles and classical procedures of editorial practices and publication. In other words, the Anglophone tradition serves as a determinant frame for production, but particular contingencies generate counter-effects that exert influence of the writers themselves on that frame.

Remapping African Literature brings together three important and interconnected subjects in African literary criticism. It argues that a

philoshophical understanding of the postcolonial condition in Africa can be approached at a micro level through the prism of the social history engendered by the publication of the Heinemann African Writers Series. Additionally, the canon of literature, constituted in large measure by the AWS, and curated by an international publisher, can be read as being grounded in the larger political economy of global production, printing and corporate practices, and residual national or local sensibilities. The tensions that structure the relationship between Heinemann and the African authors published in its series serve to highlight fundamental processes and forces at work between former imperial powers and cultures and the relatively new postcolonial cultures in Africa.

The enabling context of the AWS was constituted, in part, by the hangover from British imperialism and colonial education. This context guaranteed against the grain of the AWS that their initial function, along with those of other "Third World" Literatures in English, was first and foremost the securing of the global triumph of the English language, thus fostering the British Commonwealth project and the cultural dominance of Englishness, which in return afforded the writers international recognition. The parallel emergence of cosmopolitan centers of artistic production in a number of African cities such as Ibadan, Nairobi, and Johannesburg, the particular atmosphere of the postcolonial/postindependent city similar to those of Paris and London served to provide the main thoroughfares for artistic creativity and added vital material and imaginative dimensions to the character of African literary texts. This newly formed character, from newly defined regional centers of cultural production, has since asserted itself in ways that no longer fit within the cultural project of Englishness. These contingencies of production and reproduction now demand that African literature be read neither as a medium of coloniality or identity, nor as their expression, but as the continuous manifestation of open, complex, and dialectical relations. Such a redefinition could provide an aperture through the labyrinthine paths of entanglement of Africa with the world based on a fundamental understanding of the relations of production of African literature.

Thus, this book aims at discovering alternative genealogies of African literary production, how the internal, indigenous, and residual cultural processes and experiences, form new grounds for imagining and imaging the postcolonial subjecthood that was invented in African literature. It brings together the varied streams of African literary criticism generated by professional academics and editors to view the literary text from the

point of view of the dialectics of internal and external relations of its production. In other words, the necessity of the book derives from what I consider the overrepresentation in the field of African literary criticism of how global institutional moments invented, propelled, and appropriated literature in Africa, and the general dogma of an approach to literature that is determined by the mediation and the imperatives of the industries of literary production. This overrepresentation and dogma, of which Adele King's *Rereading Camara Laye*,[5] is the prime example, have occurred precisely because not much editorial criticism or history of publishing relations has been informed by Marxist dialectics and materialism. King argues that Camara Laye did not write *Radiance of The King*[6] because of the relationships that produced it and the editorial interventions prove a level of involvement that goes far beyond collaboration.

In discussing African literary production, therefore, a comprehensive approach is required to understand fully the complexity by which discourses of literary production—that is, both non-literary analyses of this process, and the literary texts that implicitly embody it—have always engendered a parallel motion as master narratives of social ontogenesis that aim to establish the ground or rationality for an autonomous political status of African societies and subjects. They have defined the specialized practice of African knowledge and its production not as a paradigm imposed from without but as a practice responsive to local imperatives and needs. *Remapping African Literature* demonstrates how writers like Achebe, Soyinka, Ngugi, Mphahlele, Farah, and Armah all fictionalized the concept of actively decolonizing modes of thinking and reinventing subjectivities and social production. The complex concept is an idea of Africa that is inevitably articulated to evoke unique association with the very "struggles" of the continent, its flora and fauna, its geography and climate, its people, culture, and discourse. This peculiarity or particularity by which the art of representation in Africa is practiced and theorized could ironically be argued to betray a difference that has its roots in colonial metaphysics, one that is paradoxically inherent in postcolonial grammatology. If the rationale for the creation of an "African" literary Series is to guarantee an authentic voice, the constitution and rationality of that authenticity have in effect reinforced the colonial ideologies of difference. The tension between the aims of African discourses of autonomy and the logic of difference that at once enables and delimits it can be seen as a dialectical contradiction necessary to postcoloniality as such. And perhaps, this is a condition of historical existence in which the position of difference

always replicates and reinforces the same positing of difference it would negate. Given that all questions of identity assume multiple systems of culture, the presumption of an exclusive interior of *Black* experience and expression, its classification into a distinctive genre that asserts its own rationality, necessarily leads to a metaphysics of difference. The invisible workings of this difference undergird the specialization of the AWS and its universal adoption. While the question of difference being highlighted here is clearly not the invention of the Directors at Heinemann, it by and large forms the historical *a priori* by which African cultural identity in England and other metropolitan centers was cultivated, and the general practices of African book production established. Writers, publishers, critics, and readers accept a frame or horizon that shapes the epistemology or the shared assumptions of how to construct the world. In other words, though at first glance astute marketing strategies dictated the imperative and expediency of targeting black authors for the AWS, the decision has its ineluctable reality only within a history, a framing, an epistemology that already differentiated those writers. This amounts to a tautology of marketing difference: the marketing strategy that apparently dictated the differentiation of black writers was in fact dictated by a culture that already differentiated them.

Because a majority of the writers from Africa that are most widely available and read either as part of a curriculum or for pleasure across the world have been brought forward by an International publisher, the study of the author–publisher relationships would greatly illuminate the most enduring questions in the study of modern African literature: Did the avenue of international publishing dictate the imperative of writing in European languages? For whom does the African write? Were there pressures from "outside" on the writer to make certain aesthetic choices? The ultimate problem of classification of African literature today as African, Postcolonial, and World literatures rather than as National literatures, the more conventional classification, poses the question of how the history of the literature addresses the experience of cosmopolitan production, which is becoming the single most important philosophical topic of the moment. It seems fairly conventional to associate the major authors in the AWS with the canon of African literature. This, then, allows us to make generalizations on African literary production as a whole based on the assumption of the representative position of the AWS. It is not only African literature that received magnification through the AWS; the extraordinary success it maintained until 1985 put Heinemann equally on the map of British and

internationally recognized publishing houses. James Currey supports this claim in an interview with Oxford Brooke's Caroline Davis: "[The African Writers Series] became, partly accidentally, an exploitative part of Heinemann's strategy in Africa. Again and again it gave Heinemann a presence which seemed far greater than the real size and strength of the firm. It was a key factor in enabling Heinemann to seize educational contracts from under the noses of established companies with a far longer presence than upstart Heinemann."[7]

By the logic of Derrida's paradigm of UNESCO as an exemplary archive, a study of the archives of the international institutions of literary production, as philosophemes, that is, philosophical acts, could equally enable a proposal for a cosmopolitan history of literature. This formulation allows us to see international publishing institutions as literary acts and archives but also to see a series of literary publications as an archive. In other words, in viewing the series as an archive, one opens new possibilities for the kinds of results that the study of the AWS as an archive can yield with regard to the overall quest for a material theory of African literature. As Spiers argues, "when treated *as an archive*, these books can speak."[8] Spiers' notion of niche in his edited volumes, *The Culture of The Publisher's Series*, is pertinent because it is my position that only Heinemann succeeded in creating a niche through the series by which it could be said to have attained full mastery in the African literature industry. The international publishing house of Heinemann, by acts of publication and promotion of what arguably is one of the most prestigious literary series in postcolonial literature, is the place par excellence where the question of the African and postcolonial literature industry originates, and indeed, ought to take place.

Deconstructing the institutional and bibliothecal archives allows us to question the presuppositions of the colonial legacies and neocolonialism that are bound up with hegemonic book history and views of Europe as the sole center and capital of global literary production. My contention is that the literatures and writers reciprocally transform the institutions, philosophies, traditions, and practices at stake. I proceed with the assumption that Derrida's claim that philosophy has no single memory corresponds to my argument concerning Heinemann as an international publisher and as the archive where the question of African literature from a cosmopolitan point of view could and should be explored. Importantly, this work goes a little beyond the publisher's archive, which is where some of the major works in book history in Africa begin and end. It proceeds from the basic

proposition that the publisher's archives, important as they may be, do not constitute the sole memory of literary production. *Remapping African Literature* does not concern itself primarily with an elaborate description of the content of the publisher's archive or an analysis of its discourse, but uses that archive as a frame for a new prompt: how texts constitute within themselves the counter memory of production.

In this mode, *Remapping African Literature* embodies the two theoretical motions of deconstructing hegemonic book history and the culture industry by claiming for literature what Derrida affirmed in his study of philosophy: for philosophy to be cosmopolitan and universal, it must be divested of the hegemonic memory of its European originality and ancestry through a deconstruction of this culture that functions:

> as if nature, in its rational ruse, had assigned Europe this special mission: not only that of founding history as such, and first of all as science, not only that of founding philosophy as such, and first of all as science, but also the mission of founding a rational philosophical (non-novel-like) history and that of 'legislating some day' for all other continents.[9]

Derrida continues:

> Philosophy does not have one sole memory. Under its Greek name and in its European memory, it has always been bastard, hybrid, grafted, multilinear, and polyglot. We must adjust our practice of the history of philosophy, our practice of history and of philosophy, to this reality, which was also a chance and which more than ever remains a chance. What I am saying here of philosophy can just as well be said, and for the same reasons, of law and rights, and of democracy.[10]

It is the same methodological precaution that I am laying out here for the same reasons with regards to literary production and book history, which I argue have multiple origins and cosmopolitan history both within Europe and internationally. Moments of multiple genealogies of African literary history challenge hegemonic book history, and the monogenism of singular causes that ascribed, for instance, to Renaissance printers and publishers the direct responsibilities for literary transformations and socio-religious movements of the Reformation, and that ascribes to European publishing houses the sole responsibility for the creation of postcolonial literature.

This follows the precaution by Febvre and Martin that "We must, of course, be careful not to ascribe to the book or even to the preacher too important a role in the birth and development of the Reformation."[11] The transnationalism and internationalism of book history in its European and postcolonial moments compel a cosmopolitan view of book production and history that carries with it two important theoretical movements: first is the deconstruction of hegemonic book history or Europeanized book history; second is the deconstruction of the culture industry, the apparatuses of production as ultimate determinants of form. What Derrida does for us is to underscore the deconstructive posture that is central to this book. It is this posture that characterizes Soyinka's critique of the practices of European publishing houses and the school market as the determinant frames of African literature. It is the recognition and critique of that determinant frame that constitutes the difference in approach from current works of book history in Africa.

Our study of international publishers and of African knowledge as a formation sharply contrasts with hegemonic book history's epistemic singularity and teleological continuity, which are symptoms of "a colonial and missionary culture."[12] The view that postcolonial book history is the international moment of European book history presupposes not only an epistemic unity but also a problematic historical teleology. Such unity and continuity formed the basis by which Europe assumed the authority of Greek civilization, and by which it now automatically presumes the authority not only of but also *over* postcolonial knowledge. It is precisely through the history of the book and the constitution of knowledge that such epistemic authoritarianism was channeled. Depicting what we could describe as the moment of the invention of modern Europe, Febvre, and Martin write in *The Coming of The Book*: "In Henri Estienne's words, Frankfurt was the 'new Athens' where you could see celebrated scholars talking and debating amongst themselves in Latin before an astonished public and elbowing aside players who had come to the fair to seek employment from the impresarios who gathered there to form theatrical companies. Shakespeare would have found it a fascinating sight."[13] The idea that mid-sixteenth century Europe was the "new Athens" born at this historical moment and symbolized in these fairs has persisted through the Enlightenment to date; this is the moment of the invention of modern Europe as a unified Latin culture, which is as much a rearguard attempt to counter the force of the rise of the vernacular languages and the fall of Latin culture that clearly saw itself as the direct heir of the ancient Greek

civilization.[14] Can we talk of the book trade in Africa as having the same effect, or as being a ripple effect of the history of the book? Is the moment of the invention of African literature the moment of the invention of Africa, and a second moment of the teleology of book history?

It is not enough to espouse a methodological precaution against hegemonic book history; *Remapping African Literature* challenges the very "colonial and missionary" frame of African literary production: whereas it is accurate that "Britain co-opted much world production into its imperial system,"[15] and that "[e]very localized culture across the globe shifted in response to newly reorganized world markets,"[16] the notion that "local, social, business, physical and cultural landscapes were much changed by the far-reaching influence of London"[17] is too undialectical and one-sided to reflect the comprehensive history of global production, or even that of the global Anglophone. The exclusionary binary that puts publishers in the role of founders and postcolonial writers in the epiphenomenal role of framers, to use the imagery of building a house, is not accurate. Following Tyler Cowen, I would put to test the proposition that when the contention over the production of African discourse is applied to the publishing industry, that is, "when translated into the terminology of economics or rational choice theory, the internal forces correspond to preferences and external forces represent opportunities and constraints. These internal and external forces interact to shape artistic production."[18] I would go even a step further to argue in the second section of this introduction, using Walter Benjamin's formulation of the writer as producer in "The Author as Producer,"[19] to claim that African writers simultaneously occupied the positions of primary and secondary producers. Thus, as I am about to explain, it becomes possible to demonstrate that internal forces of production interact with external forces to shape the production of African literature. Rather than continue the traditional lines of book history that focus on the chain of production, sales figures, general publishing policies, editorial personalities, records of editorial team meetings and so forth, which are about universal publishing processes, this book addresses the defining practices, challenging the imperial ideologies that those practices assume and operationalize, in the context of which selected authors are positioned dialectically, and their works redefined. I examine selected literary texts published in the AWS within the context of several problem spaces that I will call defining practices, which are the material realization of ideological investments in production, and which give shape to the object of production. The first practice that I identify as a problem space is the practice of

commonwealth as constituted through language, culture, and markets. Other defining practices include the practice of selection, the practices of educational publishing, circulation, and so on, all of which impinge upon artistic autonomy and representation—used here as a compound term. The dynamics by which that autonomy is restored and reasserted requires a new theory, the groundwork of which I would now begin to lay out.

Toward a Theory of Activist Formalism

The study of African literature as a product of an international or cosmopolitan means of production requires large-scale theorizing because of the multiplicity of factors that are in play in both production and theory. The AWS emerged at the historical moment in which homological processes in book and cultural production were in operation across the world. In Latin America, for example, Doris Sommer and George Yudice have highlighted the evolution of one of African literature's historical cousins. They describe the 1960s as the Boom period of Latin American Literature.[20] The terms of their theorization are crucial to an understanding of the global processes that played cognate roles in the emergence of the AWS. According to Sommer and Yudice, the 1960s were significant for the enormous international success of Latin American literature:

> [I]t was more than an explosion of narrative creativity; in fact, some observers are skeptical about the amount of work produced during that decade, pointing out that many of the books published then were formerly ignored works that represented a backlog for publishers to exploit once interest in Latin America had been established. The real explosion, then, may not be in the production of literature, but in its reception and market distribution. At home the process of modernization begun, in the 1930s, and greatly enhanced by the period of import substitution industrialization of the 1940s and 1950s was finally showing results in the field of mass communications. New consumer magazines such as *Primera plana* and *Siempre*, as well as major newspaper literary supplements, not only created a new reading public, but also provided the means (along with radio and TV variety shows) for transforming the writer into a superstar on a par with singers and movie celebrities. And thanks to parallel advances in education, for the first time Latin American writers could count on a broad readership. At the same time, Spain's publishing capacities helped to launch the Boom by breaking the regional deadlock that often consigned novels to their national boundaries.[21]

The Boom period of Latin American literature mirrors the production of African literature in the 1960s, and aptly assumes a global validity when the experience of South Asia in the same period is considered. G. N. Devi,[22] in his analysis of Indian literature, was first to argue that the 1960s should rightly be classified the Commonwealth period in Anglophone literature because it was the period in which Indians writing in the English language were accorded global appreciation, which in turn enabled Indian critics to establish their authority over Indian literature, similar to the one English critics once had over English literature. One effect this had was to institute an imbalance in the appreciation of Indian English literature over Indian language literature.

It is easily demonstrable that the emergence of the AWS and African literature as a whole was not an isolated occurrence, but a structural part of a historical ensemble. The universal resonance of the significance of the 1960s has been theorized by Fredric Jameson, among others. However, exploring the interconnections between historical processes in the 1960s as they played out in different geopolitical zones is not the same as Jameson's attempt to formulate a "unified field theory" in which "the discovery of a single process at work in First and Third Worlds, in global economy, and in consciousness and culture," is affirmed.[23] Positing a causal relationship between the AWS and the historical forces, which coincide with its emergence, amounts to asserting a deterministic logic of history. What is central to Jameson's theory is his claim that there is an internal historical logic of capitalism that functions as the "ultimately determining instance." However, his theory of history as necessity reproduces a poor blend of Hegelian and Marxian dialectics that could also be found in Lenin's work. This negates the optimism that uniquely defines the political struggles and cultural productions of the 1960s. The objective of this book is in part to revive the spirit of that optimism, by demonstrating the "prodigious release" of creativity in Africa in the early postcolonial period generated on the one hand by independence and on the other by intensified articulation of nativism. History as necessity does not fully describe the relationship between capitalist production at the point of the emergence of the AWS, the support it received, the way it shaped its decisions and their relation to finances and the system that is logically tied to decisions concerning finances. Rather, I take the position that Jameson's overall point about the 1960s is applicable to Africa when he argues that the 1960s were significant precisely because "the enlargement of capitalism on a global scale simultaneously produced an immense

freeing or unbinding of social energies, a prodigious release of untheorized new forces: the ethnic forces of black and 'minority,' or Third World, movements everywhere…."[24] Thus, the problem of Jameson's determinism is compatible, at least in the same passage, with the existence of a realm of superstructural freedom and creativity. This dialectical process of systemic constraints and unfettered creativity is a subject of conscious and subconscious meditation throughout the pages of this book. Jameson also argues that the "surplus consciousness" dispersed and diffused throughout that period constitutes a "sense of freedom and possibility—which is for the course of the 60s a momentarily objective reality, as well as (from the hindsight of the 80s) a historical illusion—that can perhaps best be explained in terms of the superstructural movement and play enabled by the transition from one infrastructural or systemic stage of capitalism to another."[25] If his point is that material determination is necessary "in the last instance," at the most general and abstract level, but that within this abstract field lies a broad range of historical contingency and freedom, then, his materialism is a philosophical principle that determines—sets limits to—freedom, but it is not a "determinism" because it does not preclude freedom by conditioning the specific nature of activity at the more local levels. This would be a more useful interpretation of his theory. But he seems to identify the 1960s on the contrary as a time of uneven development, when the fetters of ideological "forms" and material-social conditions were active, thereby rendering the consciousness of historical change an illusion—what Marx originally described as false consciousness. It would be along this line that his historical overdeterminism effectively marks with fatalism, all historical change, especially the powerful surge of transformations during the period. Jameson's theory of a unified and causal process is a methodological pitfall that must be avoided in the task of contextualizing the AWS and postcolonial literature at large.

The stakes in this repositioning of the center of production of African literature and its archives inform the theoretical stance of this book, premised on the notion that the African writer is a producer. The place and agency of African writers are both implicit and explicit in the material change that the imaginative work embodies and engenders despite the determinant force of non-African publishing institutions, the hegemonic status of the English language, the demands of the apparatus of education, and the effects of group or collective (commonwealth) identity or structure and so forth. The African writer as shown is indeed potentially divested of his writing by not only archival (Ogunbiyi/Lindfors), but a broad range of

"historical" (Mbembe), publishing and pedagogical procedures (Soyinka, Achebe). A rigorous consciousness of these material and imaginative fetters enables the production of ideological forms and a close correspondence between those forms and material-social conditions, such that the struggle for historical change becomes not an illusion but a reality. This dialectics of change between the material, institutional, and procedural determinism on the one hand, and contingency of creative freedom on the other hand, is demonstrated in the various forms of agency, and in the practice of autonomy that ultimately brings about the production of capital value or the functional transformation of capital. It is in this regard that Benjamin's theory of author as producer captures the culminating logic of agitation and activism by Yemi Ogunbiyi and other African writers.

The argument of this book is intended to build systematically to the point where we can make the decisive turn from hegemonic book history and theory to activist formalism in the theoretical application of the fundamental difference identified by Walter Benjamin between "the mere supplying of a productive apparatus and its transformation."[26] Benjamin alerts us to the fact that

> The bourgeois apparatus of production and publication can assimilate astonishing quantities of revolutionary themes—indeed, can propagate them without calling its own existence, and the existence of the class that owns it, seriously into question. This remains true at least as long as it is supplied by hack writers, even if they are revolutionary hacks. I define 'hack writer' as a writer who abstains in principle from alienating the productive apparatus from the ruling class by improving it in ways serving the interests of socialism. And I further maintain that a considerable proportion of so-called left-wing literature possessed no other social function than to wring from the political situation a continuous stream of novel effects for the entertainment of the public.[27]

Our concern is with both the imperial and bourgeois apparatus of production as it relates to African writers. The obverse of the hack writer is the writer as producer. And the idea of the writer as producer derives from the theory of functional transformation coined originally by Bertolt Brecht, which refers to "the function the work has within the literary relations of production of its time."[28] A work's functional transformation is thus measured by the "utmost possible extent" to which it has changed the apparatus of production. The theoretical question here thus would be how these writings reflexively perform the politics of functional transformation. In order to succeed,

this performance must not be tendentious, but expressed in its technique as a work of art. I wish to make legible the technical performance of functional transformation in select texts of Achebe, Soyinka, and Ngugi. As Benjamin says: "it has perhaps struck you that the train of thought which is about to be concluded presents the writer with only one demand: the demand *to think*, to reflect on his position in the process of production."[29] The writer becomes an active agent, an operator of transformation if he/she deploys the literary form reflexively, as a form of thought that is thinking upon how he/she is situated within the socio-political and economic relations of production.

Although it is Walter Benjamin who shows us the pathway through the labyrinths and traps of the imperial and bourgeois apparatuses of production, it is Pierre Macherey who is the philosopher of literary production from the Marxist tradition. Macherey posits what amounts to an ambiguity: the autonomy of a work of art depends on bracketing the consciousness of its total production while at the same time underscoring formal self-consciousness, as manifested, for example, in the thematization of form. This means we have in-built consciousness and unconsciousness within the literary form: the theme and its silence. Macherey demonstrates all the dangers of book history and production theory approaches. By focusing on the theme, they ignore the silence; and by focusing on the process rather than the human agents, they become impersonal, and by implying a necessary relation between creativity and material processes, they become deterministic.

The tortuous route Macherey has taken in order to avoid the reductive fallacy speaks to how treacherous materialist and contingency theories could be. How is one to acknowledge the relationship between literary creativity and the infrastructures of publishing, mass media, school systems, libraries, club houses, and other social networking facilities that constitute and enhance those channels through which literature is disseminated and not credit the enabling mechanisms and conditions with the ultimate power of realization of the text at the expense of the author's labor of creativity? In other words, the problem space of defining structures and practices subordinate creative will to infrastructural logic. This would be the sort of commodity fetishism that Achebe and Ngugi reacted against and for which materialism exists to demystify.

Keenly aware of the caricature of vulgar Marxism, and determined to wrest Marx away from economic determinism, Macherey struggles to resolve this theoretical impasse inherent in the original hierarchy between matter and spirit, between infra- and super-structure. On the one hand he reaffirms with Marx, in a reverse order, that social relations derive from material infrastructure; that is, the particular configuration of social

infrastructure determines the possibilities of relations, but on the other hand, declines to accept the implication that ideology therefore derives directly from the infrastructure. Macherey's effort occurs at the same time Raymond Williams was declaring economism or economic determinism an error of reading Marxism. Williams' work in *Marxism and Literature*[30] outlines a materialist reading that is not determinism or economistic by finessing the questions of determinism, of the relationship of the superstructure to the base, in a subtle way that shows a dialectic involved in their relationship, and not a determinism. Earlier in the same exhilarating vein, Sartre's *Search for a Method*,[31] had attempted the decoupling of materialism and determinism through the dialectical process. Rather than avoiding the implications of taking social infrastructure as a given in a theory of literary and ideological production, this book assumes that infrastructures, authors, texts and so on stand in relation to and not "behind" one another in such a way that one is neither precedent nor causative to another, and that the possibilities of one are already engendered in the processes and conditions of possibility of another. All are "products" of all. However, seeking not to reduce the unconscious of the text to a substratum, Macherey leaves it as the non-creative condition of textual production. Macherey thus avoids the traps of psychoanalysis and Marxism, yet allows us an understanding of the inner workings of creativity and the role of publishers, and so forth of the culture industry as a non-creative support of creativity, which even the self-reflexivity of a text cannot quite acknowledge. This is to say that how the text stands in relation to its production is not written into the theme of the text as formal self-consciousness; if it were, it would not be a great text. The absence of the consciousness of the relation of production is not an expression that can be read. What is absent from the theme is present in the technique, which puts the text together as a thematic unity in the first place. This is the difference between thematic reading and analysis of technique: the forgotten tools of composition whose material absence we do not notice. The doctor never leaves his or her operating tools inside the patient. Derrida, channeling Freud, talks about the prosthesis that makes an impression on the surface but the strokes of which are simultaneously and perhaps unintentionally recorded and overwritten below the surface. The marks below the surface are the measure of the impact of the prosthesis or technique and technology of writing. But precisely because the impressions are not direct, and marks are beneath the surface, the mechanical determination of superstructure by infrastructure is mediated and cannot be read on the surface where the

existence of that relation remains hidden. Mechanical and technical mediations are relations that are actively below the surface and it is through technical mediations of creativity that mechanical mediations of material production are themselves mediated. This suggests levels of mediation that intervene between art and its ultimate material determinacy. Technique in art mediates mechanical relations but also other relations of production that are not merely mechanical but social and ideological. Art is thus the correspondences above and below the surface of the canvas. Authorial intervention must be directed toward and deployed at the level of technique, otherwise artistic autonomy will be an ineffective ideological illusion. It is artistic autonomy expressed through active and reflexive thinking that is responsible for organizing, channeling, and transforming the relations of production into concrete images of reality. This is why the autonomy of art ought to be located as Macherey does in the operation of transformation through technique.

The dangers of accounting for creativity via the material conditions and constraints of production have been evident, for example, in "new historical" scholarship on Shakespeare. Reconstructions of the conditions of textual production in Elizabethan England such as presented in *In Search of Shakespeare*,[32] much as they enrich understandings of the provenance of the text, also open up the speculations as to whether Shakespeare actually wrote the plays credited to him, or whether the texts were products of collaboration or benefited from multiple improvisations from outstanding actors employed by companies that produced Shakespearean plays. This tendency to second-guess the authors that appear to diminish their geniuses is the least desirable aspect of the book history approach, yet it is an approach that enables one to have access into certain discourses and relationships that illuminate the perspectives that the text assumes. New Historicism, especially the work of Stephen Greenblatt, rewrites some of these approaches and enables us simultaneously to connect the multiple intersections of materiality, subjectivity, textuality, and historicity.

The example of Shakespeare allows us to talk about the policing of literature in a different vein. In Peter McDonald's *The Literature Police*,[33] we are dealing with the institution of the state, of an apartheid state similar in terms of absolute power to the monarchy at the time of Shakespeare. However, there is little difference between the state and the institutions of culture. The methods of motivation, repression, and alteration of speech and forms of speech range from overt and aggressive methods to very subtle and cunning tactics. They all nonetheless represent the work of an ideological apparatus. But while the relation between text and state or

institutional power is often adversarial, this book does not reduce that relation to the dichotomous alternatives of the likelihood of "containment" and the possibility of "subversion" but instead highlights a more complex dialectical relation.

Notes

1. In Alain Badiou and Bruno Bosteels, *The Age of the Poets: And Other Writings on Twentieth-Century Poetry and Prose* (London; New York: Verso, 2014).
2. Ibid., p. 122.
3. Ibid., p. 121.
4. Ibid., p. 122.
5. Adele King, *Rereading Camara Laye* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).
6. Laye Camara, *The Radiance of the King* (London: Collins, 1956).
7. Caroline Davis, *The Politics of Postcolonial Publishing: Oxford University Press's Three Crowns Series 1962–1976* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 234.
8. John Spiers, *The Culture of the Publisher's Series* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011a), p. 13, ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 8.
10. Ibid., p. 10.
11. Lucien Febvre and Henri Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book the Impact of Printing 1450–1800* (London: N.L.B, 1976), p. 289.
12. Derrida, *Ethics, Institutions, and the Right to Philosophy*, p. 11.
13. Febvre and Martin, *The Coming of the Book the Impact of Printing 1450–1800*, p. 230.
14. This is also an instance of the trope of the *translatio studii* that Ernst R. Curtius describes in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973).
15. Spiers, *The Culture of the Publisher's Series*, p. 8.
16. Ibid., p. 7.
17. Ibid.
18. Cited in Spiers. Ibid., p. 27.
19. Walter Benjamin, Michael William Jennings, Brigid Doherty, Thomas Y. Levin and E. F. N. Jephcott, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).
20. Doris Sommer and George Yudice, *Latin American Literature from The'boom'on*, 1986.

21. Doris Sommer and George Yudice, "Latin American Literature from The 'Boom' on" in Michael McKeon, *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach* (JHU Press, 2000), p. 860.
22. G. N. Devi, *The Commonwealth Literature Period: A Note Towards the History of Indian English Literature*, 1989.
23. Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory: The Syntax of History* (U of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 207.
24. Ibid., p. 208.
25. Ibid.
26. Benjamin, Jennings, Doherty, Levin and Jephcott, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, p. 86.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., p. 81.
29. Ibid., p. 91.
30. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977b).
31. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method* (New York: Knopf, 1963).
32. Charles Hamilton, *In Search of Shakespeare: A Reconnaissance into the Poet's Life and Handwriting* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985).
33. McDonald, *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and Its Cultural Consequences.*

CHAPTER 2

The Commonwealth Impresario

We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession….
(Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness*)*

Archives, Books, and Power

A perfect historical context and illustration of postcolonialism, and of postcolonial theory of literary production in Africa as sites of overlapping mediations, presents itself in its intensity and contradictions in a little known memory of the saga of Bernth Lindfors working to preserve the manuscripts of Amos Tutuola. The contestations that expressed themselves in the Lindfors' Nigeria experience could be said to have crystallized ultimately in what is famously known as the Arusha Accord: a gathering where African writers and publishers contracted a memorandum of understanding to guide their mutual enterprise. The "Accord," unusual though it sounds, echoes the proxy wars and treaties of empire in which, ironically, local publishers were now ceded to the frontlines as if they were the last men warring against those "taking possession" *ala* Joseph Conrad. I approach this chapter by taking Lindfors' particular episode as the first in a series of proxy struggles in which the Commonwealth and the nation set the beginning stages over the struggle for control of the production of culture. A discussion of the archive enables "some pertinent discussion

O. Ibironke, *Remapping African Literature*, African Histories and Modernities, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69296-8_2

of the politics of various kinds of modern repository"[1] that includes museums and publishers' repositories. These repositories are symbols and vehicles of power, the control of which animates the struggle over cultural production. The travails of international scholarship enable us to segue into the complicated legacies of international publishing, its contexts, and genealogies. It is precisely to make possible such analytical correlation and transition, and to capture the practice of commonwealth in the production of culture, that I have advisedly chosen the term impresario over publisher in the title of this chapter. The chapter is thus an engagement, behind and beyond the veil of aesthetic form, with the sweeping macro-, socio-cultural and literary developments that subsequent chapters take on at the micro-, stylistic, level of textual analysis and close reading.

If this chapter studies the activities and contributions of a group of British publishers to the development of African literature, how do we answer the question: what do Professor Bernth Lindfors and Alan Hill have in common? The response to this question can only be that they belong to the progressive instantiation of an Anglo-American cultural dominance that includes the community of English-speaking people around the world, what we today in shorthand call the Global Anglophone. The general cultural history of the British Commonwealth of which Heinemann is a part emerges from the ashes of empire to constitute a new hegemony that organized knowledge production in the early postcolonial moment. The role played by US professors in instituting Commonwealth literature reinforces the value of this analytical correlative so that all references in this chapter to "international," "world," and "global" are to be understood as the Anglo-American cultural tradition and hegemony. But herein lies a limitation of the scope of this study: Global Anglophone literature, within which this study naturally situates works published in the African Writers Series (AWS), excludes much of francophone, lusophone, and indigenous African writing and publication. One might argue that these African literary expressions, including those in Arabic, because of differing political situations, entailed different projects. The case of the francophone wound up being defined as La Francophonie, with its emphasis on language as the vehicle for postimperial hegemony, what the French now call littérature-monde, which contrasts with the Anglo scene, organized loosely around the Commonwealth as the remnant of postempire politics. The coexistence of Anglophone and Francophone spheres of influence could be considered parallel hegemonies but when taken as a northern alliance linked by an overall imperial strategy, these spheres may rightly be considered a unified field of global hegemony.

In order to appreciate fully the contestations intrinsic in postcolonial literary production in Africa, especially how national interests and aspirations collide with the claims of the Commonwealth, a brief excursion into the history of the conflicts over the control of Amos Tutuola's archive as a metonym for the archive of African literature is in order. I highlight this struggle over the archive of one single author in order to underscore the enormous importance of the Heinemann archives and the relationship between the location of archives and the historical *a priori* and tradition by which literary criticism is authorized, produced, and policed. Because the archive enables the historical continuity and provisional unity of discursive consciousness and practice, in conjunction with other institutions of historical knowledge and memory, it generates and sustains the architectonic blueprint of culture, and it becomes the basis for understanding the ontology and dynamics of social reproduction itself. The archive as wellspring out of which knowledge, creative energies, and intellection surge is what in Foucault's *Archeology of Knowledge* constitutes the "reassuring science" of tradition.[2]

At stake ultimately is not simply the authority of the publisher's archive or the authority of the series as an archive but also the implications of archives of African literature curated in the West. This is the very history of the geopolitics of the African literary archive and of the general politics of knowledge production, a flashpoint of which the famous clash between Bernth Lindfors and the Ife/Ibadan group of Nigerian professors in 1978 at the African novel conference in Ibadan is representative.

Lindfors' account of his ordeal in *Long Drums and Canons*[3] is a compelling story of misguided accusation. The story goes that a group of Nigerian professors of English had ambushed and challenged the well-meaning and thoughtful attempt by Lindfors to have his university, the University of Texas, acquire Amos Tutuola's original manuscripts, which after all he, Lindfors, had discovered in the archives of a British publisher and which he was sure would be of little or no interest to the Nigerians, judging by how they have not only neglected Tutuola but also regarded him as a freak. An article "Tutuola in an Ocean of Sharks" by Yemi Ogunbiyi had appeared in Nigerian Daily Times of June 10, 1978, alerting the nation to Lindfors' attempts, casting him as a treasure hunter.[4]

It was not only Ogunbiyi who had noticed Lindfors but Wole Soyinka, who at the time was expending a great deal of time and energy putting literary critics in their place, had also been very apprehensive. Lindfors had done some extensive research at the University of Ibadan archive on Wole Soyinka's undergraduate days at Ibadan, and on the literary activities that

Soyinka had participated in. Soyinka no doubt considered Lindfors' archival research audacious, misleading, and a violation. It was for Soyinka a form of background check, which caused him to write in *Art, Dialogue and Outrage*,[5]

> Gerald Moore's mendacity is only equaled, and to some extent surpassed, by that of Bernth Lindfors, Hagiographer Extraordinary, who "recreates" my juvenilia, in the old University College of Ibadan; every page of his essay "The Early Writings of Wole Soyinka" contains at least one inaccuracy of time and place and a series of absurd attributions. The lucrative business of juvenile hagiography of everything that moves on two feet from pop stars to syndicated criminals is, of course, very much the life-style of American letters. It is to be hoped that it never becomes a way of life in Nigeria.[6]

Lindfors' career in the archive of African literature grows out of these fierce encounters, in response to which he says: "the writer who cares about what will be said of him in the future should not try to conceal or suppress significant biographical information."[7] Lindfors further argues: "Yet, I would argue that it is precisely here, among retrievable documentary records—not just juvenilia but every published word by any author who deserves to be taken seriously—that important pioneering scholarly work can be done."[8] Lindfors may have had the Heinemann archive in mind when he goes on to make the case for a study of African literature grounded in archival research:

> Juvenilia is only one small domain, and admittedly a minor one at best, in this unplumbed, invisible realm [that is, of the archive]. Far more important would be a writer's letters. Are there any archives here or elsewhere in tropical Africa that are beginning to collect such vital documents? Where are Okigbo's letters? Where are Okot's? Where are those of Alex la Guma, Bloke Modisane, and Bessie Head, to mention only three of the latest South African casualties? Is anything being done now to preserve the literary remains of perished writers? If not, why not? Think of your grandchildren. Think of their grandchildren.[9]

Lindfors' proposal entails a fairly radical view of literary criticism, one in which criticism does not and cannot separate the text from its archive, the archive through which it was constituted, of which it is a part, and which it extends. It is also a view in which the notion of the archive does not distinguish between its private and public repositories and repertoires. However, the tone and tenor of Lindfors' appeal gets even more defiant and invasive:

> One only hopes that other writers nearing their golden years will follow Mphahlele's example and open up their lives for public scrutiny. I am urging this because I believe that academic attention at some point inevitably turns from a great writer's text to his thoughts and deeds—in other words, to the way he chose to live his life … A celebrated writer cannot expect to have his privacy and his celebrity too … To move completely out of the public eye, a writer could simply stop publishing his scribbling … since making literature is by its very nature a social act, it is perverse for writers to behave unsociably and to deliberately withhold information from those who wish to understand them better.[10]

There is the critic as a form of paparazzi, who justifies his trade by sounding a strong moral and intellectual imperative, which engendered equally strong objections from the Nigerian Academia, and from Wole Soyinka in particular. These objections were based on the perceptions of how Lindfors' appeals are evocative or reminders of what Ann Stoler has described as "affective knowledge," which according to her "was at the core of political rationality in its late colonial form."[11] For Ogunbiyi, Jeyifo, and others, Lindfors' passionate plea for the preservation of Nigerian literary heritage is a mask for a more brazen act of neocolonial appropriation. As Ogunbiyi put it: the so-called liberals in the west "proceed to seize upon the role of genuine lovers and admirers of our art. So that a Bernth Lindfors, a one-time teacher of literature at Ibadan and well-known friend of our writers offering N100 for the original manuscripts of the Palmwine Drunkard may credibly appear to be doing Tutuola and African art a favour, to be saving our art work for posterity not in our National Archives, not in any of our own university libraries, but in far away Texas!"[12]

The scholarly and moral imperative for saving the essential documents of African literature was not convincing enough for these Nigerian academics. They viewed Lindfors' mission as a "philanthropic mission," in the same way they viewed colonial administration and the statistics and surveys that provided the monopoly of information upon which colonial apparatus was established. For Ogunbiyi, Tutuola then was "the victim of what might well be the greatest swindle of a living African artist by a foreign publishing firm. So brazen is this rip-off that I think the Nigerian people ought to be alerted to the sordid fact that the pilferage of our art works which may have begun with the first Portuguese 'explorers' through the plunder of the priceless works stolen from Benin during that British expedition in 1896 has continued to this day in far more subtle ways in 1978 we are still being offered glass-beads for our gold!"[13]

Ogunbiyi here deploys a language that became mainstream among Nigerian writers of the period. It was not only Lindfors that was viewed through the prism of the British expedition of 1896; Heinemann and international publishers by and large had major diminution of fortunes with this second generation of Nigerian writers and critics leading to the famous "oath" by the progressive writers forswearing any placement of their work with these publishers. As Niyi Osundare would later recount in his introduction to *The African Writers' Handbook*,[14] "some of us in the second generation of Nigerian writers, in the true spirit of decolonizing African letters, had pledged total loyalty to indigenous publishers, and turned our back on the multinational publishing houses which we saw as active agents in the West's exploitation of Africa. Heinemann was one of those multinationals."[15]

Osundare's view that multinational publishers such as Heinemann were "active agents in the West's exploitation of Africa" takes the critique of western multinational publishers to new, some might say extreme, levels with the deliberate use of the word "active," which must necessarily cause us to ask the question, on what grounds could such claims be based or justified? It also makes us wonder why it matters at all where a writer publishes his or her work. And why the "true spirit" of decolonization requires that a certain radical consciousness and relations be cultivated and choices made that would not have been necessary were a history of colonization never remotely somewhere in the equation? These questions suggest that postcoloniality is precisely the existential condition wrought by that change in the natural order of relationships and the special demands on actors dealing fundamentally with the reality compelled by the event of colonialism. An equally important and deliberate choice of words by the poet and linguist is the use of the word "in" instead of "of" in the phrase "active agents in." In other words, the question for Osundare is not that posed by Jean Marie-Teno in the film *Colonial Misunderstanding*:[16] were the publishers and colonizers the same people? Rather, the question for Osundare is: do their activities, regardless or in spite of their intentions and designs, converge at any point to create similar or mutually enabling and reinforcing effects? And while Lindfors and Hill were not acting out of rapaciousness or colonial sensibilities, neither Ogunbiyi nor Osundare thought that the immediate or long-term value of their activities would ultimately balance out in favor of Nigerians and Nigerian literature. This is clearly a different position from that of Anthony Appiah.

Since Ogunbiyi raised the issue of the British Expedition and the Benin bronzes in relation to Tutuola's manuscripts, it might be useful to examine Appiah's response to the same problem, especially as it concerns calls for the return of stolen cultural treasures. The general situation for which Appiah intervenes is such that "(t)he great international collectors and curators, once celebrated for their perceptiveness and perseverance, are now regularly deplored as traffickers in, or receivers of, stolen goods. Our great museums, once seen as redoubts of cultural appreciation, are now suspected strongrooms of plunder and pillage."[17] This sentence, which appeared in the original version of the piece published in the *New York Review of Books* in 2006, but was curiously missing in the chapter version published in his collection *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a world of strangers*,[18] quite accurately reflects Ogunbiyi's temperament descriptively, if not affirmatively. However, Appiah contends that this situation as understood by the likes of Ogunbiyi derives from an understanding of cultures, heritages and civilizations that is connected to the ideology of cultural patrimony. The problem with this ideology according to Appiah is that cultural patrimony ignores the "cosmopolitan aesthetic experience" that created cultural objects in the first place, and that they in turn invite. Appiah posits: "The object's aesthetic value is not fully captured by its value as private property."[19] Appiah develops the notion of human interest to counter cultural patrimony. While Appiah is not for sending every stolen object "home," he nonetheless showed great pleasure in the return of some of the stolen art from Kumasi, his paternal home. This is notwithstanding the fact that he believes that the "British Museum's claim to be a repository of the heritage not of Britain but of the world strikes me as exactly right,"[20] presumably because it offers enduring protection, caters to "the global constituency," and facilitates the sharing of these objects beyond borders. In positing the rightful place of the British museum as a repository of world heritage, Appiah has surreptitiously naturalized and globalized the idea of the Commonwealth anchored by the efficiency of British institutions.

Appiah's position is closely aligned with that of Lindfors in implicitly staking their claims on a notion of a shared human interest, which is of course very persuasive; however, it is the line he does not pursue, the line that he takes out of the *New York Review of Books* version that leaves the issue largely unresolved for me. "'There is no document of civilization,' Walter Benjamin maintained, in his most oft-quoted line, 'that is not at the same time a document of barbarism.' He was writing—some sixty-five years ago—with particular reference to the spoils of victory carried in a

triumphal procession: 'They are called cultural treasures,' Benjamin said, but they had origins he could not 'contemplate without horror.'"[21] These are also the opening lines of Appiah's *The New York Review of Books* version of the piece. Did Appiah remove those first couple of paragraphs from his original essay because, as he says, "Benjamin's provocation has now become a commonplace" or is it that a closer look at those opening lines would lead us in a different direction from the one that Appiah has taken? The treasures of culture gravitate toward power. It is clear that Benjamin was more concerned about what he perceived in historicism as the empathy with the victor and also the tainted nature of the documents of civilization, the spoils, from which a historical materialist "dissociates" himself.[22] Much as I am in sympathy with the pragmatic and cosmopolitan views of Lindfors and Appiah on the location of the archive of modern African literature, which derive from an unstated assumption of a commonwealth, and while I am in full embrace of such views, they do not sufficiently exclude or stand in the way of the philosophical and political reasons that have animated challenges from the likes of Ogunbiyi.

Philosophical and political considerations have dominated recent reflections on the postcolonial national archive. Two quick examples might help to illustrate this trend. Jean-Marie Teno's film *Colonial Misunderstanding* not only attempts to demonstrate the co-optation and incorporation of the German missions within the agenda and strategies of German colonialism, but also illustrates, among many examples, by referencing the special session at the Berlin conference, the role of the missions in promoting European civilization and colonialism. It shows how the missions themselves exhibited colonial culture by what they chose to preserve, where and how they preserved it, and how they used that archive to establish a Eurocentric history of the church. Whereas Appiah's entire point is based on the deep aesthetic experience of objects that can, and ought to, be universally shared, and imaginatively accessed via similar imaginative processes and connections everywhere, Teno's film documents how objects and collections sometimes tell stories besides their aesthetic appeal. In the case of the Herero memorial to the dead in the African section of the Rauthenstrauch Joest Museum, the view of the missionaries who collected them was that the religions were defeated and that the objects were brought back to Germany to "show that all these were behind them."[23] The location of collections, it might be argued, is sometimes all we need to see to know the victors from the vanquished. This point deserves to be emphasized as complicating the idea that preserving the existence of

archives elsewhere than their origins has only that beneficial consequence of preservation, whether or not its ulterior consequences are intended or systemic and structural.

The case of Joseph Merrick is an interesting contrast to the Herero memorial. History books usually cite the English missionary Alfred Saker as the first missionary in Cameroon, with his name adorning a church and a school in Douala. Rev. Isaac Kamta, one of the narrators in Teno's documentary, reveals that a black man by the name of Joseph Merrick was indeed the first missionary in Cameroon. How did it happen then that the honor goes to Saker instead? Saker, by relocating the church from Bimbia to Douala, allowed the structure at Bimbia to disintegrate, and along with it the memory and legacy of Merrick, a Jamaican slave who with his band of returnees formed an anti-slavery society as part of his theological vision. With the erasure of his memory, it became possible for colonial education in Cameroon to claim later that only Europeans were competent, even as missionaries. Sites and objects cannot be reduced to the aesthetic experience; frequently, the status of their property enables claims that could ultimately become consequential. More precisely, following from the above, the strong aesthetic argument for preservation can seem to justify the most available and efficient means of preservation without balancing that against its strong political results.

The politics of the postcolonial archive and its implications for knowledge production have made a major entry into creative writing. *In An Antique Land*, though somewhat autobiographical, is perhaps one of the major texts to reflect extensively on the status of the postcolonial archive. Indeed, the book could be read as "a sly allegory of the intercourse between power and the writing of history."[24] Because it echoes all of the issues under discussion so far, it would be necessary briefly to consider its perspective as a way of crystalizing the argument of this section and bringing it to the next transit point. The plot of the novel revolves around a Jewish trader of the medieval Mediterranean, Ben Yiju, whose letter contains a reference to a slave that seems to bear significant clues about the nexus of relationships between India, Egypt, and the rest of the Mediterranean, enough to cause Ghosh to embark on his research. The trail of this letter was to lead him, among many other places, to a synagogue in Egypt that, like many others of its time, had a depository called the "Geniza." For more than seven hundred years, the Geniza of the congregation of Ben Ezra accumulated documents that became "the greatest single collection of medieval documents ever discovered."[25] But all this

was to change: "in the eighteenth century, a new breed of traveller began to flock into Cairo, Europeans with scholarly and antiquarian interests."[26] "[Egypt] was already well on her way to becoming a victim of the Enlightenment's conception of knowledge and discovery."[27] Among the many collectors was Abraham Firkowitch, who swindled synagogue officials to obtain the collection in the State Public Library in St. Petersburg, now known as the National Library of Russia. According to Ghosh, Firkowitch was "merely practicing on his co-religionists the methods that Western scholarship used, as a normal part of its functioning, throughout the colonized world."[28] But the most fascinating passage of the book in this regard concerns Solomon Schechter, lecturer in Talmudic at the University of Cambridge:

> They [Jewish community] decided to make Solomon Schechter a present of their community's—and their city's—heritage; they granted him permission to remove everything he wanted from the Geniza, every last paper and parchment, without condition or payment […] In all likelihood the decision was taken for them by the leaders of their community, and they were left with no alternative but acquiescence. As for those leaders, the motives for their extraordinary generosity are not hard to divine: like the elites of so many other groups in the colonized world, they evidently decided to seize the main chance at a time when the balance of power—the ships and the guns—lay overwhelmingly with England.[29]

In a sober melancholic tone, Ghosh concludes, "Now it was Masr, which had sustained the Geniza for almost a millennium, that was left with no trace of its riches: not a single scrap or shred of paper to remind her of that aspect of her past."[30] Ghosh's use of the word "riches" to describe the Geniza some might dispute as misleading. If a Geniza derives from the Jewish tradition in which one is not supposed to burn or destroy papers/documents on which biblical writings appear, but to bury them, it is the place where such old documents are buried, a garbage dump. The reason they contain such old documents, eventually, is because they aren't destroyed, but whether they are regarded as valuable, or "riches" is a different question altogether. They might just be the opposite, trash that eventually Jews and non-Jews came to collect, which became valuable after the fact. Ghosh's response might be to invoke Mbembe that the very sacralization of those documents is the classical procedure of archivization that sets them apart from destruction. This makes the word "repository" applicable.

While it would be unfair to lump together scholars like Lindfors and Solomon Schechter, Ghosh's example nevertheless helps us sympathize

with reactions such as Ogunbiyi's. The anxieties demonstrated in Ogunbiyi's essay could be read as the lingering aftereffects of colonial strategies of distribution of affect that according to Stoler featured a "moral science," operating through structures such as commissions that affirmed "the [colonial] state's authority to make judgments about what was in society's collective and moral good."[31] These judgments are also definite and definitive in mapping modern knowledge, its retrievability and usability. On the last page of *In An Antique Land*, Ghosh describes how he was looking in the libraries, in furtherance of his research, for materials on Sidi Abu-Hasira. He was looking under subject headings such as Judaism and Religion without success only to find the materials under "anthropology and folklore." His conclusion is that they were in the process of being shaped to "suit the patterns of the Western academy."[32] It is the process of this shaping, the way by which truth lies, to put it in Lindfors' ironic formulation, that seems to be the point upon which Ghosh's critique finally converges with those of Ogunbiyi and Osundare.[33]

What Lindfors says is at stake in all this is the future of African literature, which the preservation of these documents for future scholarship would help to secure. It is motivated by "Honest conservation, not ruthless exploitation."[34] In his theory of literary criticism, mere textual analysis is impoverished, a "bloodless criticism" devoid of historical understanding that only biographical inquiry could afford. According to him, "we, [that is, teachers and students of African literature] write as if the literary work has its own autonomous existence, a life independent of [....] real life."[35] The act of biographical inquiry is fundamentally archival. This is why it becomes possible for us strategically to use Lindfors' biographical pursuit as an illustration of archival science and theory, and tool for self-consciously reflecting on the publisher's archive within which records of authors' dealings, and works ranging from letters to unpublished manuscripts are stored. The notion of biography as an archival inquiry implies "remains," that is, "a heap of meaningless fragments of objects and documents which are incapable of substituting themselves either metonymically for what really happened or metaphorically for the narrative of what truly happened—but from which [the biographer] will make a story."[36] While Lindfors seems to take a more positive attitude toward biography, Nuttall is neither criticizing biography nor the biographer but simply laying out in a matter-of-fact way the nature of the biographical archive and its concomitant narrative. The remains from which the biographer constructs a narrative or attempts to bring back to life someone who lived presupposes

death and ruins. As Sarah Nuttall has noted following Mbembe, "Achille Mbembe has pushed this line of argument further to contend that what the historian, biographer or archivist does is not simply to bring back the dead to life: rather the 'ghost' is brought back to life 'precisely to kill it or to exorcise it by turning it into an object of knowledge.'"[37] Bringing the dead author back to life is apparently a tinge of irony that Lindfors, the biographer, doesn't consider or intend.

The depletion of the ranks of the pioneers of modern African literature cannot but contribute to the mortal angst with which Soyinka views projects such as that of Lindfors. The passport photographs of African writers now deceased on the cover of James Currey's book constitute a new iteration of an archive, an almanac of the dead. At the heart of bio-figuration is a presumption of death. While Nuttall and Mbembe suggest this of all biography, I am specifically interested in that performed for African writers in a way that is analogous to the retrieval of archival "remains" by relocating them elsewhere, an act that amounts to a kind of death, a second death, if you will. As I will argue in Chap. 6, the process of deterritorialization and recontextualization can be seen as a form of death and resurrection. In his own biography, Soyinka is made to confront the specter of death, after which the subject may only be spoken for by another. The archive and the presumption of death are not only requirements of biographical writing; archivization itself is an act of interment. Lindfors' concern about what will happen to the "literary remains of perished writers"[38] is precisely the type of moment that proves Achille Mbembe's point that the documents are "remains" and the archive constitutes a type of "sepulcher where these remains are laid to rest."[39] According to Mbembe, "both the historian and the archivist inhabit a sepulcher. They maintain an intimate relationship with a world alive only by virtue of an initial event that is represented by the act of dying."[40] Indeed, "the archived document *par excellence* is, generally, a document whose author is dead and which, obviously, has been closed for the required period before it can be accessed."[41] Lindfors' notion of the archive giving us veritable biographical knowledge is the equivalent of the dust Jules Michelet inhaled in the archives, which according to Steedman,[42] literally presents him with the essence of the past, and to its personalities and cultural heritage. The archive enables the historian or biographer to speak on behalf of the dead. Laid over the presumption of death is the authority and power not only to represent the voice and hidden thoughts of the dead, but also to silence the dead, to the extent that it isn't simply death that silences the dead. Mbembe's characterization of these dynamics between the living and the dead deserves a more extended reference:

> To a very large extent, the historian is engaged in a battle against this world of specters. The latter find, through written texts, a path to an existence among mortals—but an existence that no longer unfolds according to the same modality as in their lifetime. It may be that historiography, and the very possibility of a political community (polis), are only conceivable on condition that the specter, which has been brought back to life in this way, should remain silent, should accept that from now on he may only speak through another, or be represented by some sign, or some object which, not belonging to any one in particular, now belongs to all.
>
> This being the case, the historian is not content with bringing dead back to life. S/he restores it to life precisely in order better to silence it by transforming it from autonomous words into a prop on which s/he can lean in order to speak and write beyond an originary text. It is by the bias of this act of dispossession—this leaving out of the author—that the historian establishes his/her authority, and a society establishes a specific domain: the domain of things which, because shared, belong exclusively to no one (the public domain).[43]

Mbembe undoubtedly expands the meaning of archive to all posthumous documents. At this level of generality, one might rightly claim that to quote, or simply to reprint—even to refer to—the words of another, whether dead or living, is in a sense to speak through, or be spoken for by, another. However, rather than render his point banal, a truism that has no particular reference to the postcolonial, it in my view only goes to underscore the supersuppression implicit in hagiography or historiography as a hegemonic practice in the postcolony. Similarly, his use of the concept of public domain as a biased act of dispossession takes the term beyond the legal usage that refers to the state of availability reached by a document when use of, or reference to, it is no longer the private property of the copyright owner. By public domain, we are to think of the right of access invoked for example by Lindfors based on the notion of public good or interest: the public as a commonwealth. The archive of African writers should be open to anyone because by being writers at all they have become public figures. Lindfors' stake in Tutuola's manuscript is predicated on this right of the public, which he does not demarcate or differentiate, as if the US and Nigerian publics share a common interest in the preservation of these documents. If we grant that his immediate referent might be the community of scholars of African literature worldwide, the assumption is that this community across national boundaries ought to share the same interest on the question of the archive is precisely what defines the idea of a commonwealth. Mbembe's masterful exposé could thus be argued to

have its greater reverberations for the postcolony by problematizing this notion of the transnational public. Clearly, Soyinka understands the notion of the public domain as the face that dispossession now wears, and the silencing involved in transporting what for him belongs to the private domain, into the public domain. Similarly, Ogunbiyi fears that the very act of archiving Tutuola's manuscripts in Texas might effectively bury it, take it out of reach. For this reason he concludes his essay with the following remark: "The question, for example, of whether the original manuscripts of *Drinkard* should be kept away for good in some obscure American University library or in our national archives is an issue that ought to generate some national interest."[44] The national archive is envisioned here as an institution that is linked to the process of relocation of the archive and decolonization, bringing knowledge that has hitherto been out of reach and out of bounds closer to the newly independent subjects.

The push-back at the Ibadan conference in 1978 by a group of University of Ife professors, now Obafemi Awolowo University, led by Ogunbiyi, was at a time when Ife had one of the most exciting departments of African literature in the world, with African literary giants such as Wole Soyinka, Okot p'Bitek, David Rubadiri, and critics such as Oyin Ogunba, Biodun Jeyifo on its faculty. Buoyed by a literary spurt at a time of the Oil Boom, challenges to Lindfors' assertion that Nigerians did not care about Tutuola or the preservation of literary documents were to be expected. A bruised nationalist ego wanted to assert ownership and demonstrate responsibility. But by 1986, when Lindfors revisited the issue, Professor Aboyade's intervention and the plans to recruit Tutuola to Ife, and also to archive his manuscripts at the Hezekiah Oluwasanmi Library, University of Ife, had fallen apart, along with or as a consequence of the general socio-economic conditions of the nation itself. The reality of this history takes us inevitably back to Appiah's counterpoint and demonstrates the fragility and unstable nature of the social structure and infrastructure of many postcolonial nations. It has now become the good fortune of Lindfors to be the proud donor of the Tutuola manuscripts: The Bernth Lindfors Collection of Amos Tutuola (BL) at the University of Texas. The fortune rests on the misfortune of Nigeria's socio-economic crisis. This marks the triumph of the commonwealth as a more stable and reliable repository over the precarity of the postcolonial nation. But that triumph is not without political ramifications: beneath these exchanges is the real question of control over the production of statements on African literature. The location of the manuscripts and establishment of the archives of modern African literature abroad only further strengthens the

control of metropolitan institutions that already have significant control over the production of African literary texts and critical discourse. In short, the anxiety over the perpetuation of cultural imperialism remains at the heart of these struggles. Lindfors is not unaware of the undercurrents of these encounters as he perceptively titled his paper, "The Future of African Literary Studies." It is thus clear that the question of the archive is intricately tied to that of authority over the domain of African knowledge, its future resting upon accessibility to and control over the archive, and as more of the archives receive scholarly attention as the book history approach to literary history gains broader appeal, the publisher's archive will increasingly come into reckoning. Who controls the archives controls the future of the discourse.

While all the above may be true, in the interest of laying out the complexity of the issues, it is impossible to ignore the question, so let me ask: who would control the archive in Nigeria? It is not as though there was an interest at stake in pilfering and exhibiting African cultural artifacts abroad, but not at home. The archive is not neutral at home, either; the state institutions are not neutral; they are not merely state institutions, but are linked to regimes, including various regimes of power. We have seen in Egypt where historical sites of Nubians were converted into a dam, and sites in Afghanistan, which Appiah references, where an Islamic regime marked Buddhist temple and artworks for destruction. Instances of state control with less catastrophic results include denial of access to politically suspect researchers. The fate of archives and of knowledge is indeed precarious. This underscores the fault lines of any knowledge claims concerning the historical and biographical past. The principal task of any postcolonial critique must be to account for the vicissitudes of archives and sites from which knowledge is produced; it must, as Benjamin admonishes, "brush history against the grain" of power[45] and the various regimes that (re)institute, (re)inscribe, (re)appropriate, and destroy archives.

Chinua Achebe's "Publishing in Africa: A Writer's View" anticipates this debate over the location of the archives of African literature in his argument over the location of the publishing houses of African literature. His essay, along with Irele's "An African Perspective of Publishing for African Studies,"[46] remain some of the most provocative and thorough reflections on the subject of African publishing. Achebe asserts,

> when we speak of the *book trade* we blur the difference between merchandizing and a very delicate process of bringing one mind into communion with the mind of his fellows. This process is not akin to the cloth trade or

> the beer trade. When I put on a shirt I am not in communion with the factory hand who made the yarn, nor even with the tailor who sewed it (especially if it is mass-produced). When I drink, I do not think of the man in the brewery who saw the bottle fill with lager or pressed the button that sealed the cap. But when I read, somebody is talking to me; and when I write, I am talking to somebody. It is a personal, even intimate, relationship.[47]

For this reason, publishers, booksellers, critics, as intermediaries, cannot merely be "mindless conduits or a conveyor belt"[48] but must be a part of the same "historic and social continuum"[49] that writers share with their community of an "unarticulated feeling of a shared destiny, a journey toward the future."[50] Achebe ignores the ultimate element of mindlessness that his analogy of production compels, which is the mindlessness of commodity fetishism. The sum of his argument is that literary texts should not be treated like commodities to be bought and sold but as a form of personal communication and experience that requires a more intimate attention. If that intimacy is missing, the community is inoperative, and a commonwealth is lost. In other words, there can be no commonwealth without intimacy. By questioning the premise of a commonwealth where the British museum and the University of Texas play a facilitatory, mediatory, stabilizing and *protective* role at a distance, Achebe redefines and redraws the perimeters of the commonwealth. Aware that the politico-cultural nature of commodity fetishism is one general source of the condition of "mindlessness," he attempts to extricate African literature from that condition. Achebe's sense of the role of the publisher in Africa requires that he no longer be a catalyst, a facilitator of intellectual and cultural exchanges like the British museum but a part of an "organic interaction"[51] between writer, publisher [middlemen] and audience that responds to "the possibilities and dynamics of change." He therefore concludes that "It stands to reason that he cannot play this role from London or Paris or New York."[52] Achebe's logic extends beyond the publisher; it bears direct implications for the location of the literary archive as well.

Achebe's critique is in a way similar to that of Ogunbiyi. For Ogunbiyi, Texas is too far away, and for Achebe, London, Paris, and New York are too far removed. Both assert the centrality of the national space and highlight the geopolitics of cultural production in a postcolonial age. What is implicit in Achebe's critique but more explicit in Ogunbiyi's is the notion that the production of culture and its consumption is always framed by powers and interests; on one end is the metropolis in the guise of a commonwealth,

and on the other is the nation state: both exert control in varying degrees of transparency, over much of what can be published as well as seen, in movies or the television, let alone museums or archives. What we have enumerated thus far are the historical and material conditions of production that made the quest for artistic autonomy necessary. Achebe and Ogunbiyi both attempt to unveil the metropolitan mask of common language, culture, and shared institutions. Achebe's critique regarding the loss of the feeling of a shared destiny between British institutions and African writers and their community deconstructs the commonwealth much as Ogunbiyi's insistence on the role of national archives. In what follows, I will show that the critical function of the British publisher in the age of the Commonwealth was precisely the same as that of the British museum: to be the repository of World rather than British heritage. This grand role of archiving the world, which started in the Renaissance, implies the extraordinary power and privilege of discrimination and selection in the determination of what is archivable, and the grounds of its security and containment. Once that determination is made, it will establish the knowledge base of the world and as such enable and circumscribe the narratives that circulate to institute the imaginary of the commonwealth. I will argue in the next section of this chapter that it is precisely this notion of serving a world beyond Britain that functioned as the implicit philosophy of Heinemann publishers during the period of the British Commonwealth: the greater Commonwealth constituted the primary constituency and identity of the British publisher to whom Empire has bequeathed the trusteeship of postcolonial culture.

The Practice of Commonwealth: Heinemann's Empire of Books

Similar to Bernth Lindfors, Alan Hill's career provides the personal example of the intersections of British and African, or metropolitan and postcolonial literary histories. James Currey's attempt to internationalize and mainstream the AWS through the historical channels and routes of the book industry in England and Europe, through conferences and book fairs, is reminiscent of scenes from the book history of the European seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that Lucien Febvre and Jean Martin describe, and permits a view of English as the new Latin. In a letter to Nuruddin Farah, Currey writes: "*Sweet & Sour Milk* will certainly not be on the stand at the Nice Commonwealth Literature Conference. Neither

will Mongo Beti nor Senghor. Poor sods didn't have the benefit of being in the Commonwealth. Or do we treat British Somalia as an honorary member? As you know perfectly well, we did actually make the mistake of getting some copies to Berlin. We do our very best not to sell your book."[53] The prestige of the Commonwealth, which is now all but forgotten, becomes the point with which to tease Farah. Nice, Berlin, and other major European cities had been the centers of the European book trade, where Currey, through the Commonwealth book fair, was attempting to disseminate African literature.

The Commonwealth book industry could be argued to be one of the several ways in which European Capital in the twentieth century found an outward pathway toward new modes of accumulation through a process of simultaneous externalization and capitalization. Indeed, the Commonwealth period, from about the time of the independence of India to the beginning of the postcolonial period in the late 1970s, when there was a reverse Africanization process that resulted in the departure—massively—of British academics from universities in Africa: in Cameroon, Nigeria, Kenya, and Uganda as well, represents the face of the book trade after empire, a time when the book trade regained the international vocation that Febvre and Martin argue is intrinsic to it. According to them, "(l)iterature and learning were still international in the sixteenth century despite the decline of Latin."[54] We observe the same parallel with the decline of the British Empire and how an international literature emerges from the language and culture of empire. In the very last chapter of *The Coming of the Book*, there is the almost mournful tone about the eventual decline of the international book trade. With the triumph of the Leipzig Fair, which did not publish in Latin but in vernacular, publishing from this point forward ceased to be an international affair. Anderson's theory of print culture and nationalism derives from focusing exclusively on this moment of the emergence of vernacular literatures. But even if we were to accept the proposition that the vernacular language press fostered literary culture and consciousness, by the same token, the international language press, especially during the Commonwealth period, gave rise to international literary culture that reflects the shifts and changes in the structures and instruments of empire.

The beginning of the Commonwealth initiative, coinciding with the period of national independence of the African colonies, clearly indicates, as Robert T. Robertson states, an anticipation and realization of the demise of the political and economic empire. As a result, "The British

poured a great deal of energy into cultural affairs beyond the seas in the two decades 1945–65—in activities of the British Council, the BBC, London publishers (especially Penguin, Longmans and OUP), and in placing Britishers at the head of educational, media, theatre and all other cultural activities in the Empire turned Commonwealth."[55] That the AWS was established in this period by Heinemann Educational Books, a London international publisher, competitor and collaborator with Longmans, Penguin, OUP and others, already invites the question of the relationship between the Commonwealth and the AWS, and its production, marketing, appreciation, and overall effects.

Whereas the Commonwealth as an initiative emerged from the political calculus of a dying empire, the very conceptualization of Commonwealth literature, it is interesting to note, derived not from Britain or its colonies but from US professors, who at the Modern Language Association conference in 1959 organized a session on British Commonwealth Literature. Robert Robertson has argued that these US professors standing outside the Commonwealth were able to recognize in the emergent literatures in English from independent or about-to-be-independent British colonies the very moment when the English language crossed the threshold to becoming a world language. "With the explosion of the English language all over the world, carried by settlers, traders, missionaries and officials, the social world was so enormously enlarged that it, like the Commonwealth itself, had to form itself into constituent parts, and each in turn produced its own version of contemporary literature in English."[56] The emergence of these literatures to criticism and scholarship paralleled the beginnings of scholarship and teaching in the field of US literature some two decades earlier.[57] However, the sense of connection these US professors had to "Commonwealth literature" came not just from the familiarity of the situation but was also "the natural outcome of deep currents inside the corpus of literature in English itself. The response of its writers to a heightened sense of place was prompted by the diaspora of English speakers all over the globe, and that explosion of the language recovered for the literature an emphasis on place, the *genius loci*, which had been stifled for a long time by the centripetal concentration necessary for the building of a world language and a great literature."[58] The deep currents of Englishness are often disavowed in the USA even if the core curriculum of the English Department remains solidly British, and US, literatures. The disavowal perhaps has more to do with the naturalization of the depth of affinities that constituted the Anglo-American hegemony, which in turn constitutes the Global Anglophone.

The era in which the English language achieved its preeminence is that of the British Commonwealth and on the other side of the Atlantic, post-war US economic and cultural dominance. The British Commonwealth period of book history is thus the moment in which the book trade regained its international character through the activities of the international publishers, stimulating in its wake new international literature. Despite the multinational spread of Latin in the Middle Ages or Arabic for example, at no point in the history of the world did humanity come as close to the idea of a world language as in this precise era of the twentieth century. At the end of the eighteenth century, "French was pre-eminent … as an international language but it could never fully occupy the place left permanently vacant by the disappearance of Latin."[59] With the return of international languages, it became possible for the publishing enterprise to return to its international vocation, especially in Latin America and the Francophone and Anglophone worlds, and hence support the emergence of what we now term "postcolonial literature."

The Commonwealth Period is thus a decisive moment in the trajectory of the globalization of English, which might not have occurred without the initial stage of the Commonwealth, to which we might herewith append the American Empire. The proper metamorphosis of Commonwealth literature could be described as a transition to postcolonial literature as it represented the nascent conditions of "worldly transformation and dislocation" of the literary universe.[60]

The production of the AWS was reflective of the significance of the Commonwealth as a constitutive hegemony for a new form of cultural and literary capital. According to Pascale Casanova in *The World Republic of Letters*,[61] it is with the international capital derived from the international literary space that the activities of international publishing produce great writers. "In reality, the great heroes of literature invariably emerge only in association with the specific power of an autonomous and international literary capital."[62] The double meaning of the term "capital" in Casanova's theory should not escape us: Capital, both in the sense of capital city, center of political and economic activity and capital as the totality of the enabling resources of production. These literary capitals provide "both a common measure of literary value and a literarily absolute point of reference."[63] These capitals in Casanova's estimation include London, Paris, New York, Rome, Barcelona, and Frankfurt.[64] It might be worthwhile to indicate briefly here that the general belief that the metropolitan capital is "literarily [an] absolute point of reference" constitutes the hegemonic view of book history from which a departure will be required if the proper

view of the dynamics of production as they present themselves from actual sites of historical contestations is to be duly considered. For now, it is sufficient to identify hegemonic book history precisely as a precondition of deconstructing it. As absolute points of reference, these capitals also serve as consecrating authorities that "permit international writers within each space to legitimize their position on the national level."[65] Casanova however passes over regional and continental centers such as Ibadan that produced and canonized early South Africa exiles but which were later absorbed and displaced by London. However, from the world map of "literary protectorates" she outlined, our concern is the London axis, which is "a center of consecration whose legitimacy is universally recognized."[66] In order to establish the notion that these centers have, for political and historical reasons, accumulated literary capital that launches great writers, Casanova explores the careers of writers such as Faulkner, Joyce, Becket who were all consecrated in Paris. "The case of James Joyce—rejected in Dublin, ignored in London, banned in New York, lionized in Paris—is undoubtedly the best example."[67] From this perspective, the AWS would constitute one of the most remarkable examples of the cultural and literary capital of London. Some of the writers who were published through the AWS enjoyed instant international exposure, and were to become virtually the most prominent: Chinua Acbebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Cyprian Ekwensi, Flora Nwapa, Ayi Kwei Armah, Kofi Awoonor, to name a few, and the francophone and other translations that included Camara Laye, Mongo Beti, Oyono, Ouologuem, and Sembene. It is indeed the case that most of those earliest Nigerian novels, written in imitation of Achebe, were regarded as very minor. Writers such as T. M. Aluko, William Conton, Kenneth Kaunda, also Gatheru, Munonye especially, Kachingwe, Samkange, Konadu, Sellassie, and Palangyo, among others, received strong national or relative regional appeal. The first ten to be published in the series, except for Kaunda, is a roll call of famous authors, and more important, authors who were taught in the 1970s. Wole Soyinka, the only outlier, was mostly absent on the Heinemann list but prominent in the canon. Most of the first fifty titles became the canon through the 1980s, then, less so. They remained the central source of texts to teach and write about for twenty years. Most of the writers were initially better known abroad than in their own countries. This may have been partly due to low literacy rates and poor distribution systems in African countries, but was also an effect of the concentration of economic and cultural power in London.

The association of Heinemann and African literature derives from the right to reproduction and the right to a territory, that is, the right to control a territory for the reproduction and dissemination of the book. Whereas the right to reproduction is conferred through a contract between the author and the publisher, the foundational right over territories is solely a right granted by a political history. These vestigial rights of the publisher operate as a form of archaic mercantilism within the modern economy of exchange. The publisher's right is thus political, as much as it is proprietary in both senses of property and propriety. London publishers by default had the "natural" rights over the territories of the former British Empire. Additionally, there were economic conditions that permitted English publishers to market their books abroad in locations where there were few well-established local or national presses.

In a correspondence with a US publisher, James Currey, the third editor of the AWS from 1967–84, wrote, "It is conventional for a British publisher to have exclusive marketing rights in the Irish Republic, Burma, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Pakistan and trusteeships, as these were once in the British Empire and there are strong marketing links."[68] If the boundaries of Empire were to bequeath exclusive marketing territories to a British publisher, they equally delineated the ecology of African discourse, authorizing a double legitimation of aesthetic form and its reproduction. Indeed, the Empire was particularly crucial in circumscribing the imaginary against which the African writer was claiming and declaiming heritage. It constituted the *a priori* affinity between the creative and publishing ventures that formed the basis for aspects of the Commonwealth as a project that in part explored "the common heritage in language, culture and education …."[69] By the fact of publication, the immediate community of writers to which African writers belonged did not comprise those of the same nationality, but of those of the Commonwealth.

The inevitability or expediency of the reality of the Commonwealth cultural and literary project was sounded by intellectuals like Paul Edwards who, in a fascinating exposé on West African Narrative, provided a now standard argument for the adoption of English. He argued that "it might be unwise to pursue complete linguistic, as well as political, independence" because "political independence is resulting in even more communication between West African nations and the rest of the world, so that a common language is going to be indispensable."[70] The place of English as an international language thus assured dictated, *quid pro quo*, that "there are certain advantages too which the African who writes in English will have over

vernacular writers, the most obvious being a far wider audience." According to Edwards, "He will also have a rich and complex literary tradition in which to work."[71] This line of reasoning certainly resonated with African writers who chose to write in the English language. As a matter of fact, the role of African writers in a new nation, the young Achebe urged, is to "do the work of extending the frontiers of English … to accommodate African thought-patterns … through their mastery of English"![72] Thus, the African writers' mill is packed full of every conceivable grain, opening the possibility of a literature that is the true form of world literature. The elementary fact that national literatures in the postcolonial twentieth century were not written in vernacular but international languages, that is, vernaculars that had attained Latin's former status as international, renders Benedict Anderson's work problematic for ignoring that fact. Instead of a nativist fragmentation of the language of empire, or the "empire striking back," Achebe and other writers took a more philosophical posture that was in his words, "merely to ask what possibility, what encouragement, there was in this episode of our history for the celebration of our own world, for the singing of the song of ourselves, in the din of an insistent world and song of others."[73]

However, Achebe's position, while influential, cannot simply be taken as representative of all African writers. The position Ngugi takes is ideologically aligned with that of Osundare. His perspective on language mirrors his strategy on African literary publishing. In his recent collection, *In The Name of the Mother, Reflections on Writers & Empire*,[74] Ngugi expresses what can only be seen as a veiled and indirect expression of his deeply felt criticism of Heinemann:

> I have sometimes been accused of being a living contradiction for publishing with Heinemann in the African Writers Series. How can you, while denouncing imperialism, make a deal with a London-based publishing house that manufactures words harvested from Africa and African hands and then sells the finished product, the book, back to Africa at a profit? In what ways is this different from the similar process of gold, diamonds, copper, coffee, tea, all mined or grown in Africa, processed in the West and sold back to Africa, the price of both the raw material and the finished product determined by the West? I am of course talking about the entire intellectual production, distribution and consumption of books, as mirroring that of the economic and political relationship of Africa to the West in general.[75]

Ngugi can rhetorically play the role of the accused, while in fact launching the accusation himself. Such irony does not prevent us from noticing that even he, Ngugi, agrees that Heinemann inserted itself as a vector in a moment of history of African "nations and peoples when spiritual and social production mirror and energize each other."[76] The partnership of Heinemann Educational Books and African writers in establishing a community of African writers came precisely from Heinemann's capacity to provide that platform essential for the universal celebration of the African world. What is however most striking about Ngugi's critique is that like Achebe's essay on publishing in Africa, it is a resistance to the commoditization and fetishization of African literature, a rejection of commodity fetishism.

One of the consequences of establishing a community of writers based on the pre-established commonwealth community was the production of texts that stimulated and cultivated a general Anglophone reading public, one to whom the AWS is directed. James Currey, in preparing the translated version of Bebey's *Le fils d'Agatha Moudio*, in 1970, states: "I have the English-speaking African reader in mind. The AWS is aimed at them."[77] The question that arises then is who is this English-speaking African? What does the African Writers Series mean to him? What does this English-speaking African share with other English-speaking people of the world? How does the African Writers Series interpellate the English speaking African? In refusing to contract a hardback edition of Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*,[78] the editor of another major British publishing house, T. G. Rosenthal writes: "none of us feels that it sufficiently crosses the border between Africa and a British market sensibility."[79] Is then the English-speaking African that being whose sensibilities traverse the borders of Africa and other English-speaking people of the world? This problem of the reader's sensibilities underlies Ali Mazrui's complaint to James Currey over the editorial comments on his novel, *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*,[80] when he says "I am surprised that in your assessment you feel that this book is so African that the response in the United Kingdom is likely to be limited."[81] The context of the exigencies of the impresarios and publishers of the commonwealth is clearly significant in any consideration of the development of literature in Africa because it ensured that the English speaking public of the AWS was squarely identified as the commonwealth reader: the reader of English whose national experience of that language can't compete or interfere with its commonwealth commonality and sharability. The often-divergent poles of the nation and the commonwealth create pressures and demands that writers had to contend with, however,

to which they were not necessarily bound to accede. Mazrui's novel still got published in its original form, and though he was a Kenyan whose Africanness had been challenged, his novel about the Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo, who died fighting for the realization of Biafra, has become a major text in Nigerian literature, (although it was ironically considered too African for the British market).

This series of publications inadvertently or deliberately aspired in its character to appeal to a greater international audience. The outcome of such dynamics is that the finest examples of the African novel, because of this orientation, have been deemed World novels, perhaps, the first of their kind. These new ways of classifying African literature, whether as world or postcolonial literature, we must admit, are retrospective. The literature from Africa was taught for a long time either as African literature, as part of Area Studies, as Commonwealth literature, as literature in English, or as among the New English literatures, until about ten to fifteen years ago, when things began to change.[82] A world novel is one whose conditions of production and consumption require and engender global networks, cooperation, and understanding. This orientation forces us to consider a theory of the novel from a cosmopolitan point of view. It is no less than this transnational sensibility of the Commonwealth reader that must have struck Edwards in noting how desirable the AWS was as part of the offering for establishing Commonwealth literature. He writes in a letter to Keith Sambrook, in 1963, "I've been asked to teach a course in the Dept. of African Studies on Africa and other Commonwealth literature in English .... So your African writers series is going to prove very useful. I wonder whether there is any possibility of extending to a Commonwealth writers series."[83]

Although it may appear from the foregoing that the Commonwealth imprimatur on these early writings was profound, I will argue in a subsequent chapter that the concomitant promotion of a pan-African identity by the AWS may have overlaid and outweighed any such effect. The category of the Commonwealth was not employed by many teachers and scholars of African literature, who specialized mostly in regions, or in black literature including Caribbean with African;[84] Commonwealth was simply too close to colonial. Put differently, the publication orbited within concentric and intersecting circles that had Africa as a major center, albeit relatively weak or weakened by every extension of the surrounding circuits. The idea of a consummate effect of a group identity on postcolonial literature, whether in the category of Commonwealth literature, or African literature, Casanova has also observed:

> In fact, there was a desire on the part of publishers to create the impression of a group by gathering together under a single label authors who had nothing, or very little, in common. This labeling effect (which may be compared, for example, with the promotion of the Latin American "boom" of the 1960s) turned out to be an extremely effective marketing strategy.[85]

This act of group labeling as a marketing strategy will be explored more elaborately in the next chapter. It is sufficient here to simply note that it is what is responsible for the preference for treatment of literatures in Africa first and foremost along continental rather than national classifications with the commonwealth tie as discussed above also suffusing, if more implicitly, the ostensibly spatial (continental) emphasis with a language-oriented preference. It is easy to speculate that had the editors taken Edwards' suggestion to convert and expand the AWS into a Commonwealth Writers Series, the Commonwealth label could today have displaced and superseded that continental label just as the continental African label became superordinate to national labels.

While the attempt here is to establish the effects of group labeling and transnational readership on African literature, there are analogues in the field of World literature that could be usefully referenced. The insistence of T. G. Rosenthal on only publishing an African text that "sufficiently crosses the border between Africa and a British market sensibility" constitutes a core benchmark in the constitution of a world literature as David Damrosch argues in *What is World Literature?*: "[W]orld literature can also be found when a work circulates across cultural divides separating speakers of a single widespread language …. A Senegalese novel written in French can enter world literature in an effective sense when it is read in Paris, Quebec, and Martinique."[86] The transculturation that marks the works of P. G. Wodehouse, which by Damrosch's estimation exemplifies world literature in "a very real sense," is also evident in African literature, although the African dimension is completely missing from his considerations—except for one secondary quote of Achebe on his use of the English language. "Not only was [Wodehouse's] work often focused on themes of transatlantic travel and linguistic incongruity; *he was actually writing directly for an international market, comically exploiting each country's myths about the other and playing with the many varieties of English he encountered*."[87] I put the last part of this observation in italics to underscore the point that the core arguments that have been advanced for privileging certain texts as World literature could absolutely apply to any

number of African writers without the need to alter their basic formulation. What Damrosch's Wodehouse shares with his Anglophone African counterpart is not just the transculturation but how he writes about these cultures "*as if from outside*," that is, "his cultural double vision."[88] A self-reflexive moment that perfectly illustrates this cultural double vision, or double articulation, can be gleaned from Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*:[89] Obi is at a Nigerian restaurant in Lagos and while making an order the following exchange occurs:

> "Do they serve Nigerian food here?"
>
> Joseph was surprised at the question. No decent restaurant served Nigerian food. "Do you want Nigerian food?"
>
> "Of course. I have been dying to eat pounded yams and bitter-leaf soup. In England we made do with semolina, but it isn't the same thing."
>
> "I must ask my boy to prepare you pounded yams tomorrow afternoon."
>
> "Good man!" said Obi, brightening up considerably. Then he added in English for the benefit of the European group that sat at the next table: "I am sick of boilèd potatoes." By calling them boilèd he hoped he had put into it all the disgust he felt.[90]

Obi was conscious of the European group that sat at the next table at the same time that he was nominally addressing the Nigerian waiter. In that conversation with the waiter, he had incorporated another addressee that was not an active part of that conversation. This is a prevalent feature of the text, which one is likely to find in the works of John Munonye, T. M. Aluko, or Nkem Nwankwo. In a prior exchange, one finds this same gesture toward taking into account the benefit of the passive addressee, an additional explanation his Nigerian readers do not need: "'Have they given you a job yet?' the chairman asked Obi over the music. In Nigeria the government was 'they'. It had nothing to do with you or me. It was an alien institution and people's business was to get as much from it as they could without getting into trouble."[91] Could this be the reputed narrative voice as native guide for the unacknowledged addressee, the presence that can neither be ignored nor shut out?

The British Commonwealth and the larger Anglophone world thus formed a major part of the market for the AWS. The commitment of Alan Hill, the founding director of Heinemann Educational Books, who also started the AWS, to the idea of the British Commonwealth was never in

question. When he published a book on Commonwealth literature by that title, which consists of the proceedings of the first Commonwealth literature conference in the UK convened by A. Norman Jeffares held at Leeds University, Hill wrote:

> We wish to promote this book very vigorously throughout the British Commonwealth. Quite obviously, on such a small printing there will be no profit to be made on this deal. In fact, quite the contrary. However, we feel that the Conference is such a milestone in the cultural history of the Commonwealth that the publication of the proceedings in book form is a matter of the first importance.[92]

The idea of the Commonwealth clearly supersedes the commercial interests of publishing. And, the AWS most certainly constituted, in its own eminent right, a milestone in the cultural history of the Commonwealth. The "African Writer" "invented" from the renewed attention brought on by the cultural institutions of the Commonwealth was fully ready for the spectacle he was to become, even as his art served as a form of outreach to the world. That this represented a significant change in European sensibilities can be seen in Fevbre and Martin's claim that the cultured reader in Europe from the sixteenth century on was more interested in the East, the Turks, the West Indies, and the Portuguese territories, than Africa: "Books on America only came fourth, while Africa and the southern hemisphere hardly seem to have excited any interest."[93] Even earlier works by Africans that seem to have made some impact all vanished with the Abolitionist movement. Works such as Olaudah Equiano's narrative would have remained permanently eclipsed by trends in British literature toward travel narratives and modernist writing if it had not been reprinted in the AWS. It is due in large part to Heinemann that modern African literature received wide appreciation.

While postcolonial theory has since its inception featured a sustained critique of empire and western cultural imperialism, it has been less quick to acknowledge the transformations in metropolitan cultures as a result of the counter-pressures exercised by former colonies on it, although Simon Gikandi in *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (2006) and *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (2011) have explored the ways in which postcolonial cultures transformed the identities of former imperial cultures. Yet Hill himself acknowledged significant transformations in Heinemann itself, and indeed, British publishing, and

literary and cultural history more generally, that were the by-product of ventures in former colonies that occurred as a result of publishing the African literary series. In other words, the objective structure of literary production and history did not remain inert in the aftermath of the creation of the AWS, especially at the fundamental level of institutions. The determinant field of commonwealth and the practices it engendered underwent a redefinition in which African literary creativity became the operative and pivotal transformational force. This perspective is most eloquently and succinctly captured when he writes about the publication of *Things Fall Apart* and the launch of the AWS in the following words:

> In 1958 a remarkable episode changed the direction of my publishing life and added a new dimension to the firm's list. It was also a turning point in the history of English literature in the twentieth-century and a momentous event in the cultural development of black Africa.[94]

Hill here marks, within the ambit of the change in his personal career, the intersection of British and African book histories, suggesting that the genealogy of one cannot be traced without arriving at the confluence of both. What he does not say is that the history of English literature determined the cultural development of Black Africa as an event. Did it?

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CHAPTER 3

The Literary Scramble for Africa: Selection and the Practice of Hierarchies

> Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, 'When I grow up I will go there.' …
> —Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*[1]

> Europe *did* command the world; the imperial map *did* license the cultural vision. To us, a century later, the coincidence or similarity between one vision of a world system, and the other, between geography and literary history, seems interesting but problematic. What should we do with this similarity?
> —Emphasis in original, Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*[2]

In the summer of 2004 James Currey was invited by Claire Squires to give a talk at Oxford Brookes University to students at its International School of Publishing Studies. It happened that Currey and I met often at the University of Reading's library, sitting on opposite sides of the table looking through the African Writers Series (AWS) files held there. His presentation at Oxford Brookes prominently featured the display of a huge poster titled "Heinemann African Writers Series." The colorful poster had the map of Africa as its centerpiece, and on the margins on

O. Ibironke, *Remapping African Literature*, African Histories and Modernities, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69296-8_3

both sides of the map were listed the names of countries in alphabetical order with the names of writers in cursive under their respective countries. Along the top and bottom of the map were the passport photographs of the Series' major writers.

This poster, ostensibly an original product of advertisement, served the purpose of an effective pedagogical demonstration; a consummate artistic representation, it captures on a single canvas the historical forces and ideological mechanisms at work in the production of African literature. First, there is the map of Africa itself: that insurmountable destiny, the extraordinary invention of epistemological and political modernity that Heinemann adopts; second, there is the meta-text of what Heinemann inscribes onto that map, in the name of Heinemann and in the name of Africa, of an African market it has discovered, developed, and dominated. While the poster served the perfect pedagogical purpose for the class at Brookes of demonstrating the reach and power Heinemann wielded in the postcolonial book industry in Africa by exhibiting the richness and diversity of the AWS, it struck me, there and then, that beyond offering basic information about African writers and the work of Heinemann in publishing them, that map, as Edward Said noted, is the imperial map that licensed Heinemann's cultural vision. As an apparatus or instrument of power, it constituted the literary map of Africa, and Heinemann's authority and implicit claim to the invention of African literature. As Denis Wood argues in *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, the map as "a system of ontological claims" functions "as a document *capable* of embodying territorial authority."[3]

An insistent thought crisscrossed my mind that afternoon about a document by Wole Soyinka, an unpublished preface to *Poems of Black Africa*,[4] which I happened upon in the archive the week preceding the lecture, where he had described the activities of British publishers as a "second scramble for Africa." It foregrounded, for me, how the possibility of a reception of the lecture, which was quite remarkable, depended upon the deep recession of the memory of the political map, such as that evoked by Conrad's map in *Heart of Darkness*. The rearticulation of this map as a canonical sign, apparently devoid of an implicit claim or imperial authority, super-suppresses its prior projection as a sign and insignia of colonial power.

By invoking the Berlin partition in the document referenced above, Soyinka is in essence making the same argument as Said. Furthermore, he brings this super-suppression up to the level of consciousness in a way that

may, at first, appear to run counter to Macherey's theory of textual unconsciousness. However, this seeming contradiction reveals the illusion of insularity from the author that is sometimes necessary for the operation of fiction. It must approach the world on its own terms. Despite the author's knowledge of the super-suppression, his or her creative writing must be presented as though unaware of it, and show that what it does is not simply affirm the direct and necessary determination of literary by political maps, in this case, of the AWS by the material forces of western imperialism, but of a complex process of instantiation, mediation, and distance that, full circle, effectively or ultimately manifests in texts as forms of startling silence, which is profoundly more revelatory than speech. The author is freer than the text in this regard and by consciously raising the issue of the partition, Soyinka attempts to mobilize an insurgency that would eventually decenter African literature as superstructural phenomena from the colonial base of cultural production. In this chapter, I hope to show that Soyinka's choice of publishing internationally of his own free will can be read dialectically alongside his strong opposition to those same publishing houses through the Hegelian aufhebung—a preservation that is also a supersession. The moment of his opposition represents the moment of supersession. Soyinka like other writers making the exact same choice recognized that they could not altogether exit the colonial or global system from the outset; their participation no doubt preserves something of the system, but it is precisely as a consequence of such participation within that system that they are able to supersede it.

Ngugi, from a similar standpoint, addresses this history of cartographic representation of Africa more pungently in *Something Torn and New, an African Renaissance*[5] by reviving the originary moment of the contemporary cartographies, not only of Africa but also of the postcolonial world, which he locates in the Renaissance, the continuing effects of which, he insists, inscribe a European memory as "new markers of geographical identity."[6]

> Mapping, which involves exploration and surveying, was followed first by naming and then by ownership. Mapping was the imperial road to power and domination. The fictive figure of Christopher Marlowe's Tamburlaine comes to mind. Even in the last gasps of breath, Tamburlaine is still hankering after a map: *'Give me a map; then let me see how much/Is left for me to conquer all the world,…'* A map in his hands, the world left for him to conquer includes Egypt, Arabia, India, Nubia, Ethiopia, and across the tropical

> line to Zanzibar, and then north until he has all of Africa under his sword. The Imaginary Tamburlaine dies before he can achieve world domination—he does not even know America exists, but his real-life historical children do know and carry on his renaissance ambitions of mapping, naming, and owning.[7]

How fascinating, then, it would have been if the writers whose photographs appeared on that poster were not just like frozen images of an almanac of the dead but actual voices in that classroom to join the debate, validating, disputing, and producing alternative genealogies of African literature. Of those writers, only Soyinka, Ngugi, Taban Lo Liyong, and Farah are living today. A Soyinkan critique of the AWS as a determinant political force points to the AWS, and African literature itself as being determined by the diverse political consciousnesses of the authors it archives. Wole Soyinka has continued to express similar views even after the passing of five decades. Recently, in an interview for the Nigerian Vanguard Newspaper on the death of his friend, Chinua Achebe, Soyinka was quoted as saying:

> Let me just add that a number of foreign "African experts" have seized on this silliness with glee. It legitimizes their ignorance, their parlous knowledge, enables them to circumscribe, then adopt a patronizing approach to African literatures and creativity. Backed by centuries of their own recorded literary history, they assume the condescending posture of midwiving an infant entity. It is all rather depressing.[8]

The silliness to which Soyinka refers here is the tag "father of African literature" and "grand father of African literature" and other such exuberant titles that were placed on Chinua Achebe in celebration of his death by some critics, which Soyinka argues, "[i]s as ridiculous as calling WS father of contemporary African drama! Or Mazisi Kunene father of African epic poetry. Or Kofi Awoonor father of African poetry."[9] Though often not taking place in one space and maybe not even cognizant of each other, such conversations on the proprietary rights of African literary production were always already a major part of the literary history of Africa.

I use the Heinemann map of Africa as the starting point for my analysis of the role that Heinemann played in the development of African literature, but also as a means of capturing its determinate order and discourse. The role of the publisher reveals mechanisms of material production; at the same time, the publisher's marketing strategies are forms of reflexive

discourses and self-representation that are primarily discursive mechanisms. It is by paying attention to both the material and discursive, or rhetorical mechanisms that an *analytic* of literary production could be performed. My claim here is that the intertwined and superimposed matrixes of the literary and political cartographies are themselves mirrored in the material and discursive or rhetorical mechanisms of the production of culture and consciousness. What this means is that the materials that constitute the focus of analysis in this book will not be limited to documents from the publisher's archive but will encompass debates within the field of literary history, and African literary criticism itself, where reverberations of the same relations and problematics of literary production have their most profound resonance and decisive engagement. It is these large-scale debates that in fact articulate the struggles that define the fields of material and cultural production.

Currey's use of the map to illustrate the geography of the series is apt in many ways, especially because the series, as we have come to learn, is itself a map. According to John Spiers, "Series are, however, a map of maps."[10] It must have taken an intuitive understanding of this principle to deploy Heinemann's map of the AWS as a representation of representations, a map of a map of maps. The degree of reification in Heinemann's map as a complex metaphor for the multiplicity of interlocking sociopolitical, literary, and economic discourses requires not a prescriptive nor a descriptive theory of the material archive but what Michel Foucault calls an *analytic*, that is, a grid of analysis of the role of Heinemann in material production and discursive formation.[11] The interpretation that I suspect would be the least acceptable to Currey of his use of the map is one that I would presently address: that the map assumes, codifies, and appropriates the actuality that it invents.

Compelling historical evidence and literary precedent for this combination of material and discursive *analytic* can be found in Richard Helgerson's *Forms of Nationhood*, which studies the Elizabethan writing of England. Helgerson draws a portrait of maps as signs of authority, and dates the precise beginning of the unanticipated transformations in the imagination as well as social political relations that would come to define Elizabethan England: "For the first time they took effective visual and conceptual possession of the physical kingdom in which they lived, and they did it without much struggle … There had, of course, been earlier maps of Britain. But never before had England and Wales—or, for that matter, any country—been seen in such detail or with such accuracy."[12]

The land spoke to landowning gentry, not in the voice of the monarch, but directly through the images of the maps, dramatically shifting the focus and the center of authority away from the king toward the country. The sense of identity that became pervasive was one in which you were English not simply because you were a loyal subject but more because you belonged to this particular place that you could locate on the map, that is part of this greater place called England. "Maps let them see in a way never before possible the country—both county and nation—to which they belonged and at the same time showed royal authority—or at least its insignia—to be a merely ornamental adjunct to that country. Maps thus opened a conceptual gap between the land and its ruler, a gap that would eventually span battlefields."[13] Thus, maps played a crucial role in the historical transition "from universal Christendom, to dynastic state, to land-centered nation."[14]

A more remarkable claim is the idea that the emergence of national consciousness through the representation of the land also bears responsibility for the emergence of individual consciousness, and as a deep consequence for the figure of the author—"authors are enabled by the authority they confer on the land they describe":[15]

> In the emergence of Saxton as sole "author" of his survey and of the land he depicts as a figure of authority, these maps and frontispieces give evidence of both discoveries. But that evidence suggests something further, something anticipated by our discussion in previous chapters of poetry and the law. Not only does the emergence of the land parallel the emergence of the individual authorial self, the one enforces and perhaps depends on the other.[16]

According to Helgerson, there is a strong and unalienable connection between Christopher Saxton the choreographer and Spenser and Sidney the poets. "The institutionalization of English poetry, its establishment as a communal enterprise that could justify by its own internal dynamism the efforts of its practitioners, finds, as I have been suggesting, a counterpart in the development of English chorography."[17] Here is the heart of the claim at which Helgerson ultimately arrives: maps not only produce a political entity, they also become the basis for the establishment of a canon, or a tradition of literature, in this case, perhaps, the origins of English Romanticism. Although, the concept of land is a political and economic concept, which is different from the concept of nature that inspired Romanticism, it could be argued that Romanticism wrests nature from its

subsumption in land, making it visible. The mode of production in Elizabethan England dictates the function of the map that is tied to land. As we progress toward a mode that no longer has land as the center of material production, the representational power of the map changes radically in mode and function as does its concomitant relations. This analogy is useful as part of the theoretical grid for conceptualizing and exemplifying both Soyinka and Said's emphatic views of the economy of postcolonial literary production. In the specific instance of Heinemann, Soyinka's view of the determinant forces of the AWS is best illustrated through the icon of the Heinemann map. It is indeed accurate to read this last extension of Helgerson's argument on the relationship of maps to the establishment of a poetic tradition as a reductive sort of unmediated determinism, which directly entails the literary in the geographical event. But as we shall see, Soyinka strategically associates the AWS with the intentions and consequences of the Berlin partition in order to challenge it. Ngugi even takes it farther back, past the partition, to Christopher Marlowe's Tamburlaine as the continuation of the unfinished project of the Renaissance.

An immediate problem with the analogue above, finding an interpretive key for Heinemann African Writers Series map in Helgerson's analysis of Saxton's 1579 maps of England, is that it plays into the foundational impulse to find parallels for postcolonial situations in the ancient history of Europe. This always seems to suggest a theory of multiple temporalities that enables and privileges a diachronic reading of postcolonial experience. Reading all comparable temporalities, even those with very strong affinities, diachronically, especially in the loosest iterations of such readings, in my view, would be to risk tagging diachrony with teleology. At the same time, one would have to ask what purpose it serves to foreclose the genealogical work that has already been imposed by the collision of historical forces. The problem is thus not with the theory of multiple temporalities but with its geometry, that it is coextensive with geopolitical boundaries and unidirectional in its applicability. The modernists have taught us that those so-called backward societies paradoxically have in their antiquities experiences and historical phenomena that can illuminate, if we dare not say parallel, those of western high culture. What is needed is a theory of history that transcends periods and temporal hierarchies and that permits cross-references that cut across time with no underlying ranking or normativity. Such a theory is James Ferguson's notion of coevalness, which sees in the movement of history "a variety of coeval paths"[18] through which different societies negotiate their modernities. From this point of

view, it becomes possible to acknowledge multiple temporalities if they are construed as unstable and revolving, which is another way of disrupting the binary of linear and cyclical temporalities.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to assess what historical actors knew or did not know; that is, what may have influenced their choices, what their intentions were. What are available are the effects their choices produced. The synchronic and diachronic significations of this map eloquently articulate the will to truth and power that every researcher working from within the publisher's archive eventually encounters. The political map of Africa has a disastrous history that has been implicated ever since in the continent's enduring travails. How were the European powers in the distant climes of Berlin able to divide up Africa among themselves in what is now known as the partitioning of Africa, that inaugural act of formal colonialism, if not first and foremost on the template of a map? As referenced in the previous chapter, in Jean-Marie Teno's *Colonial Misunderstanding* and Ngugi's statements, the partitioning was only formalized at the Berlin conference; there had long been European engagement and effective occupation of many parts of the continent before 1884. The colonial map is a historical outcome of the cumulative cartographical effects of the work of explorers from previous centuries, to delimit territories in which trade, and eventually settlement, treaties, and control, from the Senegal River to Cape Town, and from Cape to Cairo, were established. While the processes of the partition began long before and continued after Berlin, the mapping at the conference could not be described as mere formality, since it consolidated processes and agreements that avoided an all-out European war over territories and made colonization more efficient. From war room and boardroom, the strategies of war and marketing have always required the production of a plan or vision, and a map is a singular, most indispensable instrument. The relationship between the map and the calcification of national identities, and the inevitable tragic fractures that followed are too well known. The implications of Heinemann's adoption of the political map of Africa as the template for the African literary map cannot be overlooked or overemphasized.

A map represents the land that people inhabit but are unable to imagine due to the immensity of space. As a technology of image processing and reduction, the map, either political or literary, enables the visualization of space in radically accessible ways. While I am not suggesting that all cases of the use of the map of Africa will necessarily reproduce or mask colonial divisions, I take the Heinemann African Writers Series map to be a symbolic

representation of the postcolonial dynamics and geopolitics of literary production that Soyinka criticizes. The map is such an irresistible symbol that projects a visual representation of Heinemann's inventiveness and reach in Africa; it is also a connotative image upon which to ground the fundamental question of determinacy versus autonomy in African literary production. Because Soyinka perceives the integrity of art to derive from an autonomous subjectivity, which is why its claim as a work of art is in its originality, the effects of literary production and institutional practices that permeate texts always constitute a problem for autonomy. As I understand it, Soyinka reduces the AWS, African literature in the early postcolonial era, to the immediate expression of infrastructural causes as a means of demonstrating how not to produce literature. The impasse produced by this criticism between the determinacy of the material forces that mediate literary production and the autonomy of aesthetic form, I hope to demonstrate in subsequent chapters, is what is constantly being resolved through the texts.

Soyinka's unpublished preface eloquently raises the question of autonomy, which thinkers and critics such as V. Y. Mudimbe, A. Irele, and S. Gikandi have grappled earnestly with at the philosophical and theoretical level. This chapter makes two major arguments. First, that the Heinemann series is engaged in an act of mapping that is not just analogous to, but in fact implicated in, the political mapping of Africa by imperial and neocolonial power. Second, that writers engage with the AWS through a struggle for autonomy that cannot be limited to the realm of ideas but is in fact a material conflict over bibliographic choices, the meaning of the series' imprimatur, and all the other rights of selection that the autonomous artist claims as a prerogative.

There is no doubt that Soyinka's description of Heinemann's role as a second scramble for Africa was a reflection of an impulse toward artistic autonomy and decolonization of African literature, which cannot be satisfied by the current theoretical positions. The response to this question will be taken up in Chap. 7 through something Mudimbe does with the Negritude movement, which served as precedent for the work of decolonization, and which shows how decolonization persists in literature even in the context of sometimes overwhelming determinant forces. Indeed, Soyinka's anthology of black poetry functions along a similar trajectory as Senghor's. Because anthologies aim to be a cross-sectional sample, the question of "what is representative?" becomes their defining issue. The example of Senghor's anthology can be viewed against the backdrop of Sartre's introductory argument, and Soyinka's case, which is the focus of this chapter, is

read against Currey's query on Soyinka's selection, and the suppression of a significant part of his preface to the anthology. All of this is to highlight representativeness as a defining practice of the series, a point that will be elaborated upon presently.

The networks of contemporary publishing have yet to emerge fully from the shadows of monopoly capital within which their operations were firmly established, historically. The twentieth century, at the decline of political empire, witnessed simultaneously an inverse ascendency in the activities and power of European publishing houses as they extended their operations into colonial territories. Newly independent nations or "liberated markets" in Africa, Asia, and South America provided western capital extraordinary opportunities for expansion, setting off what Wole Soyinka, invoking the imperial partitioning map of Africa at the Berlin conference of 1884–85, termed the "second scramble," the profound effects of which lie at the core of postcolonial cultural productions and knowledge industries. The limits of the power of a publisher in relation to textual products were called into question by African writers as soon as the AWS got underway. Africa's first Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, who was asked to edit an anthology of poetry for Heinemann Educational Books, made the following prefatory remark:

> Time alone will tell whether or not the second scramble for Africa has done more literary harm than good. This anthology has been made possible (and even necessary?), however, by the very fact of such a promiscuous affair. Its claims to difference is [sic] essentially the one of approach, an attempt to restore that willful entity called a poem to its self-validating existence, to rescue it from the asphyxiation to which it is increasingly condemned by the heavy-footed ogres of Eng. Lit., African poetry and even THE POET. The first is the monster creation of universities, schools and ministries of education, the second by pundits on their ubiquitous platforms of journals and conferences, the last by publishers and the automatic caste tendencies of the so-called emerging societies. Underneath it all the body of the poem is slowly ground to powder until it appears to have completed the sinister cycle back to what many claim it is—a mere figment of the imagination.[19]

Although this remark was by and large edited out from the final version of the anthology, its retrieval from the Heinemann archives is one of the truly remarkable discoveries of this research precisely because questions concerning the cultural and ideological representation of African literary production sit in the shadow of all debates on modern African literature. Is Soyinka

saying that the poem, once created, could somehow exist and be disseminated in some non-material form? Is he dismissing the material conditions necessary for production, the mediating agencies, in the name of an idealist position? Is Soyinka basically an idealist, cynical about material theorizing? It seems what is at stake in Soyinka's position is the notion of the apparatus—the ideological constructions of the apparatus—as presented by Althusser, and whether the material question of the apparatus precedes the consideration of the social, or at least, comes along with it.

Soyinka makes a series of contradictory claims. He acknowledges that his anthology has been "made possible and even necessary" by the convergence of the impresarios of modern culture in Africa. He, however, seems to negate the possibility of the anthology with its necessity. He is critical of the drivers of that possibility, and its effects. THE POET, the writer, Soyinka was first to declare, and at a very early stage, is an invention of the publisher, of an international publisher, and African literature, of the culture and knowledge industry dominated by colonial or metropolitan institutions. What is particularly striking in the critique of imperial cultural production whether by Ogunbiyi, Osundare, Ngugi, or Soyinka is the liberatory act of recognition that produces it, as reflected by their choice of words. In this small slice of the piece above, we encounter words and phrases such as "asphyxiation," "promiscuous affair," "heavy-footed ogres," "monster," "slowly ground to powder," "sinister," "caste tendencies"; the sounds of which alone are terrible enough! This language underscores Soyinka's estimation of the colonizing power of the apparatus of production—by which—he ironically presents as a proof of its inescapable reality. His argument seems to go like this: the anthology was made possible by a publisher who operates as part of a colonizing apparatus that violates the integrity of the poem, which Soyinka nevertheless believes, as only an incurable optimist might do, could somehow indestructibly, at last, be restored intact.

Soyinka is fully aware that an unarticulated imagination does not poetry constitute. Thus, his emphasis on the poem as "a mere figment of the imagination" could be understood as an attempt to isolate and separate the rudimentary work of the poet, as suggested by the word "mere," and the poet's unique and autonomous creative labor, from the appurtenances of material conditions necessary for production and dissemination. It is only when creativity is viewed as a form of labor that we can begin to appreciate, if not endorse, the unwillingness to give it over completely to the refining machine of capital without an attempt to recuperate its value.

By metaphorically linking the postcolonial publishing and educational apparatuses to the classical moment of colonial domination and expansion, Soyinka highlights and challenges the ideological weight, and the co-optive and alienating tendencies, of the apparatuses of material production on the poem. This forces us to examine literary creativity in the context of the apparatuses of production and that indefinite realm of the social from and through which a text makes its course, what Appadurai calls the "social life of things."[20]

A book, a successful publication, after all, is a representation of an alignment of forces, interests, and judgments. Theodor Adorno's point that the real signature of modern production is the liquidation of the individual lays the groundwork for a sociological theory of aesthetics. "The autonomy of works of art, which of course rarely ever predominated in an entirely pure form, and was always permeated by a constellation of effects, is tendentially eliminated by the culture industry, with or without the conscious will of those in control."[21] If Saxton's map reaffirmed individuality, Heinemann's map of maps does the opposite, because as a series, it affirmed a collective, group, regional, and commonwealth identity, which served to render invisible the individual and national identities of the writers, even when delineated in the map, to the degree that it succeeded in promoting Africa as the selling point of its product. The complex question of the publisher inventing the writer is also the question of what aesthetic, editorial, and political reasons accumulate to explain the emergence and eclipse of the AWS—viewed as an apparatus—and also what structures account for the apparatus, its power and loss of power.

However, Soyinka's call for the autonomy of "the poem" itself appears conservative and belated if it is an attempt to obliterate the trace of all productive forces from literature and from discourse (in fact to ignore the discursive apparatus, or the apparatus itself), forces without which literature could never exist even in the most romantic conception of art. The multiple exigencies of the practice of African literature bear implications for our understanding of literature that cannot be ignored. These multiple exigencies relate to the construction and collection of African literary texts in such a way as to define the discourse of modern African literature as a discourse of contingency wherein the crisis of autonomy engendered by the writer's enunciative powers is recognized. Nevertheless, Soyinka's objection would be more correctly viewed as symptomatic of what I call *colonial anxieties* that always require what John Frow describes in another

context as "the professional claim to, and the professional mystique of, autonomy of judgment; […] the basis both for the struggle over the organization of work and for individual self-respect (that is for the particular mode of subjectivity) grounded in this relation to work."[22]

Soyinka was alarmed by living the very reality of the elimination of autonomy of the work of art and of the individuality of the author that Adorno theorized. In the particular case of Heinemann, with or without their conscious will, as indicated by Adorno, they operate within the condition of modernity and are bound by the structural determinism of its regime. This comes in part as a function of the apparatus of the literary series as such. Of all the works that have been written about the AWS, none has addressed its very obvious format as a series, or as a cultural and economic structure, as an ideological construct highly consequential for the nature of literature and for culture as a whole, if only for its power to "create cultural capital, form identities and produce meanings …."[23] This should be the first order of inquiry. As John Spiers writes in the two volumes he edited, *The Culture of the Publisher's Series*:

> A working definition thus identifies a series (or "library", or "Collection", or the German *colporteur* novels) as a set of uniform volumes with a distinctive look, often (but not always) uniformly priced, usually comprised of titles by different authors, sequentially unified as an artistic or intellectual project by an individual and specific character described in an accompanying "blurb". Usually (but not always) issued under a general collective title; sometimes (but not always) numbered (inside the book; on the spine; in a list on the back-cover or in an advertisement), with titles issued in succession and in relation to one another and being offered by the same publisher. Sometimes (but not always) with a named series editor or supervising cultural patron. The usual implication, too, has been that the sum of the collected books was greater than the individual parts, together with the quality of one title reassuring readers about the others.[24]

The idea of the sum being greater than the individual parts and the idea of an iconic cultural patron as the consummate image of the series that projects "the personality and tone of the house, its preferences and commitments"[25] in order to motivate and inspire readers is best illustrated by the experience of Cyprian Ekwensi, who found his authorial autonomy undermined by the very practice of grouping that is engendered by the

AWS. Ekwensi writes, within the very first year of the launch of the series, to Keith Sambrook as the series publisher at Heinemann:

> I have now been able to look through the proof copy of PEOPLE OF THE CITY and to make my corrections which are extremely few.
>
> There is only one minor embarrassment which I felt on opening a novel which was supposed to be not only mine, but actually the first modern novel of West Africa by a West African; and that was to see the name of Chinua Achebe against my own title. I am sure Chinua will be as embarrassed as I was to find his name used in this manner.
>
> Would it be a better idea do you think, to delete the name altogether, or to transfer it to some other page after it has been established who the actual author is? Unless of course the emphasis on [sic] this case is on African Editors as opposed to African Writers.[26]

To which Sambrook, who appears well steeped in the history and conventions of publishing with broad experience working in Africa, wrote back what in essence is Heinemann's approach to the series that gives practical and particular illustration to Spiers' generalities:

> Thank you for your letter of 17 May and for returning the corrected page proof. We are due to pass this back today or tomorrow to the printer to keep up to schedule.
>
> I am sorry you are rather worried about the half-title. Originally the list of books in the series was on the back of the cover. This included a blurb on the series generally, and a list of individual titles. Some time ago we decided to use the back cover to give information about the author and about particular books. We have this for existing titles, and these new covers will appear on the reprints. In order to give a full list of the series to date we have had to use the half-title, which is quite normal bibliographical practice.
>
> The half-title of the reprints will therefore include the general heading of the series with Chinua Achebe's name beneath as editorial adviser, which he was made at the end of last year. Then, with quite a large space in between, is the title of the particular book with its number in the series and beneath that a list of other titles under the heading 'AWS'.
>
> There really is no other place for this information now that the back cover has been taken up with full details of each author and his book. I am much in favour of having this illustrated back cover with the author's portrait, etc., and full biographical details. But somewhere we should list the titles in the series and the normal place is the half-title or the page facing the title-page which is, in the case of PEOPLE OF THE CITY, taken up by Duerden's frontispiece.

> I think the title-page makes the authorship of PEOPLE OF THE CITY absolutely clear to anyone who doesn't already know.[27]

The "large space in between" on the very cover of the book maps and rationalizes the relation of editor and author. As seen above, it is this rationale for series presentation and uniformity that preoccupied Sambrook. The imperative of the series collides with the interests of the author, and the veneer of civility and diplomatic rapprochement fizzles as Ekwensi's reply takes on the fundamental principle of the series that required packaging each individual author and text in a way that the effects carry over to the next in the course of the generic evolution of the brand:

> With all due respect to your technical explanation, I still remain unrepentant and unconvinced.
>
> Here are my reasons:
>
> – PEOPLE OF THE CITY was written long before (6 years) Chinua was "born" as a writer.
> – PEOPLE OF THE CITY was revised for the AWS in the days of Van Milne with absolutely no references to Chinua, and no help, guidance, advice, "editorial direction" of any kind by Chinua.
> – Chinua was appointed Editorial Director for the series long after PEOPLE OF THE CITY was established in the series.
> – At no stage whatever, was he actively associated with this particular book. Nowhere can I find any reference to his appointment as editor for the series (my editor).
>
> What you should rightly do is to tag his name to the particular books you have conceived with Chinua's guidance, e.g. ONE MAN ONE MATCHET which he advised you to publish.
>
> I absolutely refuse to have his name tagged on to PEOPLE OF THE CITY. My name can stand on its own in any market.
>
> If I write ANY OTHER BOOK for the AWS (after his appointment as Editor for the series) then you have the legitimate right to use his name. In this case, I am afraid you have no case whatever. If you are so terrified about "literary quality" then drop the whole project.[28]

This act of packaging, and concomitant branding, is the single most important effect of the AWS on African literature. It is the effect of the brand on individual authors and texts that Soyinka attempts to challenge

by the form of resistance one detects in his preface. It is also to preserve the integrity of his autonomous voice as an author that prompted Ekwensi's skirmish with the editors. Ekwensi represents fissures and disaggregations that are naturally part of group formations, but the implicit tension within book production over how questions of authorship, attribution, and authority take on an even more problematic and symbolic dimension in the production and marketing of the series. The conflict between Ekwensi and Sambrook masks another conflict: the one apparent between Ekwensi and Achebe—which is the conflict to establish Ekwensi's proper "age" in the literary field: he does not want to concede preeminence to Achebe just because Achebe has been made the editorial adviser to the series. And this plays out also through the question of whether Achebe or Ekwensi has a prior claim on the AWS imprimatur ("in the days of Van Milne"). All of these are not unexpected as they demonstrate how individual writers struggling against a colonial cultural apparatus position themselves to appropriate the capital of legitimacy and renown by simultaneously defining what is legitimate and what is not. This is perhaps the case in Achebe's critique of Emecheta and Ngugi's remark on Okara. The most controversial example would be Achebe's comment that the Nobel Price does not confer on Soyinka the "Asiwaju" (leader) of literature. Although Achebe's name was removed and Ekwensi won this round, he nevertheless remained caught in the homogenizing structure of the series as a necessary function of being published in it.

It is interesting that an editor of the series at Heinemann-Nigeria would pick up and take on this format question in a discussion of the cover for the series about two decades after Ekwensi. At issue was whether to retain the cover of the series in its Atlantic identity as African and Caribbean Writers Series. Akin Thomas made the argument that seems to derive from a common or shared outlook between African writers and editors: this desire to resist homogenization and to retain some form of uniqueness, which raises the question as to why the idea of uniqueness is of such importance: "We believe each book, and therefore the message of its cover, is a unique experience. That uniqueness must be felt from the cover. A series which could be identified by 'square picture frames' against an orange background would maintain instant identity at the expense of that uniqueness."[29]

Akin Thomas not only wants each author but also each text to be unique. The debate about the uniqueness of each work and author in the material process of production flows into the debate on African culture as a whole, in

which Mudimbe, Irele, and Gikandi engage in their philosophical discourses. This shift in emphasis in Thomas' proposal from the collective identity of the series to the individual text constitutes a philosophical conflict and shift, or its premise, and perhaps, too, a geo-political difference within the Heinemann directorate and board. Read against the format of the series as a marketing construct and strategy as articulated by Sambrook and Spiers, uniqueness is posited here in a relation of exclusion to collective identity of the series. Thomas gestures toward a preference for each text leaning not on the other but standing alone, by itself. If as Thomas asserts, the identity of a series is constituted at the expense of the uniqueness of individual texts and authors, then the insistence on uniqueness, I would argue in this context ultimately devolves into the question of autonomy.

Although Spiers and Sambrook provide an understanding of the generic format of the series, which seems to suggest a universality of effects, there nevertheless obtains strong evidence that at the top level at Heinemann, the parent company of Heinemann Educational Books, even the executives hold the view of a more variegated character of the format and its effects. In order to validate this insight, I conducted a comparison of the effects of the African Writers Series and the New Windmill Series. These series were underwritten by overlapping procedures of the educational department of Heinemann: one served the African school market, and the other, the British school market. In a letter to a reviewer for a British publication, "The Use of English," William Heinemann's A. R. Beal writes in part: "Meanwhile you may be interested to know that we have just published THINGS FALL APART in our New Windmill Series. Psychologically I think it is a good thing to include this (and in time I hope other African books) in a series for schools which contains authors from all over the English speaking world. An author such as Achebe would certainly be accepted in such company, whereas English teachers might consider a book from Nigeria too exotic or eccentric if it appeared in a list only devoted to African writers."[30] Tony Beal's letter amounts to an acknowledgement that the packaging of African authors through the AWS, while it may have worked in African schools to some degree, will definitely produce a different result in England. Beal wrote ten years after the AWS had been in circulation worldwide, and also in the very year it celebrated its hundredth title. As an insider who has personally witnessed the boom of African authors through the series and also as a renowned British educational and general market publisher, his view of the divergent effects of the two series is much more practical and concrete. Firstly, there

is a psychological barrier that English teachers in England would have to overcome when they come in contact with a novel from a specifically designated Black African series. Second, there is apparently no such psychological barrier for the African market. Third, in a backhanded but totally vivid manner, Beal is saying the same thing as Spiers: a series functions primarily at the level of psychology; every new and unknown writer in the series enjoys the credibility of preceding companions. In this case, Achebe, as an unknown *and* different writer appearing in the Windmill Series is expected to enjoy to some extent the confidence and reassurance that Windmill writers like D. H. Lawrence and others have cultivated in the readers of the series. As a mechanism for introducing newer and younger writers, the series performs its functions differently in different communities of readers. Ekwensi perfectly understood this principle: the principle of using one author tacitly to call attention to many others, somewhat like the bundling in a promotional package; but he rejects it. This is why he states categorically in his letter, "My name can stand on its own in any market"—a view that Akin Thomas would embrace as an ideal. And fourth, the series has a target audience; any one in need of proof that the AWS was not created primarily for the British market might find Beal's analysis in the letter to Miss Evans most instructive.[31]

Despite being aware of the constraints of the series and indeed accepting the principle that Achebe's name could appear on works within the series that have received his editorial guidance, which by his own logic would still constitute placing emphasis on African editors at the expense of African authors, Ekwensi remained a loyal Heinemann author. What explains this ambiguous relation is the realization that the Heinemann series was already entrenched in the marketplace. Spiers' volumes demonstrate how the consummate work of the series is in part the cultivation of a niche, a niche-space, which is to recognize and extract "a fresh environment in a culture."[32] Spiers argues that series as entrenched as the Heinemann Series "have influenced the structure of the global field of literature as a whole—notably, they have contributed to major re-orderings of the genres and canons, as structures of authority, in many countries."[33] Further still, they have also contributed to "the modern shaping of national identity—and to the idea of a national culture."[34] Founded on the basic assumption about group behavior, and dependent upon similar presumptions about prevailing sensibilities and patterns that ultimately define a group, or at least the possibility of their discovery and consolidation, series have always facilitated community among writers and between writers and readers. As they delineate and consolidate affinities among writers, texts,

and readers, they draw and redraw the maps of interpretive communities. Indeed, the key function of the Heinemann map alluded to at the beginning of this chapter is the task of representation through differentiation. Helgerson's formulation is apt to this end: "At the root of all representation is differentiation. A place or a person can be represented only if it can be in some way distinguished from its surroundings."[35] In order for the map of African literature to be drawn, it must be drawn against the literatures that surround it. The lines on the map give definition to space and editorial discrimination as it maps African literature by the grouping together of the same, thereby defining it. Could this be what Soyinka means when he asserts the Poet is the invention of the publisher?

This is the inevitable trajectory of the series format that Heinemann adopted. One could argue that to the extent that the series is successful, its success depends precisely on the production of the effects already enumerated. Two things amplified these effects: coming at the time it did, at the very moment of inception of modern African literature, and having the success that it had, the grouping effects of the series appear to have been preset into the foundations of African literature. Abiola Irele may have been conscious of this inevitable trajectory, and the editorial and philosophical contraption that mapped African literature on the received political idea of Africa when he took a detour from defining African literature in his book and instead relied on the notion of the African imagination to carry through his project of "imaginative expression that is African in origin and nature,"[36] defined as "a conjunction of impulses that have been given a unified expression in a body of literary texts."[37] By deliberately dropping the term "African literature" and enumerating all the problems with the very notion of an African literature, which include the disjunction between language and literature and the inapplicability of the conventional association between literature and nation, Irele contends that "the idea of an African 'nation' with a recognizable political personality founded upon a common heritage of history and culture is an 'invention,'"[38] leading to the feeling of "a lack of congruence between the term African literature and the object to which it is applied."[39] However, concepts such as the imagination, which Soyinka and Irele deploy, cannot substitute for a theoretical structure to resolve this incongruity. There is no doubt that in this formulation we hear echoes of classical idealism. Irele, in his own works, has a preference for idealism—impulses and imagination, not the materiality of the book or the apparatus—even if as indicated in my introduction, his call for a materialist approach resonated with the aims of this book, which if we may recapitulate, is precisely to define the object of

African literature not only as a body of texts but also as a field, to use Pierre Bourdieu's phrase, "a site of struggle." "The *boundary* of the field is a stake of struggles, and the social scientist's task is," according to Bourdieu, "to describe a *state* (long-lasting or temporary) of these struggles and therefore of the frontier delimiting the territory held by the competing agents."[40] My task is thus to provide clarity to the field of struggle, to perform "strategic analysis"[41] of the possibilities of the global that are not imagined in the old terms of colonialism, of postcoloniality that transcends nativism and tired dualisms yet unco-opted by imperial epistemes.

The political necessity to reject the incongruence of such an invention dictates the move in Irele's argument to relocate and reposition the moment of its invention, if we are to consider African literature an invention at all. Irele argues: "Indeed, if we seek a precise reference for the 'invention' of African literature, this can only be the historic *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*, compiled by Senghor and published in 1948."[42] But when he adds, "The point is that African literature in the European languages was a distinct area of modern African expression well before Achebe came on the scene,"[43] it becomes clear that he means this as a rebuke to Simon Gikandi, who declared Chinua Achebe the inventor of African culture. It is however puzzling why Irele buries this landmark observation deep in the notes of *The African Imagination*.

By situating Soyinka's desire for autonomy within the dialectics of preservation and supersession, I attempt to underscore autonomy as the utopia of decolonization. Part of the ensemble of political sovereignty is self-representation, perhaps its prime marker. Literary production at the time of political independence of African nations cultivated the desire to interrupt coloniality through a strategy of preservation and supersession. Achille Mbembe focused on this dialectics when he noted that rather than colonial culture perpetually intervening and insinuating itself as Gikandi supposes, it instead served as "a unifying center of Africans' desire to know themselves, to recapture their destiny (sovereignty), and to belong to themselves in the world (autonomy)."[44] Whereas the institutions and networks created by colonialism still largely dominate literary production at the inception of modern African literature, if not so much at this moment, African writers engaged with these institutions, and local ones as well, by preserving the means of production and the techniques and methods of disseminating knowledge, not merely modifying and adapting techniques and methods but superseding them by the exertion of pressures that created new ones.

Indeed, it is my view that what Achille Mbembe so eloquently elaborates in his proposal for reinventing Africa was precisely the strategy pursued by Soyinka and other founding authors of African literature:

> On the philosophical level, priority must be given to interrogating the imprisoning model of a history that is already shaped and that one can only undergo or repeat—and to addressing that which, in actual African experiences of the world, has escaped such determination. On a more anthropological level, the obsession with uniqueness and difference must be opposed by a thematics of sameness. In order to move away from ressentiment and lamentation over the loss of anom propre, we must clear an intellectual space for rethinking those temporalities that are always simultaneously branching out toward several different futures and, in so doing, open the way for the possibility of multiple ancestries. Finally, on a sociological level, attention must be given to the contemporary everyday practices through which Africans manage to recognize and maintain with the world an unprecedented familiarity—practices through which *they invent something that is their own and that beckons to the world in its generality.*[45]

The different notions and forms of autonomy invoked throughout this book may not be equivalencies but they can be brought together under the definition that Mbembe provides above. Because autonomy is viewed here as an ontological status, it follows that the writer's prerogative and creative freedom (Soyinka's autonomy of imagination), the autonomy of art from the reifying forces of production and the marketplace (Adorno's artistic autonomy), and the independence of African thought from European conceptual foundations are aspects of the autonomy of culture, of superstructural freedom from infrastructural determination. All forms of autonomy proceed from and are made possible by the "unifying center" of political autonomy. However, because political autonomy is never absolute, all forms of autonomy can only be relative. This is why Marxists often speak rather of "relative autonomy," suggesting levels of mediation that intervene between art and its ultimate material determinacy. What is certain is that any and all forms of autonomy that we may specify constitute an ontological status antithetical to Gikandian thesis of being perpetually "caught within the orbit"[46] of colonial culture. Thus, the desire "To belong to themselves in the world"[47] undergirds the desire for originality as opposed to derivativeness and does not negate, nor is it negated by, the constitution of the subject through discourse.

Gnosis returns in Mbembe's proposal as a pointer toward the everyday practices of autonomy, and as the vehicle of supersession. This chapter began with an analysis of the Heinemann map of the AWS in order to show how the political map of Africa served as the template for the literary map itself. Soyinka's unpublished preface to *Poems of Black Africa* is another key document that shows, along with Ekwensi's letters, how African writers negotiated their publications with Heinemann and asserted authorial autonomy. What ties the unpublished preface to that map is Soyinka's letter to Tom Rosenthal below, a director at Secker and Warburg. Through this letter, I would argue, we find a crucial link to a principle espoused in Soyinka's novel, *The Interpreters*. In concluding this argument, therefore, I want to parse these connections to demonstrate how publishing and artistic practices could be thought together to illuminate Soyinka's representation of the everyday practices of autonomy.

Secker and Warburg had contracted Soyinka for an anthology, with Heinemann obtaining the paperback and educational rights in the UK and the Commonwealth. When the selection that Soyinka made reached James Currey at Heinemann, he sent a query back to Soyinka asking why many of the Poems from East Africa were omitted, suggesting that the selection did not represent the geographical spread of Africa. To this query Soyinka wrote addressing the concerns that were raised in the reader's report (Fig. 3.1):

> [P]erhaps your readers ought to be made aware of the following; There can be no question of producing a serious anthology based on geographical equity. It is however possibly, even likely that I have failed to unearth some deserving poems from East Africa. In such a case I would not hesitate to take out some West African pieces and replace them by the new entries.
>
> I am familiar with the poetry of most of those mentioned in that list—Achebe etc. I'm afraid that much as I admire Achebe's novels I don't find his poems worth including in a selective anthology. Nor Rubadiri's, Kayper-Mensah's nor even Echeruo's over whose poems I hesitated for quite some time. I don't quite understand why these omissions are "unexpected". Ndu, Ogutu and Ruganda are however new names to me. I don't recall running into them at all—but I'll have to check on that, by now one name is simply running into another in my head after months of poring through the lyrical effusions of the black continent! However, I'll check on these before we meet.
>
> "The counting system does not work in any case" Soyinka writes.

c/o Rex Collings

6 Paddington Street
London W1M 3LA
01-486 4631

16th Nov.

Dear Tom,

I shall of course call you as soon as the publication hassles I've got myself into over my ~~work~~ prison book is over. In the meantime, perhaps your readers ought to be made aware of the following :

There can be no question of producing a serious anthology based on geographical equity. It is however possible, even likely that I have failed to unearth some deserving poems from East Africa. In such a case I would not hesitate to take out some West African pieces and replace them by the new entries.

I am familiar with the poetry of most of those mentioned in that list – Achebe etc. I'm afraid that much as I admire Achebe's novels I don't find his poems worth including in a selective anthology. Nor Rubadiri's , Kayper-Mensah's nor even Okeruo's over whose poems I hesitated for quite some time. I don't quite understand why these omissions are 'unexpected'. Ndu, Ogutu and Rugarda are however new names to me. I don't recall running into them at all – but I'll have to check on that, by now one name is simply running into another in my head after months of poring through the lyrical effusions of the black continent! However, I'll check on these before we meet.

The counting system does not work in any case. Is Tabori's one poem to be measured by the fact that it is one or by its generous number of lines ? And in some cases it is far better for the poet to be represented by one poem than by ruined by his next best.

Rex Collings Limited
Directors
G. R. Collings L. G. Colart

All these principles must be borne in mind. Naturally, for as long as is possible, I hope we will continue to make necessary changes to the anthology. I belong to that school which believes however that three-quarters of the poems published as African poetry should never have seen the light of day. We have to be selective.

Would the first week in December be alright for a meeting ? If you are thinking of travelling out of London or something I could try and make it earlier. In that case ~~I~~ could you drop me a note ?

Best Wishes,

Wole Soyinka

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Fig. 3.1 Wole Soyinka, letter to T. G. Rosenthal, November 16, 1972. Courtesy of Professor Wole Soyinka

> Is Taban's one poem to be measured by the fact that it is one or by its generous number of lines? And in some cases it is far better for the poet to be represented by one poem than be ruined by his next best.
>
> All these principles must be borne in mind. Naturally, for as long as is possible, I hope we will continue to make necessary changes to the anthology. I belong to that school which believes however that three-quarters of the poems published as African poetry should never have seen the light of day. We have to be selective.[48]

If the publisher's archive yields any useful knowledge at all, it is this form of exchanges between writers and editors bearing on the substantive issues of readers' reports and the lagging and imperceptible effects these sometimes have on the consciousness, and overall culture of publishers. It is through these reports that the discourses on colonial epistemologies and modernity necessarily intersect with, and enter in a significant way into, our discussion of print culture, the publisher's archive, and the creation of a literary canon. Some of the reports, judging by letters like the above, are important because they constitute one of the rare occasions when writers actually have to justify, and not merely state, their aesthetic choices. There is no doubt that Currey and his team at Heinemann had a different idea of what it means for the anthology to be representative of Africa than Soyinka or even Secker and Warburg, based clearly on the overall geographical coverage of the map he displayed in the classroom on that summer day at Oxford Brookes.

The question of the extent to which the anthology is representative of all the regions of Africa was the concern raised by the original query sent directly to the top directors at both publishing houses that collaborated on publishing the text:

> I have just seen the proposed contents list. One thing strikes me at once: very little East African poetry is included.
>
> Out of 220 poems in all, only 10 are by East African poets: 2 by Richard Nkiru, 1 each by Taban, Okot, Kariara, Tejani, Lubega, Kassam, Kamera and Anyang Nyong'o.
>
> This may be intentional but is likely to reduce interest in East Africa especially in an "African" anthology.
>
> So far as I can see, the contributions are as follows:

> South Africa: 56 poems
> West Africa: 113 (including translations from the French)
> Malagasy: 7
> Zaire (Congo): 8
> Ethiopia: 3
> East Africa: 10
> "Traditional": 15
> 212
>
> The authors of the remaining 8 poems are unknown to me, except for one by Edwin Thumboo who is Malaysian!
>
> This "imbalance", intentional or not, could be a serious bar to sales in East and Central Africa. I wonder if Wole Soyinka is aware of this.
>
> There are a few unexpected omissions: nothing from Achebe, Rubadiri, Oculi, Chinweizu, Ndu, Ogutu, Ruganda, Kariuki, Kayper-Mensah, Choonara, Angira, Asaloche, and Echeruo.
>
> WS may consider nothing from these poets fits in or matches up to the rest. The selection certainly establishes strongly some leading poets: Peters, Okigbo, Brutus, U'Tamsi, Senghor, Kunene, which is a good feature.
>
> But one would like to know whether the omissions are intentional or whether the East African imbalance can be dealt with"[49]

In Sambrook's query, we see again the inner workings of a profession, and in this case a philosophy as well; perhaps, not so much a philosophy but an objective: sales. The basic logic here is what will sell in Africa as a whole must represent Africa as such; that people will buy texts if they reflect their reality, if they could find themselves represented in it. When the royalties were being negotiated between the two publishing houses, Currey would bring this intervention up as a reason to demand a greater percentage for Heinemann Educational Books claiming, "without us, Soyinka and Seckers would have produced a most unbalanced anthology."[50] In another letter to the editor at Secker, Currey wrote, "We are delighted to see that Wole Soyinka has taken into account the major criticisms we made, and that the work now looks balanced. Previously it would certainly have been embarrassingly lop-sided."[51]

Despite backing from Anthony Thwaite, a prolific English poet, publisher and literary editor of magazines such as *The Listener* and the *New Statesman*, whose report highly encouraged Secker to publish the first selected version, and the endorsement of his point of view and selection by veteran Secker publisher T. G. Rosenthal, Soyinka would still surprisingly

accede to the request of the publishers, even against what he considers his better judgment that "the counting system does not work." We have seen in his letters and the preface he would later write for the anthology that the new selection remained a source of concern for him. Rosenthal's initial letter to Currey on the first selection shows that Secker was not as invested in the concept of representativeness as Heinemann was. He wrote that "It has, as you will see when we can let you have a set of proofs, been superbly done by Wole Soyinka and according to Anthony Thwaite is not only the best black anthology he has seen but one of the most interesting poetry anthologies of any kind."[52] And even after representativeness was raised as an issue, Rosenthal still by and large agreed with Soyinka's position: "I am quite sure that you are basically right and I shall look forward very much to seeing you some time during the first week of December and perhaps as soon as you know your schedule exactly, you could telephone me …."[53]

It must be noted that Currey's query was to ask if the omissions by Soyinka were intentional, and if so, to indicate their seriousness for the interest and sales in East Africa. Currey would write after the fact that they would have been satisfied if Soyinka returned the original selection without changes on the basis of his view of their quality:

> Alan, Keith and I would not have suggested for a moment that Wole Soyinka should put in East African titles just for "geographical equity". The fact is that we want him to have a wide enough view of East African poetry to be able to make an effective choice. If, of course, he has had such an overview, and found the result lacking in quality, then this is his prerogative and we are satisfied … I am quite willing to believe that a lot of this poetry is nowhere near the quality needed. But he would have come across people like Ogutu and Ruganda of whom he confesses his ignorance.[54]

This debate between authors and publishers, of course mediated by reports from academics and others, is a crucial aspect of how literary history evolves. The anthology itself bears the memory of these debates from its very title. On the promotional questionnaire the initial title *Anthology of African Verse* was crossed out and *Poems from Black Africa* written over it. There is no precise moment from the archive when the decision was taken to change the title but *Poems of Black Africa* became the subject of most letters around April 30, 1974, first in a letter from Currey. It is clear

then that even the final selection did not satisfy fully the criteria of an anthology of African verse.

The postpublication reviews of the anthology deserve some attention for how, without knowledge of the internal debates, they reproduce the issues around which the selection revolved. As critics we are always grappling with the consequences of the decisions, judgments, and choices that were made in the process of production. This speaks to the nature of the relationship between editorial criticism and literary criticism. Angus Calder who has been described as a "ubiquitous figure on the Scottish literary scene" expressed disappointment with the anthology. Praised for the inclusion of "Asians, Cape Coloured and Malagasies and one white American," Calder criticized the anthology for being "Too long and expensive to act as sampler for the inquisitive know-nothing." He also addresses one of the primary aims of anthologies, which is to introduce students to a broad cross-section of works from the continent: "For academic purposes, it is under-edited and leaves out or under-represents too many substantial figures." This point is very crucial because as educational publishers, the calculation by Sambrook and Currey may have been that it makes little sense to promote an anthology of African verse in places like Kenya and Uganda that has little of their own poets represented. Whether as a result of omission or based on the quality of the poets, not including significant numbers of East African poems in the anthology creates a major problem either way. They have to be concerned about the potential fallout to their reputation as major publishers in East Africa, but also show commitment to those local authors as well. Paradoxically, Calder's verdict is that the educational purpose is not well served by the inclusion of local authors at the expense of the more established ones. Thus, what Calder finds mostly disappointing is the apparent reverse imbalance in the selection of promising poets:

> Meanwhile, idiosyncratic though the choice is, it isn't personal enough to be a blaze of insight for Soyinkaphiles, who would need a selection of his favourite poems from all continents. While I am delighted to see so much by Jared Angira and Richard Ntiru, two heftily promising East Africans, I think they might (like myself) find it very odd that each should get much more space than Christopher Okigbo ….[55]

The dilemmas and paradoxes of this publication highlight in vivid terms the principal task of authorship and editorship in determining what is in

and what is out, who is in and who is out. The judgment of taste involves a discriminatory practice of hierarchies. Artistic selection mirrors natural selection in its vertical practice of hierarchies. The pyramid of taste crumbles with the flattening thrust of a horizontal base expansion. Popular literature is concerned with the horizontal plane while high art is the cultivation of a pure discriminatory function, which is at the same time an elitist and hegemonic instrument that has been legitimized as the essential characteristic of an advanced species and the foundation and apogee of a human culture. This is why aestheticism and populism exist in a dialectical relation of apex and base. However, because the apex cannot exist without its base, it is ever adapting to that base and vice versa. Thus, the practice of hierarchies is also governed by the principle of selective adaptivity, which informs Soyinka's ultimate receptivity to expanding the selection to reflect the horizontal dimensions of representation.

The way in which authorial and editorial judgments should interact in the process is well articulated by Currey: the prerogative of choice is the author's but as the gateway reader, the publisher represents the reader's preferences to the author to determine the possibility of reception. The judgment of taste is not a science but an art; this is why it relies on tradition and experience. However, because it relies on tradition to legitimize and validate itself, it inevitably constitutes and reinforces tradition. On the one hand, the task of an anthology compels the author to think more conventionally like an editor—but the task of writing is always already an editorial task. On the other hand, an editor is attuned to the quest for newness that is at the heart of the fascination of reading, and is thus similarly compelled to think more creatively like an author. It is here that authorial prerogative meets tradition, and newness meets familiarity and comfort at the crossroads of transformation. The rivalry of creativity and criticism is well known. How do we define the relationship of creativity to publishing? The critic is also a midwife because whether as a commentator or teacher, he or she mediates the text in a process of postnatal transfusion. The author's choice is never insular. But the publisher's prenatal infusion of the author's choice is justified by the claim of making it effective. The dynamics of infusion and transfusion speaks to the genesis and genetics of texts. For Soyinka, the artistic principle of selectivity, and the map principle, or the political principle of representativeness are not mutually exclusive. In the letter above, he opined that it is possible to represent an author by his or her best contribution and not by the number of contributions, if

that would indeed ruin the overall reputation of such author. The question, he would imply, is how best to represent a region and the continent. However, presented with the raw statistics of his selection from a rational business point of view as lopsided, and under-representative of East Africa, Soyinka sees an ethical problem of equity, and succumbs. This is the power of statistics in simplifying the most complicated situations and silencing opposing views. Soyinka does not hold up the publication but states his objection, his reserves in the preface: "time will tell." The testament of time upon which he rests his case was repressed and now is recovered. The work of criticism as a reassuring tradition takes time. But if these early critical reviews are predictors of how the reception might take shape over time, Soyinka must feel vindicated, albeit not without immediate cost.

The review of William Oxley, Manchester born poet and philosopher, follows the exact lines of Calder's argument. One can imagine as Soyinka read these reviews at the time what his feelings must have been because the reviews criticize everything Soyinka wanted to avoid: the racial criterion, and geographical representation.

> As with any anthology constructed according to criteria not strictly poetic—in this case racial—Wole Soyinka's is uneven….
>
> Lastly, I think Soyinka's own "Ulysses" one of the best of the "neo-Latin" English pieces; but I feel that—though recognising the intention to present a full canvas of black African poets—so excellent a poet ought to have been a bit more sparing in his choice of some poets than he has.[56]

The problem of diversity in Africa plays out in this anthology. How do you strike the equilibrium between selectivity and representativeness?

The idea of equity or equilibrium of representation based on geography speaks to a different calculus of geography and literary history. It is the map principle that Edward Said noted in the epigraph to this chapter, and which most publishers share. For us, as scholars of postcolonialism and students of Said, it is the similarities between the template and instrument of geography, and the vision of the world that are of special interest. But the writer has a different view of these things: the anthology must be "serious" and "selective," two criteria that define Soyinka's oeuvre and that he hopes would define the canon of African literature. The poem, in Soyinka's view, is not validated by equity, however defined: it is "self-validating," as

he would later note in the unpublished preface. It is also apparent that Soyinka rejects the map principle and the system of mobility that inserts an author within the cartography of modernity described by Gikandi because it is preconditioned upon the contradiction and stifling of the concept of autonomy and self-validation. The question then becomes, how does Soyinka envision dealing with the "shroud" that modernity and its cartographies present along with its gifts? How does he envision the possibility of new configurations and cartographies of power-knowledge?

This takes us directly to the link in the above letter to the central question of his novel, *The Interpreters*, originally published by André Deutsch but produced in paperback by Heinemann on the approval of Soyinka's wife while he was in prison during the Nigerian civil war. A group of young intellectuals discusses the place of art or the artist in society, especially in the face of great moral and political crisis. Lasunwon, the only member of the group who is a lawyer, poses the question about Kola quite indignantly: "What is he anyway that he goes round giving himself some special status in the universe? And I don't mean just him, it's the whole tribe of them. Everyday somewhere in the papers they are shooting off their mouths about culture and art and imagination. And their attitude is so superior, as if they are talking to the common illiterate barbarians of society."[57] Soyinka's putative response comes through Kola who is seen painting what he calls "The Pantheon," through whose creation, "he had felt this sense of power, the knowledge of power within his hands, of the will to transform; and he understood then that *medium was of little importance*, that the act, on canvas or human material was the process of living and brought him the intense fear of fulfillment."[58] The quest and the anguish of ever striving for fulfillment are thus represented in its humanistic and artistic dimensions. The act of transformation through the selective power of his hand to create cannot be diminished by the constraints of the medium or mediation. In this moment, Soyinka insists, yet again, on the theory that the imagination, the act of literature does survive the mediation of representation, and secondary mediations of the institutions of literature because it is the author who ultimately ought to be making the selection as a part of his or her poetic license even as he or she responds to the pressures of the marketplace and the public.

In the exhibition that takes place at the end of the novel, Egbo sees himself represented on Kola's canvas and he rejects it, saying, "I cannot

accept this view of life. He has made the beginning itself a resurrection. This is an optimist's delusion of continuity."[59] He goes on to argue that the whole painting by Kola was a distortion of reality: "it is an uninspiring distortion, that is what is wrong with it. He has taken one single myth, Ogun at his drunkennest, losing his sense of recognition and slaughtering his own men in battle; and he has frozen him at the height of carnage."[60] To this he gets the response, "Well, surely you must concede him *the right to select*."[61] It is in this basic right to select that we find the right to fiction and the autonomy of the artist. Thus, when Soyinka locates autonomy in the right to select, he was exerting the pressure, like Senghor, of a principle that transcends structural colonialism, and institutional constraints, and that defines the freedom of creativity, as opposed to what Gikandi posits as "the freedom of Englishness."[62]

The coda to this debate between Soyinka and Heinemann publishers and editors on the principle for selection into the anthology, *Poems of Black Africa*, would come in 1981, with the preparation of another anthology of writing by women of Africa, *Unwinding Threads*, edited by Charlotte H. Bruner. A similar scenario presented itself: readers' reports suggest a geographical imbalance in the anthology, and the editor of the anthology attempted to use the map of Africa as a tool to educate readers regarding the national origins of the writers represented in the anthology as well as to resolve the problem of exclusion. In her letter to James Currey Bruner wrote about the need for a map: "Map—I feel strongly that in the front somewhere a one-page map of Africa with the authors' names on it and arrows or some such device indicating their African origin should be given. American readers have very little idea of many of the African countries. I enclose a map just to show what I mean, but not as a finished production."[63] Philippa Straton, who was helping Bruner with the anthology, had a different idea; she proposed the inclusion of a short explanation of the criteria for selection. A note at the end of her letter asked James Currey for "any suggestions for alternatives"[64] (Fig. 3.2).

Currey's response to both proposals demonstrates a reversal that is not connected to the position he took about a decade earlier in the production of Soyinka's anthology. Whatever may account for this reversal, it is at least plausible to consider the theory of a delayed effect of Soyinka's argument. Rather than be scandalized by what they then considered the inequity of exclusion, or even advocate inclusion, Currey stated what all along was

Ms. Charlotte H. Bruner,
Iowa State Univeristy,
Foreign Lagguages and Lieeratures,
300 Pemrson Hall,
Ames, Iowa 50011
U.S.A.

22nd September 1981

Dear Charlotte,

Thank you for your letter of 9 September 1981 about Unwinding Threads. I'll see Philippa in October and we will obviously be discussing it.

May I emphasise the following points for you, PHilippa and me:

1. We must gogfor literary attractiveness rathernthan inclusiveness. Does the piece read well in its own right?

2. Any judgement about literary quality is bound to be subjective and personal and when the final manuscriptsarrives we ought to get a final reattion from as many as possible on the following:
   - HEB East Africa
   - HEB Nigeria
   - HEB in Johannesburg
   - our East African reader in the U.K.
   - Virago

Anyhow, for the time being I really leave ti to you.

Yourssincerely,

James Currey

c.c. Philippa Stratton

Fig. 3.2 James Currey, letter to Charlotte Bruner, September 22, 1981. Courtesy of James Currey

Soyinka's selective principle. His guidance on the subject was that literary attractiveness rather than inclusiveness should be the determining criterion. In this instance, the model of a distanced impact of authorial judgement on publishing criteria could be formulated.

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13. Ibid., p. 114.
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20. Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
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22. John Frow, *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995b), p. 125.
23. Spiers, *The Culture of the Publisher's Series*, p. 36.
24. Ibid., p. 23.
25. Ibid., p. 19.
26. Ekwensi to Sambrook, May 17, 1963.
27. Currey to Ekwensi.
28. Ekwensi to Currey.
29. Akin Thomas to James Currey, November 12, 1979.
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31. For a broader discussion of contemporary publishing and the psychology of marketing literature see: P.D. McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice, 1880–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); E. Mack, R. Chow, M. Dutton, H. Harootunian and R.C. Morris, *Manufacturing Modern Japanese Literature: Publishing, Prizes, and the Ascription of Literary Value* (Duke University Press, 2010); J.B. Thompson, *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century* (Wiley, 2013); S. Brown, *Consuming Books: The Marketing and Consumption of Literature* (Taylor & Francis, 2006); S. Kong, *Consuming Literature: Best Sellers and the Commercialization of Literary Production in Contemporary China* (Stanford University Press, 2005).
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48. Soyinka to Rosenthal, November 16, 1972.
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CHAPTER 4

The Seeds of the Series: Chinua Achebe and the Educational Publisher

Here, then, is an adequate revolution for me to espouse—to help my society regain its belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of the denigration and self-abasement. And it is essentially a question of education, in the best sense of that word…. The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. (Achebe, "Novelist as Teacher").[1]

Although philosophy does not amount to its institutional or pedagogical moments, it is obvious that all the differences in the tradition, style, language, and philosophical nationality are translated or incarnated in institutional or pedagogical models, and sometimes even produced by these structures (*primary and secondary school, university, research institutions*). (Derrida, *Ethics, Institutions, and the Right to Philosophy*)[2]

The Nature-Culture Scene of Instruction: A Dialectical Approach

Certain aspects of Chinua Achebe's work align with Jacque Derrida's compressed thought in the epigraph above. Achebe's project has been described as affirmative in ways that clearly set it apart from, or put it at variance with, Derrida's deconstruction. However, a glance through the lens of Derrida's singular proposition above may in fact unveil a new dimension of Achebe's work, namely: that the mythical or traditional ethos of Achebe's novels are not incompatible with a material theory of

O. Ibironke, *Remapping African Literature*, African Histories and Modernities, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69296-8_4

production if only we can uncover their actual points of incarnation in material life. These points of incarnation can be located in the multiple pedagogical functions of the texts, as well as within the simultaneously diffused and underlying ideology that define Achebe's artistic philosophy, functions that are equally incarnated in the institutional instruments of textual production, which sometimes operate through and are piloted by the author function. Pedagogical relations and functions reside in the confluence of ideas, models, structures, and bodies. On the basis of this proposition, the novels as an aesthetic exploration of the career of the book in Africa, as well as the author's publishing relationships, can certainly be brought altogether within the grid of a material theory of literary production, but more importantly, these relationships as properties of texts could be seen as consisting ultimately in literary form as an advance consciousness that prefigures, and to some extent preconfigures, ideologies of production and the relations they engender.

Incarnation in the classical sense presupposes a "spirit" acquiring a new body, and in the philosophical sense, idealism. Derrida uses this same terminology considerably in many other writings, and especially in *The Specters of Marx*,[3] perhaps, because Marx himself had used that rather unexpected term "specter" in relation to his theory of material production. If incarnation were construed in a Marxist sense, that is, in terms of the dialectics of material production, Derrida's statement in our epigraph could be taken as an application of the dialectics by which pedagogical institutions and models simultaneously incarnate and produce different traditions, styles, and philosophies of writing that we designate by that inadequate, and often problematic, category of culture or nationality. In other words, there is an intricate triangular network between literary traditions and models, pedagogical institutions and models, and cultural/national institutions and models; it is worth exploring how these models inform, incarnate, and intersect with each other in any dynamic historical situation or process. At the center of this triangular network is the pedagogical function.

Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron[4] have argued that pedagogical institutions and the pedagogic systems as a whole are central to the reproduction of the social order, especially through the reproduction of the structure of class relations that habituates, institutionalizes, or is adapted to that order. The pedagogic function that reproduces "docile doggedness" in social subjects marks the "true homologies between the bureaucracy and the educational system."[5] Within the educational system

itself are relatively autonomous sub-systems, whose disparate functions cannot be separated from the ideology of the educational system as a whole. This chapter examines the publishing system as a sub-system of the educational system; and specifically, within that, the network of educational publishing that serves the school markets. If Bourdieu and Passeron could observe a homology between bureaucracy as such and the educational system, the fundamental connection between the objective mechanisms of the school as a pedagogical institution and school publishing as a business are, in my view, even more potent.

In other words, the pedagogic function is diffused throughout the educational system and sub-systems. This function is also fulfilled by institutions and systems that are not traditionally assigned the task of pedagogy. Pedagogy itself can manifest in different forms and modes. Modes of inculcation vary from academic to practical modes. Whatever the modes of inculcation or the inculcated content, the pedagogic work is always defined by the following effect as captured in this long sentence:

> Because pedagogic work (whether performed by the School, a Church or a Party) has the effect of producing individuals durably and systematically modified by a prolonged and systematic transformative action tending to endow them with the same durable, transposable training (habitus), i.e. with common schemes of thought, perception, appreciation and action; because the serial production of identically programmed individuals demands and historically gives rise to the production of programming agents themselves identically programmed and of standardized conserving and transmitting instruments; because the length of time necessary for the advent of a systematic transformation of the transformative action is at least equal to the time required for serial production of transformed reproducers, i.e. agents capable of exerting a transformative action reproductive of the training they themselves have received; because, above all, the educational institution is the only one in full possession, by virtue of its essential function, of the power to select and train, by an action exerted throughout the period of apprenticeship, those to whom it entrusts the task of perpetuating it and is therefore in the best position, by definition, to impose the norms of its self-perpetuation, if only by using its power to reinterpret external demands; and finally because teachers constitute the most finished products of the system of production which it is, inter alia, their task to reproduce—it is understandable that, as Durkheim noted, educational Institutions have a relatively autonomous history and that the tempo of the transformation of academic institutions and culture is particularly slow.[6]

"The School, a Church or a Party," even nature itself, all perform some pedagogic work; they all reproduce the "habitus," a term that is central to Bourdieu's philosophy, a term that also captures the power, and the totalitarian tendencies of pedagogic work in the serial reproduction of "common schemes of thought, perception, appreciation and action" performed through identical or universal programs and instruments. The mass induction of totalizing structures is pedagogic in its essential attribute. The pedagogic function produces conditions of possibility for totalitarian formations. Bourdieu's alternation of "School," "Church," or "Party" ought to evoke specific memories of historical moments, and the correspondences and continuities of the ideological heritages of secular, religious, and political institutions. The almost identical ideological functions and histories of institutions compel an examination of the ideology of pedagogic work within the matrices of total explanations, and the horizon of totalitarian constrictions that Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*[7] rigorously contemplated. In other words, there is a possibility here of bridging together in a dialectical fashion, the ideology and structure of educational practices: Bourdieu's framing of the ideology of educational systems and Arendt's philosophical work on totalitarian structures that could guide us through a contrapuntal exploration of the nature-culture scene of instruction in Achebe's novels, the practice and ideology of book-learning in colonial schools that he depicts, and the context of the relationship between the structures of production and distribution of African literature and the pedagogic function that in those novels are expressed in the very form of representation as reflection on pedagogy. The systematic modification of individuals is contrasted with the decentering politics of the mechanisms and systems of production, effected through the modification of production relations and function, that is, institutional modification through authorial designs. The interplay of material exigencies of cultural production and authorial design allows us to resurrect author function but within a grid of multiple and reciprocal determinations. The dialectics of how publishers and editors shape textual production—but also how in reverse or *in advance* in their pedigree as Series Advisers, Editorial Advisers, publisher's readers, editors of anthologies, literary models and mentors, and so forth, authors have also profoundly shaped the very standards and preferences of editorial judgment—is a model of the deimperializing poetics of world literature that Edward Said anticipated in *Culture and Imperialism*.[8] Thus, to appreciate fully the pedagogic work of social and cultural institutions, we must engage pedagogy in several manifestations and incarnations.

Let us examine literary nationality as "incarnating" pedagogical institutions and models, and vice versa. The ideas of literature and nationality, or the idea of literary nationality cannot exist outside the corporeality of institutions, as well as the great corpus that they generate, and which pedagogical moments interminably reveal and disseminate. In the same way, colonial nationality, the main focus of critique in Achebe's early novels, is embodied as soft power by its entire corpus, language, as much as by the particular model of institutions in which its material essence was grounded, such as colonial administration, Christian missions, schools, courts, the interpreters, and the army. We cannot talk about Achebe's novels without talking about the unique models that were the product of the operations of specific individual agents as well as institutions within the historical movement of the African society that they capture, and the interactions and intercessions of micro- and macro-models. Derrida connects the nationality of thought to the essential properties of form: tradition, style, and language, as if at the fundamental level, "*all the differences*,"[9] for instance, that "specter" or "myth" constitutes as consciousness or form are primarily a difference of mode, or accent, which lies in that peculiar dynamics of how it communicates: how it was taught, and thought, to speak.

The aim of this chapter is to highlight the different scenes of instruction, and their transformations and centrality within the nexus of culture and material life as Achebe depicted them in his novels, through an analysis of the objective structures in which pedagogical imperatives were anchored within the historical movement of an African society. If pedagogy is an imperative for Achebe, it is so precisely because he conceives the differences in nationality and in culture, like Derrida, as ultimately being the product of a mode of learning, with the mode of learning corresponding to the overall mode of production. The nation exists in its teaching; the culture exists in how we learn to live it. As we are taught, and as we learn, so also we live and reproduce ourselves as subjects within a culture or nation.

One compelling evidence for attributing to Achebe a pedagogical ideology, apart from his famous statement of his aesthetic principle of the novelist as teacher, comes from his first paragraph in the essay "What is Nigeria to me?"[10] In this essay, Achebe begins by arguing that, "Nigerian nationality was for me and my generation an acquired taste—like cheese. Or better still, like *ballroom* dancing. Not dancing per se, for that came naturally; but this titillating version of slow-slow-quick-quick-slow performed in close

body contact with a female against a strange, elusive beat. I found, however, that once I had overcome my initial awkwardness I could do it pretty well."[11] In this example, Achebe presents a perfect model for the theory of the incarnation of pedagogical ideology. It should no longer be an Achebe attribution we have to justify that nationality does not come naturally, not even to the so-called "natural born" or any future generations. If it were his view that it does, pan-Igbo feelings and nationality would not have been portrayed by him as a postcolonial invention. According to Achebe, the idea of a Nigerian nation was produced and inculcated primarily through the school. The "Nigerian stuff" he states, "…came with progress in school."[12] Igbo marginality within Nigeria amplifies but does not entirely account for the reality of nationality, in Achebe's experience, as an elusive identity. Because he posits all national, supranational, and subnational identities to be learned and acquired, he projects the "Igbo stuff" as being equally acquired through cultural, historical, and political processes.

At every level, therefore, it requires first the instrumentation of a translating authority and the acquisition mechanisms of culture to impart the naturalizing effects of nationality, that is, national memory, the equivalence of what Gayatri Spivak, speaking in relation to the comparable mechanisms within all the languages of the world, calls "lingual memory:" "If, on the other hand, we recall the helplessness of subjects before history—our own history and that of the languaged place—in their acquisition of their first dwelling in language, we just may sense the challenge of producing a simulacrum, always recalling that this language too, depending on the subject's history, can inscribe lingual memory."[13] The acquisition of the first dwelling in language is never natural, it comes with great effort and reinforcement; neither are acquisitions of subsequent dwellings in other "languaged places," any less artificial. This is why for Achebe, as an agent and producer of culture, novelists at the birth of a nation, regardless of their "origins" and their proximity to or distance from dwelling "places" of language could only reproduce a simulacrum of form that is always equally capable of inscribing national and cultural memories. This is our first instance of a writer's advance pedagogical consciousness prefiguring and preconfiguring relations of production.

The central principle of pedagogy requires a great teacher also to be a great learner. The tragedy of colonial enlightenment in this regard is that it restricts and constricts the flow of learning, by the insistence on the burden of learning as the panacea of the natives. The concept of the scene of instruction, the teaching-learning situational dynamics that define the

environment in which history takes place, are so crucial to Achebe's philosophy of writing that he surmises: "I think in the final analysis writing is learning."[14] The text is a site of instruction, not only for the public reader but for the author himself, and the publisher, as well.

If Achebe's works, then, became bestsellers, they achieved that status precisely because they fulfilled the pedagogical imperative of their time by manifesting an advance consciousness of that imperative. However, as the history of bestselling novels has confirmed, it is not sufficient for a novel to fulfill the pedagogical imperative of its time to become a bestseller. There has to be an institutional appropriation based on a reciprocal reinforcement of that imperative. Because this institutional need is not always explicit, and is perhaps only obvious after the fact, it is the function of an archeotheory of literature informed by the history of the book to discover it, and map out the confluence of institutional needs and the aesthetic formation in which its requirements were fictioned and fulfilled in advance.

This is in part a reminder that the initial use of the term "bestseller" was introduced in publishing in the aftermath of mega sales of novels induced by the introduction of universal elementary education in England. This meant that authors were no longer made available by subscription to a closed-circuit audience but for the first time, to the general public. This possibility of reaching the general public directly by virtue of universal education transforms authorial function and aesthetic practice in the same way that literature could further broaden the progressive and transformational agenda of the universal education of the public. The example of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* could be taken as proof of the claim that one of the biggest consumers of novels was and is the educational institution. The school market and educational publishing were crucial to the growth and development of African literature; and for this fact, it goes without saying that educational criteria played a strong role in the selection of fictional works that underscored the mutual investment of authors and publishers in an educational conception of the function of fiction.

James Currey underscored the consequence of the historical association of African literature with schools. Inside Africa, there had been great sales because they sold well in schools; outside Africa they were not taken up by reviewers and by the broader community of readers precisely because of that assumption that they were schoolbooks:

> Many people have asked me why, when I set up my own business, I did not start up a counter African Writers Series. The reason is that I could see that the great African era of the African writers series was over. Because the market

> for the series was now predominantly outside Africa, I felt that the time had come for a partial change of tactics. Even the best writers had been under-recognized and under-sold in Britain. Reviewers and book shops tended to assume that because they were published by Heinemann Educational Books in paperback there were "just school books."[15]

But this was the mid-1980s about two decades after the African Writers Series (AWS) was launched. Currey's statement above is a testament to the limits of his own efforts in transforming the identity of the AWS from the initial objective of educational publishing.

Alan Hill, the chairman of Heinemann Educational, publisher of the series, had established Heinemann as a serious educational publisher beginning in January 1946, a year before the independence of India. It was also at the moment of the victory over Nazi Germany and the triumphal return of the Labor Party. Hill's intervention came along the same trajectory with the program of the Labor Party after World War I, investing in the educational infrastructure of the colonies. "After the First World War the Colonial Office set up government secondary schools in Ghana and Nigeria. By the time I reached West Africa there was a flourishing school system, leading to British O and A Level examinations, and culminating in the new Universities of Accra and Ibadan."[16] This new space that opens up within the ensemble of colonial apparatuses would come to have deeper implications for the foundations of what today we call the postcolonial in general and postcolonial African literary production in particular. The foundations of postcolonial knowledge were built from within the institutions and infrastructures of empire, especially at the very moment of its disintegration, or transition. These foundations of postcolonial knowledge contain unsettled sediments of historical contradictions, and because they are historical in origin, they are themselves dependent upon history for their resolution.

The educational publisher carried on the banner of colonial enlightenment, after political independence, where colonial education proper had foundered. The AWS began and succeeded primarily as part of the educational agenda of Heinemann that Hill articulated in his book: "to publish across the whole range of writing intended for enlightenment, as opposed to entertainment."[17] During Hill's visit to India shortly after its independence, in 1956, he made the following curious but instructive remark: "Three days in Bombay, spent visiting bookshops, schools, the university and the Education Department, were enough to convince me of

the pervasive strength of the English language. The India which British soldiers and administrators had lost was being regained by British educators and publishers."[18] With the establishment of new governments and new social formations, it was clear to Hill that, insofar as the very idea of educational publishing came from what he describes as "the general realization that a democratic society must go hand in hand with education,"[19] an investment in "the liberating influence of our educational list"[20] had become both necessary and inevitable. The inevitability of colonial institutions, publishing and educational, in providing the impetus for the creation of postcolonial literature is itself a contradiction that has yet to fully resolve itself. It was with this historical inevitability of the educational program of British publishers that Achebe's pedagogical mission was to coincide. The questions of how his novels functioned within that moment, the role different readers and institutions assigned to them, and their relation to the matrices of that historical inevitability, are questions that ask us to probe a text's standing in relation to the objective spirit of its time, questions that are indeed the fundamental task of an archeotheory of African literature.

The Heinemann archives overwhelmingly reveal how different editorial directors attempted to define and repackage the series. Van Milne, the first general editor of the series, stated its aim most clearly when he commissioned John Reed and Clive Wake to produce an anthology of African poetry. "Our African Writers Series is principally educational in character and the anthology we have asked you and Dr. Wake to prepare would rank as a book to be recommended or prescribed at ordinary level."[21] John Reed's response demonstrates that he has properly digested the educational criteria: "We have tried not to include poems which are unsuitable for school children at O level, either because of their difficulty or their subject matter … and in which language and prosody are not faulty."[22]

If the argument is that culture recruits its writers from among those who already demonstrate an advance consciousness of its requirement, then what we are saying in effect is that although two parts of Achebe's trilogy were written before the launch of the AWS in 1962, those novels fulfilled in advance the educational criteria to the letter, and in the spirit of John Reed's precise articulation above. In contrast to the remoteness of the canon of colonial literature, Achebe's novels offered African students lessons in a variety of English that was well adapted to their environment, which showcased the possibilities and prospects of writing in English that was not too difficult, and at the same time was

of interesting subject matter. These novels were models of educational or "school books" even before those criteria became conceivable or were formulated.

To state this principle in reverse, culture has no requirement of its own that it did not derive from the products and forms of everyday life and practices. Achebe could be said to have anticipated criteria that he had helped to invent. This is the deterministic loop between art and culture, and also between nature and culture. After all, it was the great success of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* that drew Alan Hill to West Africa and of which he was later to write: "In 1958 a remarkable episode changed the direction of my publishing life and added a new dimension to the firm's list."[23] He further states of his decision to travel to West Africa for the first time: "It was now clear to me that I should visit Africa, in particular West Africa—and for more than one reason. Achebe was not an isolated phenomenon … The time was ripe. There must be other writers comparable to Achebe, awaiting a publisher with the confidence and resources to launch them on a world-wide market."[24] Achebe's novels were thus the seeds of the series, simultaneously producing in advance, anticipating and fulfilling the pedagogical criteria of their co-optation and their foundational role within the series.

This formulation is tantamount to turning Derrida's *aporia* into a dialectic. Derrida has argued that "The structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and its relationship to the future."[25] But the focus of our own emphasis is on how the archivable content makes the law that the archiving archive implements in the form of "deferred obedience."[26] We challenge the suggestion that structure or infrastructure is more important if we hold that the infrastructure can develop according to the law of an instituting advancement in superstructure. Structure and content, if they presuppose a hierarchical relationship would be bad analogues for publisher–writer relations; if, however, they are construed in the sense of being coconstitutive and mutually dependent, in a way that renders the question of the importance of one over the other irrelevant, then, they become useful. In fact, I understand Derrida as asking us to disrupt any sense of primacy implicit in such relationships: "The sinews of all 'deferred' […] obedience, turns out to disrupt, disturb, entangle forever the reassuring distinction between the terms of this alternative […]."[27] If however, we turn this perceived distinction between structure and content around and view it as represented by a similar dialectic of nature-culture, given that

nature is the ultimate material infrastructure and containing structure, we might arrive at a different understanding from Derrida. In this formulation, culture-content, that is, writing, becomes the more active and transformative user of nature-structure, which in this case will be the institutions of publishing. When he proceeds by asking the following questions: "does one base one's thinking of the future on an archived event …?" and "Can an *experience*, an *existence*, in general, only receive and record, only archive such an event to the extent that the structure of this existence and of its temporalization makes this archivization possible?"[28] Derrida concludes that this relationship between event/content and archive/structure presents us with a condition of an irresolvable *aporia*. In contrast, I see these questions as part of the essential dialectics of postcolonial production.

After Van Milne returned to Nelson, Keith Sambrook, who took over from him in 1963, continued to publish and promote the educational list. Like Alan Hill, he also traveled to Africa, this time not in search of authors but markets, school markets. What he wrote on December 9, 1963 to Paul Edwards reveals a vision philosophically grounded in educational value:

> I think I met everyone in Africa who is now responsible for organizing the teaching of African literature. It has taken on a rather frightening intensity. This is natural enough but, much as one is interested in new African writing and wants to see more writers of the quality of Achebe, some of the plans for honours courses in African literature are rather daunting. Your own letter seemed to me to strike a splendid balance.
>
> In a way I suppose publishers are the key to all this. They can offer to publish indiscriminately and flood the market with a lot of third-rate material, or be extremely careful and slowly build up a body of African writing which will stand examination at degree level.
>
> … I have great hopes for the Equiano. There is great interest in Nigeria and elsewhere. I'd like to do other reprints of older African works, though again one has to be careful about reprinting things which are of no particular value except as curiosities. (Sambrook to Paul Edwards)

The claim to have met everyone in Africa who was responsible for teaching African literature, even in 1963, speaks to the scale of Heinemann's program and ambitions. This should not surprise us because the publisher, more than others in the field of literary production, could be seen as the one who must maintain contact, literally, with "everyone" connected with the production, distribution, and consumption of literary works. Heinemann Educational Books (HEB), because it primarily targeted the

school market in Africa, maintained an outreach to teachers at every level, boards and ministries of education, and even Heads of States. A promotional mailer HEB prepared for Sudan demonstrates John Reed's understanding of what the educational use of the novels should entail and how it served the purpose of the acquisition of the English language.

The series as an English language series, as argued in a previous chapter, was acceptable overall only to those who had already subscribed to the idea of the Commonwealth as a historical, cultural, and political inevitability. Many would argue that Chinua Achebe, to a greater extent, was a Commonwealth writer who tried to redefine the boundaries and the "being-in common" of that Commonwealth. So, when Alan Hill discovered in India, as he said, "the pervasive strength of the English Language" and instituted the AWS as an educational imprint, the educational imprint was inseparable from the increasingly wider use of the English language. It is worth repeating here the most compelling argument for the use of English at the turn of the age of Empire, as the language of postcolonial African literature. The imperative of the Commonwealth cultural and literary project was sounded by intellectuals like Paul Edwards who, in a fascinating expose on West African Narrative, provided an account, now standard argument, for the adoption of English. He argued that "it might be unwise to pursue complete linguistic, as well as political, independence" because "political independence is resulting in even more communication between West African nations and the rest of the world, so that a common language is going to be indispensable."[29] The English language as a vehicle of cultural integration and cosmopolitan education remains largely, as uncontroversial a proposition as it was at the 1950s when Achebe made the assertion, matter-of-factly, that the role of African writers in a new nation is to "do the work of extending the frontiers of English … to accommodate African thought-patterns … through their mastery of English"![30] The educational agenda of the publisher was thus inextricably, maybe not deliberately, tied to language. The significance of emphasizing this connection is to set up the two major challenges to this agenda in the next two chapters. The focus in Chap. 5 on James Currey's publication of Soyinka's *The Interpreters* examines the most potent challenge to the educational criterion, while Chap. 6 examines the challenge to the English language itself via notions of authenticity. The place of the English language in African literature and culture is the most important difference between Achebe and Ngugi. As I intend to show in Chap. 6, Heinemann's embrace of Ngugi's radical proposal: that in order to reach the African

people directly, African literature should be written in African languages, constitutes another shift from the original objective of the series.

What does it mean for a work to be published under the banner of the series, and what is the place of Chinua Achebe within it? The considerations of educational publishing and the educational criteria loomed large not only in the production of the series, but also in the conception and philosophy of writing as represented by the case of Achebe. The primary and secondary schools, the university, and research institutions, which Derrida highlights in our preface, to which we now add publishing institutions, are a few of the forms in which objective structures and institutional acts as products or producers of tradition, style, and language of literature constitute the nationality of a contemporary writing. The nationality of writing is the expression of the contemporaneity of the objective spirit in whose immanent materiality are incarnated culture and language. Whether we call it criteria or imperative, pedagogy cannot be seen simply as an external imposition for the obvious reason that writers such as Achebe contributed in no small measure to the idea of literary pedagogy as the imperative, and condition, of African writing. His novels reflect in their technique a meditation on the educational aims of literary pedagogy associated with their production and consumption.

The Objective Structure of African Literary Production: Determinations and Incarnations

Literary pedagogy is about the instructions of speaking subjects, speaking acts, and acts of speaking. It is not only the consumers of culture who are conditioned by the form of utterances or silences, and for whom literature is instructive; producers of culture also take their leads and language from the very literatures that they produce. If this proposition appears to be a positivist and optimistic assessment, it is because it has simply never occurred to us what every successful publication reveals *ab initio* is probably all that there is to literary publishing and history. This is not to negate the contingencies of consciousness forged through the multiplicity of interlocking processes and procedures of production that set the dialectics of aesthetic choices in dynamic motion. The proposition of a reverse textual transformation of institutional function takes root in this basic idea. Incarnation is the reactivation of the passive and less-visible elements of the objective spirit. Institutional acts reproduce a cultural essence if those acts are aligned with an original purpose. Pedagogical

institutions are agents of cultural reproduction to the extent that pedagogy in its non-critical orthodoxy is itself an act of reproduction. As Bourdieu posits, pedagogical institutions are fiercely committed to the freedom through which they reproduce their operational structures. Within the very operational structures of pedagogical institutions are the essential prerequisites for the reproduction of social hierarchies and structures of privileges. The functional transformation that I am proposing occurs when the purpose of institutional acts changes or is made to seem somewhat different. Brecht and Benjamin have pointed out that the progressive writer in a capitalist, and we might add postcolonial, society can transform the conditions of production through strategic acts of functional transformation. This is particularly demonstrable with the example of early postcolonial African literature that Achebe pioneered.

As literature, Achebe's novels offer a menu of instructions about the different times and places in which African subjects have their being. They endow us with knowledge at an ideological level, of what determinants define the possibilities, and continuum, of events that require that certain choices be made. This struggle between interests and conscious will on the one hand, and the total set of existential possibilities on the other, is at the heart of the formation of individual subjectivity that writing explores. It is a struggle that underscores the inseparable nature of the question of ideology from the question of writing, because it concerns material becoming of incarnation.

The idea of incarnation takes on a dialectical form when it is also applied simultaneously, as is the case here, to how material existence is always already represented in sometimes immaterial form in language. Place, people, and events as contents are inseparable from the form in which we encounter their incarnations in literature. Incarnation has a dialectical becoming, in the acquisition of form by specific content, the formation of content by form, and therefore, in the coming into being that marks nebulous nationality with the difference of form, the difference constituted by incarnated or *contented* form. This coming-into-form of incarnation defines itself against the backdrop of the primal mythic scene: that preexistence and prehistory of which we were told, the earth was without form, and void.

In the very beginning, the earth was void not because it lacked content but because its content was yet without form. Form is to being what literature—as a form, its language, style, and tradition—is to nationality. The unformed earth then was inert matter, not yet what Sartre calls "wrought

matter," which I take to mean matter that has been worked on, incarnated, and shaped by the force of purpose, even as purpose itself is continually refined through reflection. The question that must be posed is how in every age, human beings create new forms from material content by the ability to establish a regime of exploitation through labor. The aim of historical materialism, our method of analysis, is to discover in the movements of African literary history, and in its making, not only the forces, but also the purpose, or spirit, if you will, of its transformation: its telos. The question is not why its form has changed, but why it has changed the *specific* way it did. A telos here may be different from Kant's "Thema" or Derrida's "Thesis." They all, however, are iterations of Sartre's "Objective Spirit," which Derrida's very language of incarnation already powerfully evokes.

The term "Objective Spirit," is not to be confused with "Absolute Spirit." In Sartre's definition, "The Objective Spirit of an age is at once the sum of works published during a specific period and the multiplicity of totalizations effected by contemporary readers."[31] This means that the term refers to the world of reading and writing and the general terms and conditions under which these activities take shape in a reciprocal fashion. This term serves to highlight and capture the essential requirement of writing, the necessary condition for writing in Africa that was contemporaneous with the late-colonial and early-postcolonial periods, which we have already identified in the case of Chinua Achebe as pedagogical requirements. Sartre purposefully retained the Hegelian term "spirit" to address the subjective totalizations of reading practices. But he also slipped into the use of the term "structure" in place of "spirit" to mark the materialist exteriorization of the Hegelian dialectics. While emphasis will be placed here on the particular combination in the term "objective structure" to underscore a Marxist rendering of phenomena, we will nonetheless account for the dynamism and the self-constitutive space of subjectivity within structure.

In discussing the criteria by which art recruited its artists in the decade after the 1850s, Sartre argues that for the artist, the cultural order of a given period can only be experienced in the *specific* way that the "particular structures of the historical moment require." This is because as a totality, culture imposes imperatives for subscription, participation, and discrimination. What are the implications of this imperative for writing? Sartre goes on to state concerning the 1850s: "the objective movement that transforms culture on the basis of deeper transformations … produces

such strict and contradictory norms that the contemporary moments of art cannot be realized as a determination of the Objective Spirit except in the form of *art-neurosis*."[32]

What is the distinctive determination of the cultural imperative of *art-neurosis* for Wole Soyinka, who experienced the postindependence era neurotically in the same period that I would argue, Chinua Achebe, in contrast, experienced it *pedagogically, even before the civil war*? Pedagogy and neurosis can be viewed as mutually engendered norms within the motion of historical transition. The disparity in Soyinka and Achebe's experiences is a function of the contradictory nature of cultural norms that Sartre mentioned in the passage above. The huge contrast in the artistic experience or expression of neurosis and pedagogy cannot be overstated. These contrastive expressions of writers in relation to the determination of a shared objective reality render the removal of capitalization from the concept of Objective Spirit quite pertinent for our purpose. In its small letter formulation, the objective spirit represents a significant departure from Sartre. By removing the capitals, we remove the expectations of epistemic, ideological, and formal unity, or uniformity in the forms in which the objective spirit or the imperatives of writing are incarnated. In this context of diffused and weak determination, we enable our analysis to account for the divergent expressions of great writers of the same age such as Achebe and Soyinka. In other words, it becomes possible to theoretically articulate and reconcile the requirements of the objective spirit as art-pedagogy for one author, and art-neurosis for their contemporary. It is logical for moments of historical transition to be experienced as a disruption or dissonance, at the same time that they present challenges that require steep learning curves. More importantly, decapitalizing the objective spirit shifts the emphasis toward the contradictory nature of the forces and norms of culture, and enlarges our analytical capacity to engage with the backflows and reversals through which the objective spirit is itself being reconstituted.

For the moment, our focus is Achebe for whom a determination of the objective spirit in the late-colonial and early-postindependence periods can only be realized in the form of art-pedagogy. Following the logic of what Sartre calls "normative determination"[33] that the storyteller in the new cultural order can no longer maintain the status of a griot, the poet-historian, he or she must now assume the function of a teacher. This also means that not only is the function of the novelist in a new nation to personify the praxis of writing by first incarnating a model of literary nationality through

the narrative form, thereby providing a platform for its inculcation, but also by inducing the acculturation of otherwise colonizing institutions. The novel in effect participates in this reverse acquisition of a culture at the same time that its production, to a certain degree, leaves traces of the "irreducible passivities"[34] of its cultural provenance, which become reincarnated in the very institutions and speech that produce it. Art-pedagogy is thus a dialectical praxis; its very hyphenation bears a dualism that is reproduced at every level of cultural production and consumption. It illustrates the processes of cultural production and the transformation of the conditions of production.

In the previous chapter, I strategically deployed the political map of Africa as the object through which the imperatives of an objective movement of colonial history were anchored, and as the template that both enabled and authorized the Heinemann map of African literary production. In these maps, political and literary, are the incarnations of the colonial forces at work within the conditions of postcolonial production; they represent the passive principles that informed the selection of texts that African authors would challenge, and in some cases, transform. In this chapter, my interest is in the career of the book in Achebe's trilogy as an object of great tensions and divisions, especially along the great thick lines of conscience and consciousness, and at all levels of material life: cultural, political, and social. By highlighting the book as the object around which the destiny of the world of the novels was overdetermined, I hope to reassess the question of functional transformation in relation to the African writer by setting him or her against the objective spirit of the age incarnated by the book.

I proceed from the view that it is possible to explore Chinua Achebe's understanding of the duty of the writer, or the mark of a great writer, in the specific sense of not merely accepting the imperative of his time as destiny. This understanding is consistent with the basic duty of man, as Marx conceived it, to educate himself directly and reproduce his own essence through work or labor. It is equally consistent with the duty of the worker who Sartre contends must set his knowledge or education in the "practical realm"[35] of work against all "alien ideologies"[36] that are being orchestrated to "illuminate his condition and offer him the means to tolerate it."[37] According to Sartre, "these ideologies come into permanent conflict with *his own* ideology—which issues communally, like a myth, from his hopes, his despairs, the refusal to accept his condition as an inevitable destiny."[38] His intuitive knowledge in the practical realm is "the living actualization of

praxis." It is his only hope for taking charge of his own destiny—which I argue is the stake in all of Achebe's novels, and most certainly his artistic objective.

The whole idea of the practical realm is the realm in which knowledge is acquired through practice, as a product of everyday activities, not by the elaboration of concepts. The epistemic value of physical work or the activity of everyday has been rediscovered in the idea of "situated learning," which holds that "enquiries into learning and cognition must take serious account of social interaction and physical activity."[39] These physical activities are themselves grounded in communal practices, and for this reason, they provide common ground for the beliefs, and non-verbal ideologies of the community. This mode of analysis is in line with Marxian understanding of how "real, active men" produce concepts and ideas, which marks the practical realm as a living source of instruction, the primary and foundational realm of production, knowledge formation, and ultimately, ontology:

> The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas etc.—*real, active men*, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest form.[40]

The act of "refusal" is the definitive gesture of the tragic heroes of Achebe's novels who follow their intuitive sense of natural justice that flowed directly from everyday practices of the community to challenge colonialism. Their destiny as practical men is based on the hope that their work as an instrument of self-reproduction will confer essential human dignity, which is directly linked with the ability to earn and sustain social recognition and status.[41]

The work of man on earth parallels that of the writer as a worker. It is not devoid of ideology simply because its form of ideology has not been consciously isolated, articulated, and elaborated. If our basic proposal here is to ask us to reread Achebe's first three novels as a narrative of the coming of the African book, we do so by centralizing the idea of work, or the

ideology of its function as a form of education and transformation, as that which validates existence. This centrality of work is not a particularly bourgeois notion, as we will soon discover with the example of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* where work, hard work, is in fact the form in which the objective spirit of his traditional society was also incarnated. Achebe was mindful of this parallel; he often cites the egalitarian and republican ethos of the Igbo culture, and may have intended striking this parallel to prompt a positive revaluation of the so-called traditional. Once greatness is no longer assured by hard work, despair and anxiety emerge, and Okonkwo's eventual tragedy becomes inevitable because it is impossible for him to unlearn the specific way his consciousness and his body have been conditioned. This conditioning becomes a fetter, a barrier to the acquisition of a new, and foreign, consciousness that is tied to a mode of work, and relations, which is not only different, but negates and sublates his conditioning.

The question of culture here is considered epiphenomenal to the question of work because as Sartre suggests, "at the origin of culture is work, *lived, actual* work in so far as it surpasses and retains nature in itself by definition."[42] By definition, then, we are talking about a specific kind of work that is *lived* and *actual*. Sartre emphasizes those two words to deliberately mark the form of work that is at once dialectically engaged with nature and not reified. It is not clear how the novel addresses the question of surpassing nature. It is thus understandable that a lot of attention has been paid to African culture and tradition in the analysis of Achebe's works. This appears to have been where Achebe himself had indicated their significance.

At the risk of overgeneralizing, it seems possible to summarize the entire Chinua Achebe critical heritage in western academia, in a borrowed paragraph from Milton H. Kreiger's letter to Heinemann's J. C. Watson in November 1981. Kreiger, a professor at Western Washington, was quite taken by Bessie Head's *Serowe: Village of the Rain-Wind*,[43] and makes a comparative statement that is both insightful and accurately reflects the institutional needs that Achebe's novels fulfilled in real time, and perhaps, continues, half a century on, to fulfill: "The book, it seems to me, fulfils many of the needs which Achebe's novels also satisfy, a multi-generational story of an African community, but it's told differently and brought into more recent and conclusive focus than the Achebe material many of us have come to rely on for 'perspective'" on tradition and modernity. Perhaps that's a point you could make as you look for its market."[44] It is

important to highlight that Kreiger's letter reveals one of the ways in which editors and publishers come to form ideas about texts. Editorial judgment is composite. It requires, and is based upon, other judgments. This is why Sambrook is right to have implied the need for an editor to be in continuous contact with the network of production as a whole. With a few exceptions, such as could be found in Chidi Amuta's "The Materialism of Cultural Nationalism"[45] or Biodun Jeyifo's "For Chinua Achebe: The Resilience and the Predicament of Obierika,"[46] "The Problem of Realism in *Things Fall Apart*: A Marxist Exegesis,"[47] there has been very little deviation from the "tradition and modernity" frame of Achebe's critical heritage and the institutional utility of his works that Kreiger describes.

The comparison to *Serowe*, however, offers the opportunity of an unexpected opening. *Serowe* was the product of a series of extensive interviews of over a hundred villagers. The large village is a trade and commerce center critical to the history of Botswana. While the interwoven personal narratives of the villagers have been the focal point of the novel, the concept of work and the difficulty that Head encountered defining it with precision I think is more relevant to the undercurrents of the two novels. Because the village was a commercial hub, the stories of the villagers had to be situated within the economic context of their social activities. In her notes to the editor, Head struggled with the correct occupational classification of her respondents: "NB that the word 'occupation' is not given (correctly) under the volunteers' names here. (See also my General Notes re use of this word.) This word could be deleted throughout, especially as in African traditional societies work is even harder to define than in industrial societies."[48] If Head deletes the occupational categories of people whose social and cultural activities are to a great extent defined by the village as a commercial center because of the difficulty in naming these occupations with precision, this leaves the text with a deliberate point of excision, an excision that Sarah Nuttall tells us opens up to excess. In other words, the text bears this excision as an unconscious, non-verbal trace, indicating the *aporia* in measuring the traditional and modern.

Kreiger is right, *Serowe* is like *Things Fall Apart*, but not only because it marks the transition from traditional societies into modern ones in Africa. In our account of the fall of Okonkwo, we tend to omit a small but important detail, namely that Okonkwo actually returned to an Umuofia that had become Serowe in the short seven years he was away. "There were many men and women in Umuofia who did not feel as strongly as Okonkwo about the new dispensation. The white man had indeed brought

a lunatic religion, but he had also built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umuofia."[49] It must have been part of the imperative for Achebe to situate the transformations in that society within the changes in the mode of its economic production. If Head found it challenging to repress that imperative in her own work by deleting occupational classifications, one could only imagine the possible challenges for Achebe who focused exclusively on African traditional societies whose occupational categories Head says are even more difficult to classify than a modern African village. We see traces of what appears to be Achebe's similar encounter with the problem of occupational classification or at least a strong interest in the subject by virtue of the kind of book he was reading, or frantically searching for. In a letter to Alan Hill and James Currey Achebe sends an SOS concerning the location of a particular book. "I sent a frantic letter to Alan in the morning and received yours in the afternoon. The whole business is most unfortunate. I should have foreseen the danger in leaving unidentified books in a publishing house. If you have another opportunity to search please look out for a big hard-back book: Classification of Occupations."[50] Against the backdrop of the unfolding argument on the problem for writers like Head, of how to correctly classify occupations in African traditional societies, it becomes important to probe the texts for non-verbal traces of conscious and unconscious attempts to define, classify, and situate practical work and what Marx considered its cultural, intellectual or pedagogic effluxions.

Like Marx, Sartre's theory of the relationship between culture and work is useful because it sets us on a course that would examine the dialectics of retention and supersession in African literary production. It will be instructive and innovative to investigate how African literary texts retain and are penetrated by the effects of material production but at the same time surpass those effects. An analysis of how work serves as the basis of culture and tradition in Achebe's novels would not only be a primary and material analysis of the essential requirements of cultural production, if not a metaphysics of culture as such, but also offers a radical rereading of those novels as examples of retention and supersession. My analysis is focused on those critical moments of change in the requirements of the objective spirit and in the very objects or objective structures of its incarnation, on that transition wherein book became work and practical work lost its power to condition and validate existence as a result.

We see this recurrent historical movement in every society when the requirements of work, its techniques, and the associative rewards, or the value of its surplus, change. If the book is the incarnation of the objective

spirit of modernity, it is a mode that has supplanted practical work in traditional society. The focus on the educational and transformational instrumentality of work in the novels of Achebe is obviously an indirect but concrete way to revisit the questions of authenticity and alienation, especially as those questions arise anew out of the conditions of global production with the emergence of the book as a fetish of modernity, as "a finite mode of the Objective Spirit"[51] *à la* Sartre. I would argue at the end of this chapter that Achebe's writings have responded to the question of retention or the alienation effects of material production of African literature by Heinemann, with what I am calling the reverse acculturation of institutions, or the tutoring of the objective spirit through the poetics of institutional disalienation.

Practical Pedagogy: The Ideology and Form

It should help, perhaps, to mark the depth and dimensions of our analysis of practical work as a form of practical pedagogy by illustrating the relationship or tension between work and book from the broader black diaspora perspective of Langston Hughes. Work, here, encompasses not just labor but what Hughes describes as "all the acts of life."[52] Practical pedagogy is thus the condition of being tutored by all the acts of life as opposed to being tutored by speech—verbalization of instruction, or through books—elaboration of ideology. In Hughes' *The Big Sea*, we encounter in the very first passage, an archetypal set up of black modernity in the melodrama of a black man and the book: "[I]t was like throwing a million bricks out of my heart when I threw the books into the water. I leaned over the rail of the S.S *Malone* and threw the books as far as I could out into the sea—all the books I had had at Columbia, and all the books I had lately bought to read."[53] We may frame this melodrama, from the perspective of a host of black intellectuals and authors from Du Bois to Achebe as a moment that crystallizes a central imperative or problematic of black modernity. This act is so far-reaching in its implications that it serves a useful symbolic purpose in being the starting point of our engagement with African literature and the history of the book. It is not the first moment of symbolic importance in the black metanarrative of the book. Henry Louis Gates' "The Trope of the Talking Book"[54] is a good compendium of similar moments from Douglas to Equiano; Hughes was among the first to link the book to the verbalization and elaboration of class consciousness, ideology, and formation, not just as knowledge but as an instrumental and

symbolic object, in terms of its materiality and utility. Hughes marks a moment of moral clarity for the young black man who suddenly becomes aware of the ethical implications of his acquisition of books and the ethos of book culture. "I believed in books more than I believed in people—which, of course, was wrong."[55] At play here is the inherent schism in socialist ideology between a people-oriented ethos and an ethos built on abstract value, represented by the book. The supposition is not only that people are real in a way that books could never be, but also that it is a moral flaw to have what Said has called a textual attitude to people. The contradiction and collision of these two ethe is predicated on their totalizing structures and the implicit violence of their formative drive toward distinctive class subjectivities. This is the relevance of the critique by Hannah Arendt of the residue of Darwinism in Marx's theory of the survival of the progressive classes, which we shall soon explore in the course of this chapter.

Two class subjectivities emerge from the Achebe narratives of the African encounter with modernity that Hughes' examples can help structure. There are those subjects described as "conscripts of modernity"[56] by David Scott, but there are also the dialectical opposite of the conscripts: the objectors who refuse their prescribed destiny. The language of objection goes against the grain of Scott's argument since his interest lies in the circumstances in which modernity recruits its subjects as either volunteers or conscripts. In order to delimit the alternatives for subaltern subjects as a choice between volunteers and conscripts, which is another way of saying that there is really no choice, one would have to subscribe to a form of historical realism that accepts modernity as its solely defining authority. As an objector to the alienating effects of the "being by oneself" of book modernity, it is not surprising that Hughes would throw his books out to the sea shortly after dropping out of Columbia University. He discarded the books for the same reason that he opted out of Columbia. He says, "I didn't like Columbia. It was too big … You didn't get to know anybody, hardly. The buildings looked like factories."[57] These gestures and statements are motivated by an ideology that is oriented toward connection to real people and to a social life that is not rendered completely mechanical by the impersonal and abstract logic of mass society, which schools and factories represent and reproduce. This is also the basis for objecting to aspects of modernity, and for the quest for authenticity that runs deep in black literature.

Real people, in Hughes' estimation, are not simply people of flesh and blood; they are the people who do "useful and important" work such as

growing the food that keeps all of us alive. "The food we had grown went off to market to feed a big city. There was something about such work that made you feel useful and important—sending off onions that *you* had planted and seen grow from a mere speck of green, that *you* had tended and weeded, had pulled up and washed and even loaded on the wagon—seeing them go off to feed the great city of New York. *Your* onions!"[58] At play in the sentiment displayed by Hughes is a political insistence that we fundamentally reexamine the system by which modern societies allocate values. Examined closely, this is not dissimilar to the implicit demand that Achebe seems to be making through his trilogy.

Hughes' "real people" become "*real, active men*" in Achebe's novel who are taught in a comprehensive manner by "all the acts of life." Work and the status of objectors define "real men." Achebe's trilogy renders a story of the implicit romanticization and eventual radicalization of the practical man. The distinction that has to be made, which is not clear from Hughes, is whether the concept of the real man is the same as the man who lives off the land. I have chosen to deploy Sartre's conception of the practical realm instead of the more obvious paradigm of "the real man" to avoid the trap of traditional masculinity associated with the notion of living off the land. Indeed, I hope to dissociate masculinity in Achebe's writing from the traditional context, if possible, by situating it within the dialectical stream of the objective spirit. Furthermore, practicality here denotes the pleasure of work derived from a direct correspondence between use value and the value of labor on the one hand, and the material connection between producer and product on the other. It also represents the organic and integrated conditions of production and consumption, and the utopia of zero-sploitation. At the aesthetic level of the novels' operation, it is the interruption of this organic pleasure of "work" that constitutes the drive for supersession and ground for plotting the ironic conversion of the practical man in the missionary period into objectors of the modern—with a certain expectation of failure that further elevates his heroic status.

The difference between Hughes and Achebe in how each expressed the ideology of work may be limited to the generic form in which they wrote: autobiography and fiction, respectively, the former explicit, and the latter implicit. Hughes' more explicit expression of the ideology of work is paradoxically unreflected experience, making him our prime example for illustrating how the practical man incarnates ideology in the practical realm. On the contrary, as I shall soon show, Achebe's representation of the ideology of work has been shaped by reflection on pedagogy, which makes it

doubly hidden and refracted. In Hughes, books become objective and concrete expressions of ideology. As Sartre states, "written words are stones."[59] From this formulation, we gain some insight into Hughes' association of books and building walls: "Columbia" and factories are the building blocks of a disciplinary society; a regime of exploitation, which Foucault has argued, fosters a relationship of "docility-utility."[60] The practical man in both Hughes and Achebe is thus an objector to the docile bodies of book-constituted subjectivities and the exploitative regime of docility-utility constituted by book culture.

To be practical is to acquire a "whole earth catalog" of knowledge through the genius of one's bare hands through what Marx would perennially call "intercourse with nature."[61] This mode of education, which is not to be confused with vocational education, produces the practical genius that is being displaced in the world of *Things Fall Apart*—excellence in the art of wrestling, agriculture, and war, for instance. It is not for mere romantic appeal or the defense of African traditions that Achebe's sympathy seems to lie more with Okonkwo than any other of his fictional characters. Okonkwo is the product of a regime of exploitation that offers mobility to the ordinary man, that is: the limitless space of self-improvement, and self-reproduction through work, with the promise of enhanced social value and status. Here is the example of a man of significant deficit inheritance, whose father was a social misfit but who through the strength of his arms was able to propel himself upward as a rare prodigy to earn a seat at the table with the lords of the land. His story is all the more compelling for being situated at a historical period in which admission into the exclusive domain of aristocracy in most cultures of the world was virtually impossible. His extraordinary story of social and economic mobility in a traditional African setting is held up in celebration and as proof of Igbo sophistication and advancement, tainted only—and the resonance of Achebe's regret and condemnation is splashed all over the pages—by the existence of the zone of exclusion for the infirm and the abject, the evil forest, and the *osu* system. The second important dynamic of practical work is the value of the knowledge acquired through labor that activates the forces of nature. Work in this context is the constellation of practical knowledge, and the natural and social transformations that are the reflection of the objective spirit of work.

If work in *Things Fall Apart* has been until now understood as a sole attribute of traditional masculinity, it is because the appearance of masculinity in the primal sense cannot be easily divested from practical work and

the very concept of work as praxis. Hughes helps to capture the translation and incarnation of knowledge in the practical realm, but he also symptomizes the problematic synonymy of the concepts of traditional and practical masculinity. Toward the end of *The Big Sea*, Hughes reintroduces a forward originally written for a sociological survey he had compiled that seems to suggest precisely that:

> In the primitive world, where people live closer to the earth and much nearer to the stars, every inner and outer act combines to form the single harmony, life. Not just the tribal lore then, but every movement of life becomes a part of their education. They do not, as many civilized people do, neglect the truth of the physical for the sake of the mind. Nor do they teach with speech alone, but rather with all the acts of life. There are no books, so the barrier between words and reality is not so great as with us. The earth is right under their feet. The stars are never far away. The strength of the surest dream is the strength of the primitive world. This meant, I suppose, that where life is simple, truth and reality are one.[62]

In Hughes' attempt to describe the practical world in which there are no books, his choice of terminology proves he is clearly a victim of the treachery of a language that was invented before him. He never fully critiques the use of the term "primitive" as a description of the Other, though he repudiates any connection to the term in "Not Primitive," just two chapters later. What Hughes says of the primitive world is equally true of the practical realm. It is probably the attraction of a ritualized "truth of the physical" containing "all the acts of life" that informs Hughes' unambiguous ideological location and identification with ordinary black folks. Against the backdrop of his criticism of black elite culture, he wrote: "From all this pretentiousness Seventh Street was a sweet relief. Seventh Street is the long, old, dirty street, where the ordinary Negroes hang out, folks with practically no family tree at all, folks who draw no color line between mulattoes and deep dark browns, folks who work hard for a living with their hands."[63] The difference that Okonkwo constitutes from the folks on Seventh Street in their sociological condition as egalitarian masses is that having attained lordship, he fully embraces and defends a status that he knows subconsciously, given his background, to be precarious. In need of a constant display of his merit, he becomes the arrowhead of the class interests of the men of title against foreign imposition. He is a more complex and ambiguous character than we have thought, being a conscript of practical masculinity and an objector of colonial modernity, at the same time.[64]

In Achebe's novels, regardless of their time period, it is not a question of whether there are social and class divisions, it is rather the question of what the dividing lines are: whether they were divided by mastery of the practical realm or mastery of the book. For a better understanding of the significance of these two axis of mastery: the harmonious education of the so-called primitive world on the one hand, and the inherent division of modern education[65] as exemplified by the Washington Society on the other hand, we can look to W. E. B Du Bois' *The Education of Black People*,[66] a collection of essays he began to write at the turn of the twentieth century, a decade or so before Hughes, and spanning the active period of Hughes' writing career in the 1960s. Du Bois' idea and ideal of education for life derives from the view of the harmonious or integrated education in premodern societies.

> There under the Yorubas and other Sudanese and Bantu tribes, the education of the child began almost before it could walk. … Even after that, their education went on. They sat in council with their elders and learned the history and science and art of the tribe, and practiced all in their daily life. Thus education was completely integrated with life. There could be no uneducated people. There could be no education that was not at once for use in earning a living and for use in living a life. Out of this education and out of the life it typified came, as perfect expressions, song and dance and saga, ethics and religion.
>
> Nothing more perfect has been invented than this system of training youth among primitive African tribes. And one sees it in the beautiful courtesy of black children; in the modesty and frankness of womanhood, and in the dignity and courage of manhood; and too, in African music and art with its world-wide influence.[67]

First, there is the practical world without books. And second, the practical world without books is an ideal model of education in which education is "completely integrated with life," as Hughes put it, with "all the acts of life." With the examples of Hughes and Du Bois, there appears to be a dominant view in Africa and the diaspora of an idyllic integrated education, a confluence of the natural and cultural scenes of instruction. It is not completely out of the realm of possibility that Achebe might have been aware of this view, if not of its specific expression in the works of Du Bois and Hughes. The title of his own collection of essays, *The Education of a British-Protected Child*[68] while foregrounding the colonial context, demonstrates the same racial awareness that Du Bois observed when he

said of the black university: "There is no use pretending that you are teaching Chinese or that you are teaching white Americans or that you are teaching citizens of the world. You are teaching American Negroes in 1933, and they are the subjects of a caste system in the Republic of the United States of America and their life problem is primarily this problem of caste."[69] Du Bois' *The Education of Black People* and Achebe's *The Education of a British-Protected Child* are supremely concerned with the overcast of caste, whether racial or colonial. This formulation of the racial ideology of education in the USA and in colonial Africa echoes that of Bourdieu referenced at the beginning of this chapter, for whom, "the School today succeeds, with the ideology of natural 'gifts' and innate 'tastes', in legitimizing the circular reproduction of social hierarchies and educational hierarchies."[70]

Like Hughes, Du Bois approached the education of the black subject from both the practical-integrated and class perspectives.

> This is the problem of education with which the world is most familiar, and it tends to two ends: it makes the mass of men dissatisfied with life and it makes the university a system of culture for the cultured […] This type of university training has deeply impressed the world. It is foundation for a tenacious legend preserved in fiction, poetry, and essay. There are still many people who quite instinctively turn to this sort of thing when they speak of a university. And out of this ideal arose one even more exotic and apart. Instead of the university growing down and seeking to comprehend in its curriculum the life and experience, the thought and expression of lower classes, it almost invariably tended to grow up and narrow itself to a sublimated elite of mankind.[71]

Let us leave aside for the moment the irony that Hughes considered Dr. Du Bois a part of the sublimated elite of mankind, of the Washington Society mold. The need to contrast university education, whether at Columbia or Oxford and Cambridge, with education in a more practical realm, and to perform a critique of class division inherent in modern education is a reflex I would argue Achebe also reflects in his fiction. We can locate the conscripts of modernity at the apex of the educational tree and the objectors at the roots that are still connected to the basin of life and concrete experience.[72]

We can compare Hughes' story both as a mirror and gateway into Okonkwo's story, to the extent that they started out as progressive subalterns but ended as champions of different class positions. Integrated or

practical education produces its own hierarchies and aristocracies based on fitness and personal distinction, which Okonkwo embraces. Though Hughes gets the opportunity to break into the black elite circles of Washington Society, as did Okonkwo into the circle of men of titles, he refuses conscription into that world. He instead prefers to continue to work with his hands, to the chagrin of Washington Society. "So when I got through the proofs, I decided I didn't care to have 'a position' any longer, I preferred a job, so I went to work at the Wardman Park Hotel as a bus boy, where meals were thrown in and it was less hard on the sight, although the pay was not quite the same and there was no dignity attached to bus boy work in the eyes of upper class Washingtonians, who kept insisting that a colored poet should be a credit to his race."[73] Okonkwo wanted to be a credit to his class of men of title, to be the walking embodiment of their merit that upper-class black elites saw in Hughes. The use of the term "class" is supported by the idea that division in Okonkwo's culture seems to have been based primarily on productivity and achievement. What seems to be on display in the novel is the precondition for the title class, which is made up of those considered to be the advanced species of the culture, to reproduce itself in its requirements for membership. It is doubtful that anyone would consider Hughes' insistence on working with his hands a traditional masculine obsession but rather a demonstration of an ideological position. It is through the performance of this extrapolation, by comparing his act to that of Okonkwo, that I hope to compel a reconsideration of the form of Okonkwo's labor, and suggest that we take it out of its historical context of traditional masculinity as a means of foregrounding its ideological significance.

Hughes is an example of how the preferences of an author are reflected in the world that he chooses to capture and the heroes he celebrates. While Achebe may not have been a Marxist, his statement that "*Things Fall Apart* I wrote with more affection,"[74] can be read as an ideological statement regarding the status of Okonkwo's work in the novel. In a structural parallel to Hughes' ideology of work in the practical realm, the novels of Achebe, not just *Things Fall Apart*, illustrate the two casts of characters in Africa's encounter with the couple of enlightenment and modernity: the conscripts and the objectors: those who aspire to and occupy positions on the condition of their bookworthiness, and those who by virtue of practical work are schooled by the movements of life itself. If David Scott via Talal Asad provides this analysis with the language of conscription, the language of objection is derived directly from Achebe himself. There is no

other way to understand better the trilogy outside the author's expressly stated ideology of his "fundamental objection to colonial rule."[75] Where Scott and Achebe's ideas intersect is on the question of tragedy. The only possible outcome of colonial domination is tragedy. This is why Scott talks about "the tragedy of colonial enlightenment" in the subtitle of his book. In response to a question about the differences between the stories of *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, Achebe puts the tragic inevitability this way:

> The background is the same. But the story itself is not—in fact I see it as the exact opposite: Ezeulu the chief character in *Arrow of God* is a different kind of man from Okonkwo. He is an intellectual. He thinks about why things happen—of course as a priest; you see, his office requires this—so he goes into things, to the roots of things, and he's ready to accept change, intellectually. He sees the value of change and therefore his reaction to Europe is different, completely different, from Okonkwo's. He is ready to come to terms with the new—up to a point—except where his dignity is involved. This he could not accept; he is very proud. So you see it's really the other side of the coin, and the tragedy is that they come to the same end, the same sort of sticky end. So there's really no escape whether you accept change or whether you don't—which is rather pessimistic….[76]

It is not only objectors such as Okonkwo and Ezeulu that are confronted with the reality of an inescapable tragedy, even Obi Okonkwo who qualifies as a conscript of modernity is not exempt from what Achebe describes as the "fatalistic logic" of the tragedy of colonial enlightenment. Achebe represents a model of postcolonial dystopia that is based on the dialectical materialism of the objective historical structure, as negative dialectics, that he seeks to surpass. The challenge for him, as for other African writers, in the end, is how does postcolonialism transcend the dystopia of this negative dialectics? The concluding chapter of this book will provide suggestions about how we have attempted to reread early African authors in the modern era from a more optimistic perspective than thinkers such as Mudimbe and Gikandi. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

Whether we are talking about traditional Igbo society or modern Africa, the requirements of culture as Achebe understood and experienced it was pedagogical. His project was to endow work in the practical realm with dignity to the extent that it equally fulfilled the pedagogical, as much as the technical, requirements of reproduction in its time. This much he makes clear in *Home and Exile*, "I have been attempting—with incomplete

success I fear—to convey to the reader the quiet education my hometown came slowly to embody for me. I have deliberately left out of account so far the louder, formal education I was receiving simultaneously at school, at Sunday school and in church. As it happened, it was only these foreign aspects of my upbringing that we dignified with the title of education."[77] What I am attempting here is to expand the range of the instruments and mechanisms by which Achebe thought that education, a so-called defining experience of colonialism at the level of culture, was anteriorly or simultaneously acquired from within the culture itself, outside the formal and informal structure to include the practicum of all the acts of everyday life.

The pedagogy of practical work, which is used loosely here to be synonymous with physical work, is much quieter than the informal education of dinner table conversations and storytelling, or the late-night eavesdropping on serious communal concerns and debates that Achebe referenced above, and to which Du Bois must have been alluding. Physical work is where the human body in active engagement comes in direct intercourse with nature, and nature, as an equally active living matter, synchronizes with the immaterial biodynamic forces of the human will and purpose. As the nexus for the constant engagement of nature, biology, and ideas, physical work becomes for us a nucleus of analysis. It is the very mechanism through which the material and immaterial forces are channeled in the production of life as we know it, and by which humanity modifies its environment and history: transformation; but also renews and revitalizes its mythologies and practices: evolution of consciousness. This is why we maintain work not simply as a means of production but more importantly as praxis, that is, work as the dialectics of material transformation and the evolution of consciousness.

This centralization of the pedagogy of practical work in *Things Fall Apart* is recognized by Irele in his introduction to the Norton critical edition of the novel: "Achebe presents an agrarian society, one that has patiently worked out a relation with the land from which it draws sustenance, a fact that is emphasized by the nature deities that inhabit its system of belief and the dominance in the collective imaginary of sacred spaces, in particular the caves and hills consecrated to the deity Agbala."[78] Irele's notion concerning the foundational landscape of the novel's aesthetics can be reduced in essence to a theory of the poeticity of the land. This poeticity of the land is often lost in the endless interrogation of the "system of belief," without considering the ideological structure of the association of the "system of belief" with "relation with the land." In the first place, all

the elaborate descriptions of customs and rituals in the novel end with the first part. The second and third parts take off with a mesmerizing velocity in recounting the ensuing conflict of church and clan, two of large-scale historical and symbolic motions under which the story of Okonkwo in the first part is finally subsumed. The critique of an anthropological exotic only takes the first part of the novel into account. The so-called local color gives a panoramic view of the culture like a tapestry of folk narratives; however, while its overall function may actually work to introduce non-natives to the culture, it also serves as an aesthetic necessity for the grounding of Okonkwo's mode of self-reproduction, the corresponding mode of intercourse, and the rationality of his actions based on the habitus of the culture, and mode of existence.

Taking the novel as a whole, we are obviously bound to acknowledge the poeticity of the land, but that acknowledgment often stops short of elaborating its ideological production. What lies in-between the physics and the metaphysics, between culture, marked by the correspondence of the imaginary and nature, is ideology. If the land and the mythic spaces of an agrarian society are taken as signs that incarnate and communicate deeper significations and instructions, they provide richly profitable avenues for interrogating the ideological productions, which we have already identified in the novels as mainly pedagogical. This ushers us ultimately into a space of conversation with Achebe's attempt, informed by the very matrices of his own textual productions, to reshape or surpass the ideologies of African literary production.

The profound indications of the novel's consciousness of its simultaneous ideological and pedagogical productions are already present in the first part of the novel with all the cross-referential significations to the other parts. In the second paragraph is a description of the wrestling match that earned Okonkwo the right of history:

> The drums beat and the flutes sang and the spectators held their breath. Amalinze was a wily craftsman, but Okonkwo was as slippery as a fish in water. Every nerve and every muscle stood out on their arms, on their backs and their thighs, and one almost heard them stretching to breaking point. In the end Okonkwo threw the Cat.[79]

It may be true that sports commentary rarely presents satisfactory substitution for the event itself. The economy of narrative space in the short paragraph above does not adequately capture the momentousness of the

event that propelled Okonkwo into preeminence in his culture and time. Why does it simply never occur to us to compare the short paragraph that introduces his inaugural achievement and the one that the district commissioner contemplates in the end about the interesting story of the life of Okonkwo? In these narrative economies, we are not dealing with an elaborate concept of the historical moment or event as a magnitude that could bring into effect the stoppage of time or temporal disruption. On the one hand, time is eternal and transcendent; by that logic, all events over time are significant together as the constellation of the historical movement. On the other hand, only colonialism can disrupt or reset temporality. Thus, in the end, what is particularly troubling about the district commissioner's thinking is that the colonial attitude of arrogance and condescension coincides with a historical fact.

> In the book which he planned to write he would stress that point. As he walked back to the court he thought about that book. Every day brought him some new material. The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger.[80]

The basic syllogism here is this simple: Okonkwo throws the cat to become the incarnation of the founder of the town who himself had thrown a spirit. The novel ends with the narrative of how another book takes over its story. Okonkwo's story ends up in this new book as "a reasonable paragraph," having been the focal point of the original frame narrative. This *mise en abyme* is the surest demonstration of our main point that it was this new book, the commissioner's book that literally and figuratively consumes the book of nature or Okonkwo's living book. The book, now an isolated material object, is the new foundation, the new incarnation of the objective historical spirit that offers the promise of superseding nature. It is not surprising that the book becomes the site of the struggle for survival and emancipation in the sequels to *Things Fall Apart*. I have emphasized the dialectical view of the historical movement deliberately to underscore Achebe's strongly held essential view of history, which he attributes to his father and uncle: "Those two—my father and his uncle—formulated the dialectic which I inherited."[81]

The dialectical structure of the novel is a reflection of a dialectical logic of Igbo history: "The Igbo have always lived in a world of continual struggle, motion and change—a feature conspicuous in the tautness, overreach and torsion of their art; it is like a tightrope walk, a hairbreadth brush with the boundaries of anarchy."[82] Achebe writes this passage about the "tautness" and "torsion" of the Igbo world as reflected in art more than four decades after he himself had captured that essential feature in the second paragraph describing the wrestling match in *Things Fall Apart* in which we are to hear the wrestlers' muscles "stretching to breaking point." The sports analogy remains germane to his understanding and expression of the culture, centered on a tensive physical and kinetic principle and image, as is the sense of an inexorable dialectical movement of history. At a deeper level, the kinetics and imagery of the wrestler or tightrope walker might provide the key to an earlier question as to why "a world of continual struggle, motion and change" might be experienced pedagogically and neurotically in the same period of time. A never-ending tightrope walk could be too intense a test for the limits of a culture.

It certainly was for Sekoni, the engineer in Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, the text to which we turn in the next chapter, after losing his job and the struggle to bring electricity to rural communities due to the intractable corruption of the bureaucracy. He spends his time afterwards, before his madness and accidental death, on a sculpture, "The Wrestler," a major event in the novel, which is thus described: "Taut sinews, nearly agonizing in excess tension, a bunched python caught at the instant of easing out, the balance of strangulation before release, it was all elasticity and strain."[83] The master poet and master of paradox, Soyinka inserts "easing," "release," and "elasticity," into a struggle where Achebe sees "no escape." These are not necessarily contradictory, and neither are pedagogy and neurosis. In Achebe's second novel, *Arrow of God*, the failure of a pedagogue, the intellectual priest, results in a nervous breakdown. The symbolism of a wrestling match is thus a point of entry into these novels, and into the whole processes of cultural production that produced them.

If the dialectical structure of the novel is symbolized by a wrestling match, then we might require the aid of a structural analysis of the world of wrestling to unpack the ideological significations that undergird such aesthetic enterprise. Okonkwo's wrestling with "the Cat" is not merely a fight that mirrors "the perfect functioning of a moral mechanism" as Roland Barthes says the wrestling match does; it recalls the foundational act of the town, and through the recall, incarnates it. There are two

important elements in Barthes' analysis on the world of wrestling. The defeated wrestler assumes the ancient figure of the suppliant and "resumes the oldest myths of public Suffering and Humiliation: the cross and the pillory."[84] And, the hero is the instrument of retributive justice. Barthes' analysis in the end depends on the radical demarcation of the world of wrestling and real life:

> When the hero or the bastard of the drama, the man who has been seen a few minutes earlier possessed by a moral fury, enlarged to the size of a kind of metaphysical sign—when this figure leaves the wrestling hall, impassive, anonymous, carrying a gym bag and his wife on his arm, who could doubt that wrestling possesses that power of transmutation proper to Spectacle and to Worship? In the Ring and in the very depths of their voluntary ignominy, the wrestlers remain gods, for they are, for a few minutes, the key which opens Nature, the pure gesture which separates Good and Evil and unveils the figure of a finally intelligible justice.[85]

In the web of significations in *Things Fall Apart*, such separation of the real world and the world of wrestling does not obtain. The real world itself functions as a gigantic Ring. Once Okonkwo undergoes wrestling's power of transmutation in the fight between Amalinze the cat and Okonkwo, "a fight which the old men agreed was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights,"[86] he is transformed into and remains a transcendental sign, not just for a few minutes, but throughout the narrative. What is at stake in this wrestling match is a mechanism by which the authority of the founder is transferred through successive generations. Where Barthes points to the dramatic signification of a Human Comedy, the wrestling match in *Things Fall Apart* is marked by severity, which is why it ends in tragedy. It profiles a "tall and huge" man whose "bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a very severe look."[87] The short paragraph describing the match is thus a prologue to the great wrestling with, and refusal of, destiny. It is immediately followed by a description of Okonkwo's physique: "He breathed heavily, and it was said that, when he slept, his wives and children in their out-houses could hear him breathe. When he walked, his heels hardly touched the ground and he seemed to walk on springs, as if he was going to pounce on somebody. And he did pounce on people quite often. He had a slight stammer and whenever he was angry and could not get his words out quickly enough, he would use his fists."[88] As Barthes reminds us, "it is the wrestler's body

which is the first key to the combat."[89] His beating of his wife during the week of peace, the killing of Ikemefuna, discharging his gun aimed at his second wife, the explosion of his gun that killed a boy at Ezeudu's funeral, the beheading of the white man's messenger, and the hanging of himself, all his excessive acts are contained in that initial description of his physique. "The wrestler's physique establishes a basic sign containing in germ the whole fight."[90] The law of wrestling calls for the perfect synchronization of his physique and actions in the production of an ostentatious and obscene "show of manliness,"[91] which serves as the "exaggeratedly visible explanation of a Necessity."[92] "Okonkwo never did things by halves"[93] is a backhand euphemism that heralds his impending doom.[94]

Structurally, nothing could have prepared Okonkwo for the great wrestling with nature itself than defeating the Cat. Okonkwo's next logical rite of passage is the struggle or intercourse, as Marx would call it, with the unpredictable and absolute forces of nature, which defines the inextricable link between the practical realm of his work and his "one-sided" existence. This is where his mastery of the universal and portable techniques of intercourse in the practical realm would be most consequential. His startup in life had been the eight hundred yam seeds he borrowed from Nwakibie:

> The year that Okonkwo took eight hundred seed-yams from Nwakibie was the worst year in living memory. Nothing happened at its proper time; it was either too early or too late. It seemed as if the world had gone mad. The first rains were late, and, when they came, lasted only a brief moment. The blazing sun returned, more fierce than it had ever been known, and scorched all the green that had appeared with the rains. The earth burned like hot coals and roasted all the yams that had been sown …. That year the harvest was sad, like a funeral, and many farmers wept as they dug up the miserable and rotting yams. One man tied his cloth to a tree branch and hanged himself. Okonkwo remembered that tragic year with a cold shiver throughout the rest of his life. It always surprised him when he thought of it later that he did not sink under the load of despair. He knew he was a fierce fighter, but that year had been enough to break the heart of a lion.
>
> "Since I survived that year," he always said, "I shall survive anything." He put it down to his inflexible will.[95]

The elaborate nature of the narrative of his resilience and victory over the forces of nature underscores the novel's emphasis on how the mastery and semiology of the art of wrestling undergirds and translates into the mastery

and semiology of the art of war, and the "difficult art" of preparing and cultivating yams and so forth. The requisite mastery of life and work in the practical realm is the intercourse with nature necessary for the total mastery of culture. This is the basis of the concept of integrated education in traditional Africa, the political economy and cultural ramifications of which I argue the trilogy aptly illustrates. This approach also compels a reading of the church as a pedagogical institution and as such takes the debate about clash or conflict a step removed from the realm of culture or religion, to the fundamental and determinant realm of pedagogy and education. The colonial mission after all was economic, political, and pedagogical. Subsumed under the pedagogical mission is the work of the church, followed by the schools, publishing institutions and so on. In other words, the institutions that engaged in the production and dissemination of spiritual and intellectual instructions.

Okonkwo's profile is deliberately set against the profile of Mr. Smith, the missionary who replaces Mr. Brown, to create the necessary conditions of what, following David Scott, we are referring to as the tragedy of colonial enlightenment. The so-called clash of cultures for which Achebe's novels were initially famously reputed appears here only as a surface analysis of fundamentally contradictory norms or tenets, and the imperatives of material collisions operating at the level of concrete or personified models that compel historical motion. Contrary to Mr. Brown who maintained a very close connection to the people, debating the elders from whom he "learnt a good deal about the religion of the clan and he came to the conclusion that a frontal attack on it would not succeed,"[96] Mr. Smith's arrogance and complete dismissal and denigration of the culture, and the District Commissioner's humiliation of the elders of the clan, their imprisonment and flogging, for example, absolutely guaranteed Okonkwo's instinctive and vigorous reaction against the alien ideologies. Flawed as the Okonkwo model of masculinity and radical conservatism may have been from the standpoint from which his story is being told, it required the contradiction represented by the equally radical alternative norm personified by Mr. Smith and the colonial administrator for a story to be possible or emerge in the first place.

A brief aside on the novel's narrative point of view is pertinent here. There may be some validity to the point that Achebe's perspective was inflected by a western anthropological portrayal of Africa which he internalized in the invention of the stereotype of traditional African

masculinity. A more interesting approach would be to situate that point of view as a part of a modern bourgeois dialectical relation to the past as Marx has articulated it.

> Although it is true, therefore, that the categories of bourgeois economics possess a truth for all other forms of society, this is to be taken only with a grain of salt. They can contain them in a developed, or stunted, or caricatured form etc., but always with an essential difference. The so-called historical presentation of development is founded, as a rule, on the fact that the latest form regards the previous ones as steps leading up to itself, and, since it is only rarely and only under quite specific conditions able to criticize itself- leaving aside, of course, the historical periods which appear to themselves as times of decadence-it always conceives them one-sidedly.[97]

According to this approach, Achebe's view of the past, can only either be developed, stunted, or caricatured. We see all the elements of this in his works. There is no mistaking the nature of his humor as contained within the form of caricature, while his frustration and criticism express themselves in the stunted representation of characters such as Okonkwo. This dialectical perspective of the present imposed on an earlier period of the African past cannot be confused however with the horizontal, spatial, and temporal perspectives of anthropological difference.

The structure of a symbolic struggle, a struggle that serves to build and to infuse its instructions into the body directly through a dialectical operation, an instructional struggle, is the very template of the story and the illustration of the incarnation of the objective spirit. The simultaneity and inseparability of the symbolism and pedagogy of material struggle are apparent in Okonkwo's tripartite relationship to his father, his son, and in the conflict between the clan and church in which he is the central figure. Worried about his son's defection to the church, Okonkwo experiences an epiphany watching a bonfire consume a log of wood. "As he looked into the log fire … He sighed heavily, and as if in sympathy the smouldering log also sighed. And immediately Okonkwo's eyes were opened and he saw the whole matter clearly. Living fire begets cold, impotent ash. He sighed again, deeply."[98] The incipience of contradiction, its finality and fatality, is the narrative formula that manifests in the depiction of Okonkwo's son and is reflected in the wider culture where outcasts and rejects of the community become the foundational members of the church, receiving education and acquiring positions of power as a result within the colonial administration: "The converts [were] the excrement of the clan,

and the new faith was a mad dog that had come to eat it up."[99] This necessary and inevitable overturning of the regime of exploitation of nature, and of natural law, that is, "the law of the land"[100] as the basis of culture is paradoxically presented as a form of natural justice. A certain naturalism continues to inform the changing requirement of the objective spirit from the mastery of the practical realm to the mastery of books. In the next section, I will explore the dialectic as also gendered.

However, the template of symbolic struggle that inscribes Okonkwo's achievement as a foundational act also draws it into the remoteness of mythical time such that the severity produced by the material disciplines becomes both archaic and out of place. He moves upwards and sideways at the same time. His sole obsession with work and its manly virtues isolates him from the beginning, and in the end, it comes as no surprise that he chooses to fight alone. Once he is boxed into this decision and action—he was presented to us ab initio as a man of action—his story begins a rapid descent through the anti-climactic phases that began with his exile. This gradual separation, this being-by-himself, contradicts his father's interdiction not to be *alone*. His father's initial consolation when his crop failed now becomes an Oedipal instruction or law, a prohibition that always provokes an uncompromising reprisal: "Do not despair. I know you will not despair. You have a manly and a proud heart. A proud heart can survive a general failure because such a failure does not prick its pride. It is more difficult and more bitter when a man fails *alone*."[101] But Okonkwo takes no one's advice, not that of Ezeudu, or Uchendu, or Obierika, much less of his despised father, who by every standard he considers a failure. Achebe's emphasis on the word "alone" marks the point where the totalitarian nature of the culture emerges: Okonkwo, no matter how great, is not permitted to act alone. He balks at the habitus of culture, at the prescribed dispositions and predispositions that undergird the cultural guarantees of his privileges. To invoke Bourdieu's theory, he exhibits "negative dispositions and predispositions leading to self-elimination,"[102] in his ultimate suicide.

The totalitarian determinants of culture wear an egalitarian mask. Okonkwo's fatal flaw is not his hyper-masculinity, however problematic it may have been, but his failure to properly read the sublime and contradictory instructions of his culture, which says on the one hand: "work like a man,"[103] "be a man,"[104] but also on the other hand: "speak with one voice"[105] and "act like one."[106] This is the same pitfall that dogged Ezeulu, the chief priest in *Arrow of God*. In acting alone, in substituting their judgment as

individuals for that of the community, these characters fall out of step with the clan, whose only strength resides in its collective being, as the One. "The One," which Derrida argues, "makes itself violence."[107] In acting alone, they marginalize themselves and become powerless. The real tragedy of these heroes lies in being deserted by their own folks. Their desertion registers the amputation from the "One" of an extremity that has suffered irreparable arterial blockage. To quote Hannah Arendt, "power always comes from men acting together, 'acting in concert'; isolated men are powerless by definition."[108] The great mechanism of the clan, and the church, has been the threat of exclusion or excision. This unsparing objective mechanism of excision constitutes the totalitarian ideology implicit in the logic of history as a movement; whatever does not move with the inexorable objective movement "where all men have become One Man, where all action aims at the acceleration of the movement of nature or history,"[109] is excised from history itself.[110]

Achebe was well aware of this process of excision but seems to have viewed it as part of the natural order of historical messianicity. He says in an interview in which he was reflecting on the tragedies of Okonkwo and Ezeulu: "Because life must go on, no matter what we say, no matter how many people suffer or how many people are killed, life goes on. This is really what I was saying at the beginning. But if you take a short episode, it may be full of tragedy. I mean if you take the situation in Nigeria today, it's full of tragedy—in Uganda even. But I think the long view, at least to me, holds out some element of hope."[111] If we work our way back into the novel from this statement of historical messianicity: "some element of hope," we discover the origin of the idea of that doubly ironic "reasonable paragraph" at the end. When our sympathies for Okonkwo are deepest, we are told by the parodic figure who arrives at the end of history, like a deus ex machina, that his life was just a paragraph, an episode in the history of the Niger region. This rule of historical excision allows us to understand the sins of Okonkwo: "'guilty' is he who stands in the way of the natural or historical process."[112] This is the situational realism through which the objective spirit is incarnated in the practical man, or what Lyotard calls "practical subject."

This reflection punctuates the novel at every critical turn. A key moment that exposes the modus operandi of the One, is after Okonkwo is sent into exile for accidentally killing a young boy at the funeral of Ezeudu.

> As soon as the day broke, a large crowd of men from Ezeudu's quarter stormed Okonkwo's compound, dressed in garbs of war. They set fire to his houses, demolished his red walls, killed his animals and destroyed his barn. It was the justice of the earth goddess, and they were merely her messengers. They had no hatred in their hearts against Okonkwo. His greatest friend, Obierika, was among them. They were merely cleansing the land which Okonkwo had polluted with the blood of a clansman.[113]

This moment does not arrest the attention of critics as much as the statements that come immediately after it, in the last paragraph of the first part of the book, which ends with the exile of Okonkwo. It has been rendered invisible, especially by the attractive sentence that follows it: "Obierika was a man who thought about things."[114] Obierika's reflection on the destruction of Okonkwo's compound and the many other troubling and unanswered questions about the culture that Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, also harbors, demonstrate the latency of contradiction in the communal consciousness, the seeds of discontent that would amplify the contrast highlighted by the missionary and colonial ethos against Okonkwo's one-sidedness. Some, in an attempt to unburden the stereotype of black masculinity in Okonkwo, have even gone so far as to suggest that it makes Obierika the real face of the African culture, because he exercised the power of reflection. Obierika's questions render the culture's masculine stiffness as fetters that weight it down, or draw it backwards. But while the seed of contradiction may have germinated in him, it has not transformed him into an evolved specimen of the culture who can supersede the dispositions of the culture. This comports precisely with Marx's theory that consciousness appears retrospectively, that is, in the moment of reflection, but as fetters the very moment it is contradicted by a superseding form: "The definite condition under which they produce, thus corresponds, as long as the contradiction has not yet appeared, to the reality of their conditioned nature, their one-sided existence, the one-sidedness of which only becomes evident when the contradiction enters on the scene and thus exists for the latter individuals. Then, this condition appears as an accidental fetter, and the consciousness that it is as fetter is imputed to the earlier age as well."[115] Obierika does not belong to the group of "latter individuals" and the consciousness imputed to him is imputed retroactively, as one in whom the contradiction was beginning to appear.

While it may be true that Achebe encouraged readings that imply Obierika is the author's alter ego by stating that he is "this other alternative"

to Okonkwo,[116] the novel was in the end constrained by reality of the historical context to giving Obierika limited exposition and possibility. Biodun Jeyifo in an interview said to a nodding Achebe, "there is something of Achebe in Obierika."[117] It is not Obierika as a reflective character but the alternative model that he incarnates that Achebe thinks is promising, just as Mr. Brown represents a promising model of modernity. In developing these characters as transcendental signs, Achebe presents us with competing models, or what Sartre aptly calls "strict and contradictory norms" of culture. Although a reading of Obierika as an alternative and promising model is compelling, I want to argue that the passage about the destruction of Okonkwo's compound, more than any other in the novel, reveals the ideology of the culture in its most perceptible starkness. No matter the model, there are really only two but fluid subject positions available in the culture: those of executioners and victims. This is the dynamic we see at work in the formulation of the entrapment of colonial rule from which there is no escape. In any case, the promise of the Obierika model was fully developed and demonstrated to its logical limits in *Arrow of God*, through the character of Ezeulu. In Achebe's view of historical overdeterminism, the outcome remains the same, "whether you accept change or whether you don't."[118]

Whatever his objections and reservations, Obierika becomes one with Okonkwo in his killing of Ikemefuna, and becomes the executor of the natural justice of the earth goddess at the precise moment that Okonkwo, like Ikemefuna, becomes its victim. The gravity of his action is underscored by the narrator's description of him as Okonkwo's "greatest friend" in the same way that the gravity of Okonkwo's involvement in the killing of Ikemefuna is underscored by Ezeudu's caution to Okonkwo: "he calls you his father."[119] It is the same Obierika who had objected to getting personally involved in the killing of Ikemefuna by arguing "the Oracle did not ask me to carry out its decision."[120] Yet, "greatest friend" or "father," swept by the overpowering logic of natural justice and the objective historical movement, without ill feelings toward their victims, both become executioners. This is the moment when the historical movement itself becomes fetters. It is most eloquently expressed in Arendt's formulation: "The inhabitants of a totalitarian country are thrown into and caught in the process of nature or history for the sake of accelerating its movement; as such, they can only be executioners or victims of its inherent law."[121]

Arendt provides a means of understanding the fetters of this impersonal logic, and the totalitarian implications of an objective and overdetermined

view of history as a natural movement by which "life does go on,"[122] indifferent to whatever we may think, say, or do. In her book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt points to the optimistic fatalism implicit in the idea of "a long enough view:"[123] the idea that somehow, the terror and tragedies of colonial/postcolonial histories would work themselves out into a worthwhile and redemptive resolution, could be seen as sharing the same philosophical orientation as the optimism of Marx and Darwin in the ultimate triumph of the more progressive classes or fittest species. What we have is the process by which the laws of nature become the laws of history, or as Arendt puts it, "ultimately the movement of history and the movement of nature are one and the same."[124] This situation presents a problem for the act of praxis that is oriented toward a more transformational and progressive purpose, because it makes the task of superseding nature even more complicated. When Nature and History are rolled into one monstrous framework as the objective and transcendental source of consciousness, law, morality, and justice, supersession becomes all the more difficult to achieve. Nature and History become expressions of "the framework of stability within which human actions and motions can take place."[125] A gulf is created between reflection and action as if they bear no relation to each other. Obierika's action in joining in the destruction of Okonkwo's compound is an act of justice on behalf of the earth that takes place regardless of his deep personal discontents. The submission of his thought process to the supreme justice of the earth that Okonkwo has defiled is "characterized by strict self-evident logicality, from which apparently *there is no escape* …."[126] It is interesting that Arendt uses here the exact same phrase "*there is no escape*" that Achebe has used in describing the fate of Okonkwo and Ezeulu. The "self-evident logicality" or what Achebe calls "fatalistic logic" is the ultimate rule of ideology, and the ideological implications of the structure of work and consciousness in the trilogy, especially, in *Things Fall Apart*. Arendt describes it as the essence of totalitarian ideology that is immanent in systems of government since their inception:

> It is the monstrous, yet seemingly unanswerable claim of totalitarian rule that, far from being "lawless," it goes to the sources of authority from which positive laws received their ultimate legitimation, that far from being arbitrary it is more obedient to these suprahuman forces than any government ever was before, and that far from wielding its power in the interest of one man, it is quite prepared to sacrifice everybody's vital immediate interests to the execution of what it assumes to be the law of History or the law of Nature.[127]

The tragedy of the heroes in Achebe's novels can be outlined by the last clause of the sentence from Arendt quoted above; they were all sacrificed in the name of the laws of history and nature. In the logic of a totalitarian motion, these great individuals themselves with all their titles and evolution, and not merely their conditions of life, discover in their ultimate doom that they are, in the words of Marx, "accidental" to the system they helped to establish.[128] This significant insight represents a surprising intersection between the writings of Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe at the deepest levels of the foundation of culture, when one considers the obsession with ritual sacrifices in Soyinka's important plays such as *Death and the Kings Horseman*[129] and *The Strong Breed*.[130] Having recourse to Arendt here helps to identify the rule of the earth goddess, the law of the land, that binds together Okonkwo and Obierika, as different in personality and philosophy as they are, to the same roles as executioners, with or without their will, as totalitarian rule as such, and put this rule within the continuum of generic totalitarian ideology that is incarnated by a nature-culture scene of instruction characterized by overlapping regimes of work, institution, consciousness, and identity. If all the models of historical transformation in Achebe's novels, from the people-oriented to the book-oriented, end up as tragedies, what then is his proposal? And how do we understand his perspective of literary and educational publishing in Africa from that standpoint?

The mechanisms of the practical realm and those of modern school systems dispense similar or equivalent pedagogic and social functions in the legitimation of the social order and the hereditary transmission of privileges. Bourdieu's summation of the ideological function of the educational system can be generalized in this regard:

> Thus, the educational system, with the ideologies and effects which its relative autonomy engenders, is for bourgeois society in its present phase what other forms of legitimation of the social order and of hereditary transmission of privileges were for social formations differing both in the specific form of the relations and antagonisms between the classes and in the nature of the privilege transmitted: does it not contribute towards persuading each social subject to stay in *the place which falls to him by nature*, to know his place and hold to it, *ta heatou prattein*, as Plato put it?[131]

The distinction between the colonial schools of Achebe's later novels and the practical realm of *Things Fall Apart* lies in the specific form of relations and the nature of privileges being transmitted.

By identifying the rule of the earth with totalitarian ideology, we effectuate the extraction and extrication of the African world of Achebe's novels from the realm of tradition, which for us, because of the exhaustion of its anthropological referent and meaning, no longer possesses any valency or heuristic value. I situate it instead within the dialectical intercourse of material life and consciousness/ideology in an attempt to deconstruct the grand narrative by which the "place" of social subjects is circumscribed and naturalized. The characters in Achebe's novels are not conscripts of tradition but according to the terms of our materialist analysis, conscripts of a totalizing historical-natural movement. Indeed, the concept of "conscripts of modernity" derives from the attempt to posit modernity as active, as opposed to inert and negative conditions to be surmounted or translated.

Disavowing the natural law of historical development, David Scott uses Talad Asad's formulation that "historical conditions change like landscapes created by glaciers" to argue that "This geological image of the way historical change takes place—and of the register in which it is most useful to consider its occurrence is instructive for thinking about the transformations that constitute the making of colonial modernities and the subjects who find themselves conscripts of that structure of power."[132] Scott uses the language of "conscript" to highlight the adaptive structures of historical change that constantly reconstitute the grounds of subjectivities. It is however what he brackets off, that is, the underlying question of nature and the natural law of change that he views as merely metaphorically analogous to historical development rather than foundational to it, that suggests an attempt to sidestep the question of ideology in his deployment of the terminology of "the conscripts of modernity." Being only a denotation of historical and institutional determinants of possibilities associated with the moment of modernity, the notion of "conscripts of modernity" seems to consign the determinative power of history exclusively to the reserve of the unified modern; the power to determine history remains external to subaltern spaces. A more inclusive view of historical change would take into consideration contradictory and residual forces as possessing degrees of determinative capital or potentials.

Contrary to Scott, I demonstrate the effect of the historical-natural conscription, using Achebe's illustrations of pedagogy and social existence, and their interactions, as a diffused mode of totalitarian ideology, from the environmental to the metaphysical, to the level of individual subjectivity. It should have been obvious to Scott given his long meditation

on the reversal of Toussaint Louverture's transmutation from revolutionary hero to despotic autocrat and executioner of black slaves. For Achebe, the two personas of the hero and figure of terror were always joined. Darkness held a vague sense of terror for the bravest of the people; the great masked spirits were terrifying spectacles; Okonkwo's household "lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper."[133] If in the end, the failure of Okonkwo is his failure, just like the Toussaint of *The Black Jacobins* that Scott analyzes, to be dynamic, like Eneke the bird whose maxim is repeated in different forms in Achebe's trilogy: "since men have learnt to fly without missing, he has learnt to fly without perching,"[134] that failure of dynamism, that stiffness, no longer carries an African specificity since it is now incorporated into the larger failure of superseding the movements of nature and history, and even the indelible differences of the nationality of thought and forms to which Derrida alludes at the beginning of this chapter. Indeed, tradition: cultural, literary or philosophical, becomes like a communal mythology that upholds the unbreakable rule of the supreme ideology: "the earth," the allegorical signification of impediment, if not impossibility, constituted by this insuperability, not just of nature, but in the widest possible sense of the objective spirit that incarnates and governs material life.

Okonkwo's "conditioned nature" is inseparable from the conditions of his work in the practical realm. This conditioning becomes fetters for "later individuals" operating in the new missionary-colonial era whose mode of production is defined by their primarily book-based education. The instructive passage in *Things Fall Apart* on this point can be found in the model of Mr. Brown.

> In the end Mr. Brown's arguments began to have an effect. More people came to learn in his school, and he encouraged them with gifts of singlets and towels. They were not all young, these people who came to learn. Some of them were thirty years old or more. They worked on their farms in the morning and went to school in the afternoon. And it was not long before the people began to say that the white man's medicine was quick in working. Mr. Brown's school produced quick results. A few months in it were enough to make one a court messenger or even a court clerk. Those who stayed longer became teachers; and from Umuofia labourers went forth into the Lord's vineyard. New churches were established in the surrounding villages and a few schools with them. *From the very beginning religion and education went hand in hand.*[135]

If we read the above passage in the light of Olufemi Taiwo's *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa*,[136] we would come to a better appreciation of Achebe's insight as a son of a missionary himself. The object of colonialism contradicted missionary idealism and co-opted it in many cases at the same time that the stunted nature of internal dissent represented by Obierika foreclosed the development of a more benign trajectory of African modernization that would not be indebted to colonial modernity. The genealogy and model of religion and education that Achebe is tracking in his novels, while they may be problematic in certain respects, are nonetheless sound proof that colonial modernity was not the only historical path or possibility to African modernity.

The Career of the Book: Postcolonial Enlightenment and the Mark on the Flesh

We are juxtaposing the nature-culture scenes of instruction with the more formalized, organized, and verbalized form of ideology represented by modern institutions of book dissemination and learning. This juxtaposition, and/or problematization, is present in the works of early African writers as a form of an advance consciousness that in many instances has acquired prophetic dimensions. A precaution is necessary here since practicality and abstraction as pedagogical methods and modes are never binaries. Every practical engagement with the material world, or the environment writ large, is mediated by a form of purposiveness or abstraction, which some insist should be called ideology. Both instructional modes are linked in their own ways to the production of an evolved species of masculinity. In the third section of this chapter, we attempted to take Achebe's works out of the context of traditional masculinity where his critical heritage has fixed them as a way of highlighting their ideological significations. In this section, we are performing the reverse analysis by situating the works literally within traditional male privilege, linking education back to the patriarchy of the ancient regime of tradition.

Having laid out the informal scene of instruction of his early childhood in *Home and Exile*, which becomes a scenic template that is reproduced throughout the trilogy in different forms, Achebe contrasts it directly with formal school instruction, "as it happened, it was only these foreign aspects of my upbringing that we dignified with the title education … and its acquisition was generally painful …. The atmosphere of

the schoolroom was always tense, and you were lucky if a day passed and you did not receive a stroke or two of the teacher's cane."[137] While we do not get an explicit depiction of the classroom in the novels, its objective instrument, the book, and its effects, as already indicated, is central to the overall concern of the stories. For most writers of the period, the pain of book-learning, the pain of the teacher's cane, the painfully tense atmosphere, function as a rite of passage that Ngugi compares to the pain and transformation of his circumcision: "though the whole ritual of becoming a man leaves a deep impression on me, I emerge from it convinced more deeply that, for our times, education and learning, not a mark on the flesh, are the way to empower men and women."[138] Circumcision, "a mark on the flesh" is a classic symbol that marks the moment of transition from the corporeal object of discipline and instruction in the practical realm, the body proper, to a psychological template, with the book and the teacher's cane as the prostheses of a new technology of instruction, discipline, and branding of the psychic template. This accounts for why Ngugi's life, work and struggle have been devoted to the decolonization of the mind, or as he put it, "the psychological violence of the classroom."[139] But why is it of any significance that Ngugi has made this striking comparison of book-learning to male circumcision? Ngugi was writing against the context of a popular view that gained momentum and canonical status with the publication of *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol* by the Ugandan poet, Okot p'Bitek, of the emasculation of the black man by book-learning.[140] "For all our young men /Were finished in the forest, /Their manhood was finished /In the class-rooms, /Their testicles/Were smashed/With large books![141] Thus, by performing an equifunctional translation of circumcision and the threat of castration into book-learning, and vice versa, Ngugi and p'Bitek provide us with a new way of conceptualizing the anxieties of postcolonial enlightenment.

Of the many scenes of male circumcision in African literature and cinema, especially strong in Eastern and Southern African literatures, including those in Ngugi's novels and autobiographies, to which we may refer for a proper guide and understanding of the cultural and spiritual contexts of Ngugi's reference, that of Nelson Mandela stands out. In the first part of *Long Walk to Freedom*, "A Country Childhood," Mandela writes of his own circumcision:

> There were now two boys before the *ingcibi* reached me, and my mind must have gone blank because before I knew it, the old man was kneeling in front

> of me. I looked directly into his eyes. He was pale, and though the day was cold, his face was shining with perspiration. His hands moved so fast they seemed to be controlled by an otherworldly force. Without a word, he took my foreskin, pulled it forward, and then, in a single motion, brought down his assegai. I felt as if fire was shooting through my veins; the pain was so intense that I buried my chin into my chest. Many seconds seemed to pass before I remembered the cry, and then I recovered and called out, *"Ndiyindoda!"* I looked down and saw a perfect cut, clean and round like a ring. But I felt ashamed because the other boys seemed much stronger and braver than I had been; they had called out more promptly than I had. I was distressed that I had been disabled, however briefly, by the pain, and I did my best to hide my agony. A boy may cry; a man conceals his pain. I had now taken the essential step in the life of every Xhosa man. Now, I might marry, set up my own home, and plow my own field. I could now be admitted to the councils of the community; my words would be taken seriously.[142]

This passage is an extraordinary simulation of the Passion and of suffering, as a necessity for the production of manly virtues, the superman.[143] It serves to foreshadow allegorically the destiny of the male subject who passed the test of masculinity. Of note is his ability to look directly into the Oldman's eyes; he would later need this ability to stare down an entire system of injustice. He also was able to overcome the momentary disablement by pain, the experience of which Ngugi invokes to enable a particular understanding of the function of book-learning.

If we flash back momentarily to Okonkwo's many struggles, starting with the famine, and then, the test of Ikemefuna, which confirmed his role as an executor of the laws of nature and history, we can see how suffering could serve as a baptismal preparation for that role. Mandela begins the story of his own life struggles and triumphs retrospectively with the remarkable story of his childhood and his initiation into the brotherhood of men. The initiate at his first test of masculinity undergoes a physical test, a physical exertion of will, where he learns to imprison his pain, as if mastery over pain is mastery of the will over the body, its pleasures and its desires; this physical test is a symbolic test that mirrors the adversities of life itself, and foretells the outcome. Though the candidate at his second test may be free from the physical demands of the first test, he cannot escape its symbolic implications and pressures.

The colonial school teacher simply took over the uncompromising inculcation of manly virtues and discipline in conscripting and cultivating

colonial subjects. Ngugi deftly translates postcolonial enlightenment to its cultural and political function of the production of masculinity. A subject we shall return to, shortly. The shifting mode and scene of instruction from the book of life itself to the objective form of paper is accompanied by a corresponding expectation or aspiration in social relations that invests masculinity with an emancipatory capacity and promise. With book-learning comes a condition of instruction that is primarily a condition of alienation. This condition of alienation is, however, compensated with a promise.

Joseph Zobel's 1950 novel, *Rue Cases-Nègres* adapted into a film in 1983 by Euzhan Palcy, is an evocative portrait of this promise. Set against the backdrop of the cane fields of a Martinican plantation of the 1930s, Jose's teacher's words reverberate throughout the postcolony: "L'instruction c'est la clef qui ouvre la deuxième porte de notre liberté" ["Instruction/Education is the key that opens the second door to our liberation."][144] Achebe had lived the reality of political independence just as Zobel had lived the reality of colonial Martinique. Zobel, like many other black authors of his time was quite invested in the promise of liberation through education.

Achebe's approach appears to be more ironic and deconstructive given that he takes us through the genealogy of the promise of liberation through education and locates its origin in colonial discourse. This moment occurs in a passage in *Things Fall Apart* where

> Mr. Brown begged and argued and prophesied. He said that the leaders of the land in the future would be men and women who had learnt to read and write. If Umuofia failed to send her children to the school, strangers would come from other places to rule them. They could already see that happening in the Native Court, where the D.C. was surrounded by strangers who spoke his tongue. Most of these strangers came from the distant town of Umuru on the bank of the Great River where the white man first went.[145]

That Mr. Brown chooses to employ the power of persuasion and was indeed impressive given the warm and highly favorable reception he received is an indication of the model of enlightenment and modernization that the institutions of colonialism preempted in Africa, and in much of the postcolonial world. The promise of book-learning as articulated by Mr. Brown is not simply one of social and economic mobility, its ultimate realization is the supersession of nature at the most basic level of becoming

a purely moral being, who has attained maturity. This coupling of enlightenment and ethics is reflected in the image and personality cultivated by Mr. Brown as the paradigm évolué. "And so Mr. Brown came to be respected even by the clan, because he trod softly on its faith. He made friends with some of the great men of the clan and on one of his frequent visits to the neighbouring villages he had been presented with a carved elephant tusk, which was a sign of dignity and rank."[146] I have highlighted what appears to be Achebe's endorsement of the Mr. Brown model in contrast to the Mr. Smith model to signal where I want to rest my argument at the end of this chapter on the question of institutional disalienation. Robert Wren has furnished us with the historical event that inspired the figure of Mr. Brown and the gift of the elephant tusk. The depiction of Mr. Brown, according to Wren, is a gesture by Achebe to immortalize his father's teacher, G. T. Basden, to whom the people of Ogidi gave the gift of the elephant tusk. "Isaiah Achebe was a true convert. His teacher and mentor was a missionary named G. T. Basden, like Brown, was a patient man, ready to discuss theology with non-Christians; like Brown, Basden was presented with an elephant tusk in appreciation of a quarter century of service in the Onitsha-Ogidi-Awka area, which is Achebe's home ground."[147] This historical aside reminds us of the importance of proximity and intimacy as requirements of publishing in Africa.

It could be argued that "*all the difference*" constituted by these two models may well be in their manners, in how they communicated and expressed the same ideology. Guided by Mudimbe's insight that missionary and colonial institutions operated under and spoke through the same signs, I want to suggest that although Achebe seems to have accepted the transformation of the indigenous culture as part of an inevitable natural and historical process, he was nevertheless unwilling to accept justifications, either missionary or colonial, for harm to that world that violated its fundamental sense of dignity, or its prestige. This is the importance of the model of Mr. Brown and his investiture with the elephant tusk, the sign of the culture's "dignity and rank" that arguably informs Achebe's views and relationship, especially with his British publishers, as an extension of the overall apparatus of modernity and change in Africa.

The elephant tusk as the sign of dignity and rank is also the attempt to symbolize the codes and the terms of engagement of a masculine culture that prioritizes those qualities and incarnates them in its pedagogical institutions and models, which the writer's ideology and representation simulate. After all, the tusk had been a gift, a discursive and moral economy of

the greatest men of the clan whose code it is. Achebe's position can be seen as two sided. On the one side, the necessity of change should not collaterally necessitate the loss of dignity and rank. The product of the dialectical movement of history and nature is not necessarily the most evolved. The dialectical movement does not only resolve contradictions, it generates contradictions as much as it resolves. This premise leads to the other side of the ledger, if we are to accept the mantra of modernity as "the book as a force for change," to use Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin's phrase, that is, colonial enlightenment as liberation pedagogy;[148] this is not itself devoid of old and new contradictions.

To anchor this sense of what that change in requirement actually signifies, and to begin bringing the argument of this chapter together, it may be worth revisiting Ngugi's earlier quoted statement, which appears to suggest that the western-educated African takes the place of an Okonkwo as the evolved species of the culture precisely through a change in the rituals and object of masculinity: "Though the whole ritual of becoming a man leaves a deep impression on me, I emerge from it convinced more deeply that, for our times, education and learning, not a mark on the flesh, are the way to empower men and women." This formulation is again, strikingly similar to Achebe's in *No Longer at Ease* where an Old man gives Obi a charge.

> Then he turned to the young man on his right. "In times past," he told him, "Umuofia would have required of you to fight in her wars and bring home human heads. But those were days of darkness from which we have been delivered by the blood of the Lamb of God. Today we send you to bring knowledge."[149]

Here is the perfect illustration of the gendered nature of war as a template for the gendered nature of the new techniques and technologies of waging it. This charge gives expression to a postcolonial version of the Clausewitz aphorism: education, or the lack thereof, is war by other means, as much as politics has been. This was the ultimate charge to colonial children, and the absolute test of their manhood. It is directly connected to the sense of grave responsibility, and the imperative of art-pedagogy that characterized the writings and ideology of the time: if the book is the perfect instrument of empire, it is also the perfect instrument of decolonization. Writing in the *New York Times*, Alison Gopnik wrote: "In the last 30 years, the United States has completed its transformation to an information economy.

Knowledge is as important in the twenty-first century as capital was in the 19th, or land in the 18th."[150] It is safe to say that although the postcolony did not realize the transformation into a knowledge economy, it was well ahead in seeing knowledge not so much as power in the classical sense, but as indispensable capital.

The contrast in Achebe's trilogy, the contours around which I have structured my argument here, is between "times past" and "today," how "today" must urgently supersede "times past." "Times past" was the time of the executioners, with a direct reference to Umuofia, and the invocation, it seems, of the image of Okonkwo drinking at ceremonies from the trophy of his first human skull from battle, and also with a not so subtle reference to another "times past" of the dark ages, especially with the invocation of darkness in the passage. The narrative present is located in "today," which can only represent "times past" as stunted or as a caricature. But here is the complex representation of the discourse of the modernist moment at work in Achebe's trilogy: not only do characters, volunteers of modernity, such as the Oldman's caricature "times past," they themselves appear as caricatures, whether in the ambiance of profundity or in their sheer voluntarism. The modernist moment as a new form of one-sided existence equally becomes the flip side of times past.

The caricature by characters who themselves appear as caricatures is the motif behind the characterization of Obi Okonkwo's father who is portrayed, like Ezeulu, as the uninformed genius.

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

> *Arithmetic* which he used in 1908 to Obi's Durrell, from obsolete cockroach-eaten translations of the Bible into the Onitsha dialect to yellowed Scripture Union Cards of 1920 and earlier. Okonkwo never destroyed a piece of paper. He had two boxes full of them. The rest were preserved on top of his enormous cupboard, on tables, on boxes and on one corner of the floor.[151]

The remarkable insight we find in this comparison between the marks Igbo women make on their bodies and the marks made on paper to produce books is similar to the analogy Ngugi makes between the inscription on the body proper in male circumcision and the inscription on paper.[152] There is a parallel that is constantly being struck between new modes and techniques of inscription and the ones that are being displaced, with the automatic ascription of advancement and upper stratum of material culture to the new. The substrate of the old is the human body itself, or nature, which is considered ephemeral, but the support for the new is the template of paper, which is thought to be capable of permanence. The mark on the flesh is scriptural.

These fictional characters recognize that inscriptions are made through impressions that are meant to last at least a little longer than the moment of inscription. The system of writing is the archive of impressions that the old could only cognize in its stunted decorative form but which is now being fully incarnated in its archivable form by the new. This is why the reading of Obi Okonkwo's father by Neil Korteneer with regards to the origins of literacy and fetishism does not go far enough in recognizing what Derrida calls the archontic instinct of an archivist that is at work in Obi's father. This archival instinct goes beyond the haunting power of the book and its appropriation, or mere fetishism. It is fetishism only to the extent that archivization is fetishism. The mystic regard for Mr. Okonkwo reflects the sacred status documents acquire once they are considered archivable. Achille Mbembe has eloquently described the processes and procedures of sacralization in his essay, "The Power of the Archive."[153] Unlike the six black authors that Gates referenced in his trope of the talking book, Equiano's and Achebe's approaches to the object of the book differ to the extent that the mystic regard is accompanied by or contextualized in ways that demythologize the book. As the analogies to Hughes and Du Bois already indicate, and to build further on them, a level of the analysis of Achebe's educational practice as a writer is situated deliberately within a wider black engagement, not merely with the trope of the book, but also its ideology, its materiality and masculinity: its career.

Anyone familiar with black literature in general will recognize the near universal resonance of the theme of emancipation through Enlightenment. As James T. Campbell states in his book *Middle Passages* "The idea of literacy as the gateway to self-expression and freedom is a ubiquitous theme in African American literature."[154] Achebe's characters in the other books of the trilogy share the vision that enlightenment and progress go hand in hand. They follow the belief that enlightenment or book-learning, as Mr. Brown has argued, is literally expected to lead to the transformation of living conditions and the evolution of ethical principles. This connection, between the book and enlightenment on the one hand, and between enlightenment and emancipation on the other, represents a conjunction of the idea of the book and the transformation of living conditions that finds its most powerful expression and summation in no other place than in W. E. B. Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folk*:

> Slowly but steadily, in the following years, a new vision began gradually to replace the dream of political power,—a powerful movement, the rise of another ideal to guide the unguided, another pillar of fire by night after a clouded day. It was the ideal of "book-learning"; the curiosity, born of compulsory ignorance, to know and test the power of the cabalistic letters of the white man, the longing to know. Here at last seemed to have been discovered the mountain path to Canaan; longer than the highway of Emancipation and law, steep and rugged, but straight, leading to heights high enough to overlook life.[155]

Book-learning as the path to Canaan offers a promise beyond a mere emancipation proclamation. It is not at all surprising that Du Bois recapitulates the black struggle for freedom through education as a religious experience and journey in almost the same way that Ngugi does by comparing it to a rite of passage, to circumcision. They are both responding to a certain numinous quality of the book that prompts the comparisons in the first place. Education as a form of religious experience is even more apt in capturing the sense of profundity, *à la* Sartre, with which Achebe's fictional characters struggled in their encounter with the material career of the book.

Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, and *No longer at Ease* are replete with the aura of profundity as manifestations of the implicit faith in the liberational power and the promise of the book. During Ezeulu's exile and imprisonment in *Arrow of God*, he observes the district officer and his

clerk; the narrative presents his observations in terms that reveal what Du Bois describes as "the power of the cabalistic letters of the white man."[156] Ezeulu was not impressed by the Clerk, but the unusual event was that of the D.O. "He too was writing, but with his left hand. The first thought that came to Ezeulu on seeing him was to wonder whether any black man could ever achieve the same mastery over book as to write it with the left hand."[157] Ezeulu is discerning enough to see the emergence of a new form of mastery as a requirement of the colonizing structure of power, to which his own place and power would have to be grafted in order to remain relevant. This requirement presents itself opaquely as a mystery to him for a number of reasons, not least of which is that the book represents, as Sartre has suggested, a finite mode of the objective spirit of a relation of production and consciousness that claims to be more developed than the one in which Ezeulu operates; which is why the representation of his encounter with this object takes on the dimension of profundity as a marker of the distinctively higher stage of consciousness and development of the invading "advanced species." In other words, profundity is always a reflection of the gaps in knowledge, and the different stratum of social existence of the colonial host in its encounter with the unfamiliar realm of the imperative form of abstraction constituted by the book.

According to Sartre, the book's abstraction is a function of its institutional character, which makes it "in a sense, a sacred object; its 'numinous' character is manifest most clearly when we imagine it in its occasional relations with uninformed people who read very little. When they approach a work—recommended by others whom they trust—they treat the text as if it were composed of *carmina sacra*, according it the same respect. In effect, they are dimly if inarticulately aware that by absorbing those little pointed black splinters we call words, they are about to swallow society whole."[158] Left-handed writing is of the same order of profundity as the wholesome consumption of society. The book presents itself to "the unguided" (Du Bois) and the "uninformed" (Sartre) as an unfathomable and haunting abstraction.

The haunting quality of the "cabalistic letters," is really what Gates' trope of the talking book attempts to define at a time when letters were, to black slaves, the sign of a totalitarian exterior. The fascination with the iconography of modernity constantly sets characters like Ezeulu apart as uninformed men. He is quite representative in being smitten by the sword of letters and haunted by its seductive power. So much so, he reinforces the wisdom of his decision to send one of his sons to school, upon his

return to his village. In his caricature is announced the locus of the narrative in a modern historical space looking back upon an earlier stage that it contains within itself.

> When I was in Okperi I saw a young white man who was able to write his book with the left hand. From his actions I could see that he had very little sense. But he had power; he could shout in my face; he could do what he liked. Why? Because he could write with his left hand. That is why I have called you. I want you to learn and master this man's knowledge so much that if you are suddenly woken up from sleep and asked what it is you will reply. You must learn it until you can write it with your left hand. That is all I want to tell you.[159]

Although, the trademark subtlety with which Achebe elicits sympathy for these mystified characters is usually set against the ironic tone in his works to create a sense of ambivalence, in the passage above, it is the ironic treatment of profundity that draws our attention. The writers that Gates cites that used the trope of the talking book were all struck by this quality of profundity and magic. Achebe's approach reveals a more mature and historically situated response to profundity and its representation. The signs of mastery were devoid of any ethical content, a form of mastery accompanied by "little sense." It is the cognitive ability that intuitively recognizes the connection between the mastery over books and the mastery over men, and the struggle to articulate this within the limits of their knowledge gaps and epistemological orientation that Achebe highlights in the encounter above. Here we see the beginning of the dismantling of profundity and Mr. Brown's grand claims of the promise of education. The institutional and figurative connection between the two masters, the headmaster and the colonial master, underlies the thematic threading together of colonialism and enlightenment in the form of a critique of colonial enlightenment that appeared prominently in the first wave of modern African novels. Thus was developed simultaneously a critique of the enlightenment, which simply means for our purpose, "book-learning," combined with a representation of profundity in African literature. In using the term enlightenment in this manner, I am following the example of Richard Barney who in *Plots of Enlightenment*,[160] traces the relationship between education and the novel in eighteenth-century England in order to uncover the early formation of what he calls the novel of education.

A little earlier than Achebe, precisely two years before the publication of *Arrow of God*, Cheikh Hamidou Kane had in 1962 published in French *Ambiguous Adventure* that represents enlightenment as colonial and the book not as a force for change, but as a perfect instrument of empire. Samba Diallo was asked a question that presupposes he was already subjugated by virtue of his status as a western educated African: "'Tell me how they conquered you, personally,' I don't know any too well. Perhaps it was with their alphabet. With it, they struck the first hard blow at the country of the Diallobe. I remained for a long time under the spell of those signs and those sounds which constitute the structure and the music of their language."[161] Earlier in the novel we were told: "the new school shares at the same time the characteristics of cannon and of magnet. From the cannon, it draws its efficacy as an arm of combat. Better than the cannon, it makes conquest permanent. The cannon compels the body, the school bewitches the soul. Where the cannon has made a pit of ashes and of death, in the sticky mold of which men would not have rebounded from the ruins, the new school establishes peace."[162] This is perhaps the earliest and most pungent expression of the association of colonial schools and colonial domination as such in the African novel. The idea of bewitchment shows that Kane does not separate profundity, the haunting or enchanting quality of the book's abstraction from the force of arms under which the colonies were brutally subjugated.[163]

In describing the critique of colonial enlightenment in these novels, I am deliberately compressing and collapsing the distinct processes of print culture, the production of books, and the modes of their institutional appropriations in formal settings such as schools, into their representations in the novels. Both Achebe and Kane were more interested in the larger cultural space within which books generate their multiple effects. And because Achebe had published *No Longer at Ease* with similar concerns, it is possible to speculate that they have both arrived at the same impressions about these effects independently and simultaneously. And while much has been written about Kane's notion of double conquest of the alphabet and cannon, little notice has been made about Achebe's framing of the same phenomenon, especially in *Arrow of God*, where he makes the young men who were building the roads to utter the following:

> "We are talking about the white man's road," said a voice above the others.
> "Yes, we are talking about the white man's road. But when the roof and

> walls of a house fall in, the ceiling is not left standing. The white man, the new religion, the soldiers, the new road—they are all part of the same thing. The white man has a gun, a matchet, a bow and carries fire in his mouth. He does not fight with one weapon alone."[164]

It is no news that a number of the major writers of Achebe's generation share this supercritical notion of colonialism as a complete and intricate structure. They were convinced that if you take out one of the parts, the entire enterprise falters and begins to fall apart, every aspect of the colonial apparatus is thus as important to the possibility and effectiveness of colonial domination as the other. The book, just like the road, is a weapon of war that these colonial children hope to master, own, and redeploy in their own project of decolonization.

Achebe's use of an architectural image "when the roof and walls of a house fall in, the ceiling is not left standing," which suggests an intricate and interconnected network of superstructures, institutions, and practices that constitute colonialism, is apt if only because it coincides precisely with the same set of images that Lord Lugard deploys in his description of the fundamental strategy of his colonial mission in Africa:

> In Africa we are laying foundations. The superstructure may vary in its details, some of which may perhaps be ill-designed, but the stability of the edifice is unaffected. You may pull down and re-erect cupolas, but you cannot alter the design of the foundations without first destroying all that has been erected upon them.[165]

Achebe and Kane in that early period of their writing career, which was already the late period of colonialism, reflected a degree of insight into the ambition and workings of colonialism as a foundational act that has since been validated by postcolonial and poststructural theories of empire. For example, we now know that colonialism was not merely about political power but about knowledge as well. As the Most Royal Lady puts it in *Ambiguous Adventure*, book-learning is the search for the knowledge of "how one can conquer without being in the right."[166] The missionary and colonial conceptions of the relationship between knowledge and ethics are thereby emphatically rejected and refuted in these novels.

The career of the book, because it is the most elaborate if not always obvious verbalization of ideology, in this case, alien ideology, is thus imagined in these texts as a form of slow conquest. This is why Kane describes it as a spell, and nowhere has the encounter with the book, with the school,

been more profoundly experienced as a haunting space of enchantment than in these founding texts of African literature. In this regard, we seem closer to the Gatesean trope of the talking book, which shows the black subjects' attempt to harness and redeploy the power of the book than we are to the Hughes' ritual of unlearning. A closer examination of the texts will however reveal that these two gestures form the poles around which the responses of African writers have revolved. From Laye's *The African Child to* Ngugi's *Weep Not Child*, the young hero harbors a hope of emancipation entwined with the consciousness of responsibility. He ardently follows the train of progress to its terminus. These novels cast their riveted eyes backward on that journey reimagined as reflections, where ideals and fantasies are lamented, not fulfilled. As lamentations of unfulfilled ideals of emancipation, the story of anticolonialism is best told through the form of tragedy rather than romance, as Scott proposed. What has yet to be accounted for in these narratives is the sharp twist in how stories that raise high expectations of classical romance end up in fact as tragedies. The true form of these novels as tragic form best illustrates Scott's formulation of the tragedy of colonial enlightenment. A somewhat different version of the narrative twist occurs with the Cameroonians Mongo Beti (*Mission to Kala*), and Ferdinand Oyono (*Road to Europe*).

What these writings about colonial childhood offer, despite the divergence of their ideologies and backgrounds, is the strong and unusual verbalization of romanticism and enlightenment, and a consciousness saturated by the effects of disillusionment and tragedy. The heroic quest of these young Prometheans filled with the dream and utopia of enlightenment, what Du Bois calls "the ideal of book-learning," Achebe declared was "doomed from the start to distress and failure."[167] The failure of these characters we are to construe as the demonstrable limits of even the Mr. Brown model of colonial or alien pedagogy, however soft it may appear. If Mr. Brown's soft model has been held as oppositional to Mr. Smith's abrasive model, and both as oppositional to the colonial model as a whole, these oppositions break down at the moment their imperatives are examined together because in the end, they all demand supersession without, or with as little retention, as possible. This model however gets shifted with Hampate Ba's *Fortunes of Wangrin*.

Profundity manifests in the encounter of "the uninformed" with the book as an inscrutable form of abstraction, an ornament of power, an instrument of conquest, of learning and mobility, and of conversion and translation. The cumulative effect of the career of the book is that through

it and through the other forms of transformations, especially of space and techniques, modernity itself is experienced in the form of profundity. Profundity then becomes that aspect of the mystic of colonial relations that has not been adequately recognized and disarticulated even though writers such as Achebe, Ngugi, and Soyinka expressed it as a form of advance consciousness in their early writings or in more recent reflections on the late-colonial period. Ngugi, for example, gives colonial childhood the best illustration of profundity in his blend of romanticism and irony in his memoir, *Dreams in a Time of War*: "the day I wear my khaki uniform and walk two miles to Kamandura is when I enter and float in the soft mist of a dreamland."[168] On his way to the high school he writes "now my time has come, now I am doing the same thing. A train to school. A boarding school. Alliance High School, Kikuyu. Twelve miles away, but it is as if I'm about to ride a train to paradise. This one is even more special. It will carry my dreams in a time of war."[169] The school as an apparatus of colonial enchantment represents one of the several mechanisms of seduction and subjection, and the world of these novels is the school writ large. Talking about developing the ability to read, Ngugi states: "this ability to escape into a world of magic is worth my having gone to school. Thank you, mother, thank you. The school has opened my eyes. When later in church I hear the words I was blind and now I see, from the hymn 'Amazing grace,' I remember Kamandura School, and the day I learned to read."[170] This ironic mode is a reflection of an advance consciousness that operates at a higher level of self-awareness, as one might expect than the trope of the talking book that Gates expounded in his *Signifying Monkey*.[171]

In *Ake*, first published in 1981 about three decades before Ngugi's memoir, Soyinka already displayed this ironic relation to profundity by sounding a bit more disdainful about his first day in school, having simply walked in after trailing his sister to school, according to him, at about the age of two. The headmaster obliged him a space in the infant section and told him he needn't come to school every day if he did not feel like it, to which he responded:

> I looked at him in some astonishment. Not feel like coming to school! The coloured maps, pictures and other hangings on the walls, the coloured counters, markers and slates inkwells in neat round holes, crayons and drawing books, a shelf laden with modeled objects—animals, human beings, implements—raffia and basket-work in various stages of completion, even the blackboards, chalk and duster … I had yet to see a more inviting playroom![172]

The inviting quality of an enchanted space is best understood for its disciplining function if situated within the overall disciplinary regime in these schools, implemented through a rigorous and comprehensive curriculum or program, as a part of the general regime under which colonialism disciplined most of Africa. It is this disciplinary function that Ngugi's comparison to circumcision was intended to emphasize. Achebe described the dispensation of colonial power as a universal mode of discipline that involved the disciplining of both mind and body. Examples abound, but the story often recounted by Sony Labou Tansi stands out for being the most fabulous. What he described as punishment for speaking his language in the Congo when he grew up and for murdering French at school wasn't just wearing a hat but carrying a box of shit on his back.[173]

The effects that colonial power generated over the mind are securely latched onto the mechanisms for the control of the body proper. The mechanisms for book-learning in the colonial space incorporate within them the nature-culture scenes of instruction. Colonial power sublates and substitutes an internal mechanism of control in order to maintain simultaneously control from within and without; this is why it was so thorough, comprehensive, and ultimately, self-perpetuating in a way that cannot be easily delegitimized. According to Ngugi, "The pressure to do well must have produced the high degree of tolerance for corporal punishment, sometimes verging on abuse, that was so common in Manguo. The aggrieved children had no sympathy from their parents. The teacher was always right; after all, he was the daily eye of the community in the classroom."[174] The classroom is a sovereign world unto its own, a space situated outside the communal space, not because it is physically separated, but rather because it represents a mode of instruction alien to communal ideology, and ontology, and is completely outside the authority of the community, being initially under the proprietorship of the missions, and ultimately the megapower of state. So, it appears these two spaces, the classroom and the community, are distinct ontological realms that colonial children crisscrossed daily. Stepping into the classroom demands, or effects, an ontological translation, and the profound transformation of the familiar rules of discipline that parents cannot even begin to understand, much less engage. Thus, the children that return home daily to parents undergo a thousand imperceptible spiral transformations by virtue of that oscillation. The upbringing of the children is partially and gradually delegated to the teacher.[175] The teacher increasingly assumes more authority to mold the children of the community outside the classroom, and

ultimately, he or she is relied upon to mold the community itself. This is the moment when the teacher-function becomes a de facto political function, whether articulated as the new author function, read novelist as teacher, or in the actual responsibility of the teacher, including the use of coercion that Ngugi describes above.

In his discussion of the literate tradition and social conservation, or the technical function of the teacher, Bourdieu argues that the need to legitimize the authority of the social system has necessitated an investment of authority in the teacher who substantiates and actualizes the social function of the educational system. "In conceding the teacher the right and the power to deflect the authority of the institution onto his own person," Bourdieu continues, "the educational system secures the surest means of getting the office-holder to put all the resources and zeal of the person into the service of the institution and through it the institution's social function."[176] Bourdieu sees in all pedagogic actions objective symbolic violence that is not subject to dispute "insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power."[177] However, the legitimacy of direct forms of coercion such as corporal punishment is determined socially in order for it to be a legitimate mode of imposition. "Thus, whereas in certain societies recourse to techniques of coercion (smacking or even giving 'lines') is sufficient to disqualify the teaching agent, corporal punishments (the English public school's cat-o'-nine-tails, the schoolmaster's cane or the Koran school teacher's *falaqa*) appear simply as attributes of teacherly legitimacy in a traditional culture where there is no danger of their betraying the objective truth of a PA of which this is the legitimate mode of imposition."[178] As part of a disciplinary mechanism, the work of inculcation in the social context of colonial rule mimes the social order that it imposes. This mimesis of pedagogy is central to all pedagogy actions and the function of social reproduction. As a form of "dramatic action" or "performance," the mimesis of pedagogy may sometimes reproduce modes of punishment or systems of reward that are already part of what Bourdieu terms "the cultural arbitrary" to be imposed all the way down: "Whether or not he wants to or is even aware of it, the teacher must define himself by reference to the social definition of a practice which, in its traditional form, cannot forego some dramatic action. Although it presupposes pedagogic authority in order to take place, pedagogic action must, by an apparent paradox, obtain the recognition of its authority in and through the performance of the work of inculcation."[179]

The omnibus function of the teacher as a mechanism of surveillance, control, discipline, and enlightenment that was central to the colonial/postcolonial societies grows naturally out of the objective structures of colonial modernity. Its centrality by extension imposes on the writer an inescapable encounter with the immanence and performativity of the pedagogical moments of colonizing structures of which the school and the publishing institutions are integral, just as have been the Christian missions. If schools and publishing institutions are incarnations of colonial modernity, it is no coincidence that both publishers and writers would discover within the objective structures of colonial modernity, similar pedagogical models or requirements. It is very useful, if not necessary, to refocus our analytical methods on the determinations and requirements of the objective structures constituted by the ensemble of colonial modernity in order to comprehend fully the intersections of the agendas of publishers and authors in the early postcolonial period.

Despite Soyinka's description of the colonial school as kindergarten playground, a depiction that may already foreshadow his heightened sense of dramatic irony, the character of Lakunle in *The Lion and the Jewel* reveals a cynical view of the ideological function of the teacher as the pivotal head of colonial modernity. Lakunle loses the bride to the Oldman in *The Lion and the Jewels*, just as Odili, in Achebe's *A Man of the People* loses his girlfriend to Chief Nanga. The loss of the bride to the forces of atavism is an attempt to signpost the universal failure of postcolonial enlightenment. Yet, when the man, the hero of Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, is confronted by these same forces, he has nowhere to turn but to seek advice from Teacher, his friend, on how to survive the crushing corruption of his world, because Teacher is removed from it all, having isolated himself from society. The import of the advisory function of the writer as a public teacher is clear at this moment in Armah's novel, further highlighting the period as one in which writers understood the overriding imperative of the age as pedagogical. Of the early writers, it was Armah who arguably most self-consciously made pedagogy, the social function of the teacher, a central principle of form, with the aestheticization of the figure of Teacher in that first novel.

A brief history of the editorial arguments that Armah's centralization of the teacher function in the novel generated is pertinent here, especially as it reveals that once the pedagogical function is foregrounded it appears as political; or put more directly, that the foregrounding of the pedagogical function unmasks the political nature of pedagogy as such. In the original

manuscript, Armah had presented Teacher's thoughts or statement about society directly in a long, italicized passage in the middle of the novel. This device caught the attention of Moira Lynd who reviewed the novel, and queried it. Armah's publisher at Heinemann, James Currey working through Aig Higo, the Director of their Nigerian office, passed this concern to Armah for "a critical personal appraisal," as Armah's relationship with the London office was already showing signs of strain. Starting by citing Lynd, Currey wrote: "'The author has been unable to resist introducing a straight political harangue in the middle section.' We have all been uncertain about this central part. What do you feel about it? I must say I think that we ought to put this criticism to Armah so that he considers it and thinks about it even if only to reject our criticism."[180] Armah's five-page response to this query makes the best defense of political arguments in the African novel by playing up the role of the character Teacher as one that is inextricably bound up with the political.

Bassek Ba Khobio's film, *Sango Malo* [The Village Teacher], is a perfect expression of the view that the direction of the development and transformation of African society will be determined by the pedagogical paradigm it adopts. Achebe and Armah represent two of the ways in which the pedagogical action and function are being represented, and envisioned, in Africa. It is paradoxical that the moment in Armah's novel where he stages a pedagogical vision in the critical mode rather than in the more pedantic mode associated with Achebe is the very moment that readers considered structurally weak. While Achebe's notion of the novelist as teacher articulates the overall social responsibility and ideological function of the novelist as an adviser of the public on the questions of beauty and thought, Armah develops a prophetic vision that is at once critical and frustratingly detached. Armah's rejoinder is apt to the extent that we see in the character of Teacher a critical vision that does not in any real sense constitute a political program as such. If the teacher-function cannot be depoliticized, the novelist's function as public teacher cannot be depersonalized. The pedagogical moment in these accounts is rendered as the positive modality of the production of subjects. Their reactions all build up from a foundational conviction concerning the profound change in the requirement of the objective historical structure in modern Africa.

Mass education has been crucial to the modern conception of historical progress, as it has been to the development of the novel. Achebe made a

career as a writer by successfully linking the genre of the novel in the African context to a pedagogical imperative and by the elaboration of the function of the novelist as a teacher. Both of these factors could be argued to be the requirements for writing in the early postcolonial period when the dominant publishers of fiction were educational publishers. It would be interesting to consider how Achebe's idea of literary pedagogy, and the relationship between literature and ethics in the context of educational publishing and school marketing fits within the history of the novel at large, especially considering the accounts, among many others, of Robert Scholes in *The Rise And Fall Of English*,[181] and Philip Waller's massive *Writers, Readers, & Reputations, Literary Life in Britain 1870–1918*.[182] The relevant question that Waller's research would raise for us is whether there is a parallel in the ways in which the educational Acts and institutional programs impact the production, consumption, and development of literary culture. Central to his claim is that the 1870 universal Elementary Education Act created a reading public that sustained literary production and shifted its mode of circulation from a closed-circuit system of subscription to mass consumption that could be argued to have impacted the debate around, if not the development of, the novel, as well as the role of publishers and critics, significantly. They all, in the words of Dick Donovon, either had to "follow the market" or were forced to respond to it in one way or the other.[183] With the accessibility of novels to the general public, and with the increasing identification of the ordinary reader with the general public, comes a pedagogical imperative that Waller sums as follows, "And not just ordained ministers of God have assumed the missionary position. The appointed advisers of the nation's reading have included schoolteachers, medical authorities, civil servants, librarians and the like, also authors themselves, publishers, editors, journalist; indeed anyone who has been blessed with a wagging finger on one hand and with a pen in the other."[184]

Robert Scholes is in agreement with Waller, or perhaps, the other way around, that the position that literature occupied at the turn of the nineteenth century, a moment that coincides with the highest point of imperialism, which he describes as the moment of the rise of English, was indeed, a "missionary position." Notably, Alan Hill used the term "missionary ethos" to describe the imperatives of the early period of postcolonial publishing. These echoes of the missionary era speak to the resilience of the category of ethics in the expectation, utilization, and evaluation of the function of literature.

In this chapter so far, I have attempted to draw out the role of the writer as Achebe conceived it as being in line with the role of "the appointed advisers of the nation's reading." This role, Waller reminds us, is a de facto "missionary position," that writers share, with schoolteachers and publishers, among others. In my analysis, I have tried to outline the implications of this advisory role in the early postcolonial moment in Africa as primarily pedagogical, approaching pedagogy from both practical and abstract angles. Ngugi has framed it slightly differently as pedagogy that is emotionally felt and pedagogy that is a purely cerebral activity: "Learning, for a colonial child, became a cerebral activity and not an emotionally felt experience."[185] The ultimate question to which we shall now turn is how we are to understand Achebe's perspective of literary publishing in Africa from this standpoint?

Author as Method:[186] Functional Transformation in African Literary Production

Is the author function still a relevant concept in literary and cultural production? This is the larger import of the inquiry that seeks to understand the pedagogical role of Chinua Achebe in the production and development of African literature, especially in his advisory capacity, both as adviser of the public concerning reading and taste, and publishers. In her *tour de force* treatise *Against World Literature*,[187] Emily Apter puts forward a concise case for the elimination of the author function in our heuristic and hermeneutic considerations. While this position against the author function may have acquired a certain gravitas, which may have indeed served to foreclose, for the time being, certain inquiries into the nature of the role of writers in cultivating public sensibilities and tastes: in the creation of culture, it is pertinent for us to reexamine the notion of author function within the relations of production, especially against the profile of pioneering writers who also double as editors, publishers, or their advisers, and thus acquire outsized capacity to shape the direction of the culture, and even set the very terms of our engagement and debates.

The period during which Achebe was adviser to the AWS coincided with the time editorial judgment was modeled by what Alan Hill described as "the highly personalized HEB management style."[188] The term "highly personalized" rings loudly of personality not only in the sense of pedigree but also signals, as Hill would later elaborate in the epilogue of his memoir, the freedom and power of the editor's individual judgment. For Hill surmises, "Publishing is a supremely entrepreneurial occupation: personal

initiative is everything and motivation is the most precious quality."[189] Hill was lamenting what at his time was the beginning of the corporatization of publishing, the same reasons for which James Currey left Heinemann in 1984. This was the era when the division of labor within the publishing operation was not, perhaps, as pronounced as we have it today. Authors of fiction and their editors were thought to have the capacity to shape public culture, and they often took initiatives in the selection of what subject matter and style of writing to promote. It is not only that the public, influenced by specific publications, comes under the tutelage of the author, some authors hold sway over the criteria and standards that determine what is produced. Some of this is done internally through editorial advice, but as Achebe's essay demonstrates, authors are not always averse to joining public and critical discourses on the nature of the craft, or to intervening in debates on the production of culture, or as in the case of Armah, entering into antagonistic relations with producers of culture.

At present, eliminating the notion of author function is *a priori* to literary criticism. The strength of the elimination argument derives from being the direct culmination of the reified ideations of poststructuralism and postmodernism as the entrenched theoretical models of the last half century.[190] The notions of the unified subjectivity of the author as a constitutive principle of form, and of the text as a unitary formation are two of the greatest casualties of the age of New Criticism. Because these theoretical postures are near exhaustion, they have themselves become increasingly non-reflexive and formulaic that they are no longer capable of facilitating the recognition or understanding of the residual modes and the totality of productive forces at work in the field of literary production as a whole. While the validity of Apter's specific argument may not be in question, its undialectical thrust clearly diminishes its widest possible application. Apter argues:

> The work becomes something on the order of what I would call *l'oeuvre oeuvrée*, the worked and working text. No longer viewed as a stable object owned by a single author, it emerges as a site of translational or editorial labor. […] Mediated by unseen editorial hands, the text bears the imprimatur of anonymous signatories whose alterity redounds against the unregistered identities of the work's all-inclusive readership. Translation is similar in this respect: the translator remains below the radar interceding as unobtrusively as possible. And like *génétique*, translation operates in the domain of literary *techne*, working through linguistic medium and milieu.[191]

In order to posit the "unseen editorial hands" as "the genius of the genius," Apter would have to conceive of editorial labor as existing outside the authorial sphere of influence. My argument is that where authorial labor or sphere ends and editorial labor or sphere begins is much harder to delineate than has been previously appreciated. Editorial labor was previously occluded by the focus on authors but the renewed focus on editorial labor also tends to occlude authorial labor. It is as if both forms of labor are mutually exclusive. I am therefore not asking us to do away completely with notions of the elimination of the author, or the death of the author, which raises the same issue as Bakhtin's work on discourse or genres as preceding the speech act, as if authors are made before coming into speech or genres are something always there beforehand; neither do I ask to dismiss those arguments in favor of Achebe's personal intervention in choosing which books to publish. My argument here is that the editor function is as susceptible to deconstructive critique as the author function has been; that we are all preceded, author and editors, by many things, including books, which frame the horizon of our discourses, understandings, or judgments. It is this dialectic that is missing in Apter's view of the generic shift of the literary text, which is representative of the general consensus in the field.

To demonstrate the irony of a hardline demarcation of authorial and editorial spheres, we can show how a deconstruction of editorial judgment could lead us in the same circle directly back to author function. Editorial judgment is both qualitative and quantitative. In essence, it is analytical, evaluative, consultative, and aggregative. As a secondary activity that depends on a number of variable judgments and inputs, the general editor performs the aggregation of the evaluations of the publisher's readers against the backdrop of a fair sense of what sells, which itself comes entirely out of the quantitative analysis of sales records. It is perhaps important again to specify that what I am describing may be more relevant to the operations of HEB in the 1960s and 1970s. John Thompson's *Merchants of Culture*[192] covers about the same time period and tracks more broadly the transformations of the publishing industry. Division of labor in publishing, whether academic publishing or the publication of fiction have since evolved that the function of the series editor in some cases may simply be tied to the books, not to production and sales, which is the function of another editor. Editors in this model wear somewhat different hats, perform radically different functions: one deals with sales and agreements, another with texts and authors and translators. But I am concerned here

not so much with the changing structures of publishing as with the drivers of editorial judgment for which the acclaim of authors and sales remain significant factors. Critical acclaim and sales records can be mutually generative, as it is hard to imagine a scenario in which one does not, for a period of time, produce the other. As Michael Joseph has pointed out, "good reviews will slightly benefit a 'bad' book, they cannot be expected to sell it if it proves to be the kind of book the public will not buy." Critical acclaim is thus not a guarantor of sales, much as what sells now cannot guarantee what will sell. The calculus of editors and publishers is not as assured or as assuming as critics who take editorial intervention in the working of texts for granted believe. Publishers more than anyone are aware of the fact that "public taste is absolutely mystifying."[193] If editorial judgment is being fed by the varied streams of analysis of sales records, critical acclaim, readers' reports, subjective preferences of editors and so on, and is as receptive and pliable, what force do some great authors exert then that could profoundly impact these variables? We are indicating here the transformation of author function in its capacity to institute editorial and public judgments.

Phillip Waller provides a compelling study in *Writers, Readers & Reputations Literary Life in Britain 1870–1918* that supports this notion of a more or less fluid connection between the two functions of authors and editors. While it has been established by the Frankfurt School that the culture industry as a whole generates effects that permeate texts, that industry is itself not *sui generis*, it is not impervious to counter-effects, neither is it free from becoming the expression of other effects. Waller's particular frame is important. Not only are the publishers of fictional works, such as the ones he describes, dictating in a sense what is being published, but they do so on the basis of models established by the authors themselves.[194] It is not enough to recognize the "unseen editorial hands," as it is another thing entirely to ask what moved or motivated those "unseen editorial hands" and why? According to Waller's account of the Victorian period in England, which in many ways remains relevant, in seeking best-selling authors: "[publishers] did more than pray, being not averse to priming both author and market. Throughout the Victorian period and after, publishers endeavored to persuade, even dictate, what an author should write. In the case of authors who had written one best-seller, this generally meant that they should write their next book along the same lines, while authors who had not so far written a best-seller should model theirs on someone who had."[195] Writers who are held up by

editors as models for others perform a different function as editor's pick; they are granted enormous power to shape the field of literary production. "It was not just publishers, literary critics, academics, and all purpose panjandrums who participated in the manufacture of authorial pedigree. Writer also patronized writer."[196] If all we focus on is how editorial intervention affects generic shifts that make texts unstable objects in textual production, we miss the dimension of authorial modeling and relationships, how for instance "authors recommended authors to each other or to the public at large, by word of mouth, by epistolary advertisement, and by acting as reviewers."[197]

It was made clear that Achebe's pedigree was the reason for his selection as editorial adviser. His role as a publisher's reader and adviser is inseparable from his pedigree as author. A study by Cheryl Wall details how Toni Morrison's work as an editor could be shown to have had a shaping influence on African American literature of a particular generation. There are of course the examples of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, who were a huge influence on modernism. In Pound, Morrison, and Achebe, we are talking about a different function of the author that is not usually accounted for in our conceptualization of distinct editorial and authorial functions, one in which the editorial function simply subtracts or eliminates authorial function and the text is reduced to a mere site of editorial labor.[198]

Chinua Achebe's relationship with the Heinemann publishers straddled authorial and editorial functions, and transformed both. By all matrices of pedigree, whether it be best-selling author, authorial model and mentor, or series editorial adviser, Achebe stood in a position of influence that transcended that of any editor or reader within the Heinemann editorial board. This set of unique capacities makes the elimination of author function a net loss in this analytical context. While the influence of other authors may be more difficult to measure or highlight, it is nonetheless present. The individual talent, to take Eliot's term, is in conversation with many other figures, whose voices all count as well, be they editors or other authors or other books. The word discourse captures this principle: there are those Foucault terms "founders of discursivities" but as Bakhtin rightly counters, no one "founder" invents a discourse, we all influence it. It happens however that some discourses are influenced more by some people than others.

In the 1990s Heinemann estimated that "Chinua Achebe's titles represented 11% (£110,444) of the revenue of the African Writers Series in

1994 (£990,921). They are the cornerstone of the African Writers Series. The first title in 1962 was *Things Fall Apart* and Chinua was the Series Editor for the first 100 titles."[199] This report was generated in the aftermath of a major Doubleday upset that acquired the US rights to his books directly from Achebe himself in 1994. Heinemann was gravely concerned: "The African Writers Series is a backlist led list. Chinua Achebe is perceived as the most important author on our list by the outside world. As publishers of this list we have entry to African educational markets and a cudos that the other multinationals do not have. To lose control over the Achebe contracts and ultimately lose markets (as we did in the US last year) would have serious implications for the Series as a whole."[200]

The role of Editorial Adviser or Series Editor as later described in the 1990s, was a strategic role deployed by Heinemann to draw attention to the series and to draw important writers to it as well. Heinemann used the imprimatur of renowned authors and capitalized on their literary and cultural capital in cultivating its niche and planning its marketing stratagems. In a discussion about Abdulrazak Gurnah in 1995, the editorial board considered that "It is important to us to retain Abdulrazak as Series Editor as he is very influential in Academic circles internationally."[201] Whether it was appointing representatives or advisers, Heinemann maintained the same practice of selection based on authorial pedigree throughout its operations. D. O. Fagunwa, the preeminent Yoruba writer, was appointed as Heinemann's representative in Ibadan at the same time Achebe was appointed Editorial Adviser. Their renown as authors was precisely the basis of their appointment and was spelt out in a letter to T. M. Aluko at Fagunwa's death. "Daniel Fagunwa's death was a great shock to us all. I heard about it when I was in Uganda. Since then we have been able to get more details, but I am still not entirely clear what happened at the Wuja River. As you say, it will mean that we have to make new arrangements for representation in Nigeria, and this will need a bit of thought. Daniel was such a well-known person in Western Nigeria that it is not going to be easy to find another well-known person to replace him."[202] These literary figures guaranteed that Heinemann in Nigeria inherited the pioneering writers of the Mbari literary movement, one of the greatest literary movements in Africa in modern times. Heinemann actively relied on these celebrated authors who were its advisers and representatives to recruit writers to the AWS. This is a fairly common practice in publishing, in general, by most accounts. But in a situation in which publishers and writers are domiciled in different geopolitical and cultural locations, the need for an intermediary

becomes more pressing. In a 1966 letter to D. E. Priestley of the parent Heinemann company, Keith Sambrook wrote a year after the launch of the AWS and within a month or so of his appointment as publishing editor what amounts to the definitive statement on this modus operandi: "The Series is getting widely known in Africa and a considerable amount of new writing is coming in direct to H.E.B. All being well some really good work reach us through our contacts there, particularly Chinua Achebe who is, as you know, editorial adviser for the series."[203]

This modus operandi would be tested with the attempt to recruit Margaret Busby as the Series Editor for the Caribbean Writers Series based on similar tactics. Being a Ghanaian-born writer, broadcaster, and publisher, the first black woman book publisher in the UK, cofounder of the London-based publishing house Allison and Busby in 1967, Busby's profile seems exactly primed to provoke a challenge to the practice and to charge that "Heinemann puts its money where its mouth is" instead of seeking to strategically ride on the coat tails of best known authors it has appointed to serve as Editorial Advisers and Series Editors:

> I was enthused by the idea that you wanted to revitalize and raise the profile of the series but feel it's unrealistic and it doesn't inspire confidence to go about trying to achieve it without being prepared to commit more resources and effort in the short term. As for encouraging authors on Heinemann's behalf—I'm talking about assessing rather than commissioning as such—it's probably less a matter of looking for them at conferences etc. than that many (established as well as promising new) writers already seek me out, because of my background and, I suppose, the reputation I'm perceived as having, and sometimes because they want me to be their editor and have that written into their contract; so inevitably publishers I already have a relationship with often benefit. With a formal commitment to CWS I would obviously, where appropriate, be honor-bound to make the case for Heinemann (not, I have to say, most people's first choice).[204]

I have inserted below the full correspondence so as to shed light on the context of the negotiations between Heinemann and Busby. In the excerpt above, Busby was responding to the section titled "Proactivity" in Natalie Warren-Green's Letter of Agreement of February 17, 1995, "Commissioning, I'm sure opportunities for encouraging potential authors will present themselves as you attend conferences and functions as mentioned in the letter, and therefore, this is seen as part of the role, but, as part of the whole and within other duties …." The function of

"encouraging potential authors" was not to be explicitly stated in a contract, neither would it count as a duty onto itself for the purpose of remuneration. It would simply be "proactivity," the "plus" factor that advisers bring to their role.

What was being offered Busby, £1800 plus fees in the year, was an improvement on what Abdulrazak Gurnah got. Robert Sulley, in an email (February 1, 1995) to Natalie Warren-Green, attempted a preemptive justification of this difference, "If he asks, we can justify all of this to Abdulrazak (who is getting £1200 plus fees for individual reviews) by explaining that Margaret is getting much more involved in reading and reviewing manuscripts than he wants to. *He is more of a figurehead and strategy adviser*, whereas Margaret is going to be more involved in each ms in the way that Adewale was" (my emphasis). In the end, Heinemann decided it did not need a formal Series Editor but kept open the possibility of working with Busby on the basis of occasional ad hoc consultancy and review work while confirming parallel arrangements through Myra Murby to draw on Stewart Brown, English poet, university lecturer and scholar of African and Caribbean Literature, and Lawrence Scott, an award-winning novelist and short-story writer from Trinidad & Tobago, as consultants/reviewers (Fig. 4.1).

Achebe was certainly not a figurehead. The use of the term "figurehead" by Robert Sulley, especially in 1995, may well symptomize a subconscious awareness of the diminishing cultural pedigree, and functional dispersal, of the author toward the end of the twentieth century. This transition from the author function to the discursive function in general that Foucault announced as early as 1969 informs the approach in Apter of the text as a site of editorial labor. It is important to recall that this move is only possible if we were to bracket the historical analysis of the author function. This is what Foucault asked us to do in "What is an Author?" "I will set aside the sociohistorical analysis of the author as an individual and the numerous questions that deserve analysis in this context."[205] The cost of doing as Foucault has urged would mean that we will have no way of accounting for the historical contexts or historicity of editorial labor itself. This cannot be done with the required analytical rigor without returning the question of editorial labor to the question of editorial advisers, to the question of the methodological implications of the author function both in terms of literary production, pedagogy, and criticism.

Busby was right in her assessment of how her position would function to recruit authors who would also want her editorial advice. This is precisely how Achebe helped to build the AWS, as an adviser of editors, publishers,

28/02/95 18:24 3

To: Tilly Warren-Green
From: Margaret Busby

20/2/95

Oh, dear, we seem to have gone around in a circle! It occurs to me that this negotiation will end up taking almost as much time as the job itself, so maybe it's best if I just bow out gracefully and let you find someone else may feel you can better afford. We seem to have reached an impasse. I feel I'm pushing you to pay more than you seem comfortable with, given your current financial constraints, yet it makes no sense for me to accept less than I could earn from other sources as (if not more) easily, and without any ongoing obligation.

I'm sorry we seem to have misunderstood each other in our last conversation. When I came up with the compromise sum of £200 - as an increase on your suggested £140 while still representing less than your revised estimate of the number of days you expect the job to entail - I thought it was a given that the £20 per hour remained applicable for any time spent beyond 10 hours per month, otherwise clearly it is more to my advantage to forget a retainer and simply clock up every hour. In other words, without repeating the points of my letter of 2 February, I can see the attraction for you in a retainer of that figure being your entire outlay, but not for me!

As I was trying to say in that letter, it would be impossible to do the job without throwing in a lot of things for free, as it were, whether contacts or experience. My involvement with Earl Lovelace's visit will it seems turn out to be a case in point: nevertheless, my efforts were coloured by my potential association with CWS, and the knowledge that he has just completed his first new novel in a decade, which I imagine would sit well on the list if he were persuaded to offer it to you - beyond that I have no vested interest other than in helping an author I admire to get the attention he deserves. And I do think it's the sort of initiative that Heinemann should have been undertaking, with support funding from other sources if that is the only affordable way, and which could be hugely beneficial. I suppose it is a question of taking a longer-term view - I do understand that you are basing your calculations on the performance to date of CWS, which your powers-that-be feel are less than satisfactory, but the prognosis is doomed to remain dismal unless Heinemann puts its money where its mouth is. I was enthused by the idea that you wanted to revitalise and raise the profile of the series but feel it's unrealistic and it doesn't inspire confidence to go about trying to achieve it without being prepared to commit more resources and effort in the short term.

As for encouraging authors on Heinemann's behalf - I'm talking about assessing rather than commissioning as such - it's probably less a matter of looking for them at conferences etc. than that many (established as well as promising new) writers already seek me out, because of my background and, I suppose, the reputation I'm perceived as having, and sometimes because they want me to be their editor and have that written into their contract; so inevitably publishers I already have a relationship with often benefit. With a formal commitment to CWS I would obviously, where appropriate, be honour-bound to make the case for Heinemann (not, I have to say, most people's first choice).

Actually, apart from anything else, I find it somewhat demeaning to be haggling at this level, over tens - not even thousands! - of pounds, so it will be a relief to draw a line under it. I hope you understand. Of course, if you do ever want to consult me on specific things on an ad hoc basis I'll be quite willing to discuss it then. Being more involved would have been an interesting challenge - though I have more than enough of those on offer - so I'm really sorry we haven't been able to work something out.

Margaret

We've spoken since I wrote this –

Scan3114, June 17, 2004.max

Fig. 4.1 Margaret Busby, letter to Heinemann's Tilly Warren-Green, February 20, 1995. Courtesy of Margaret Busby

and authors themselves. The story of how he acquired Ngugi's first published novel has been told in multiple sources, including in Ngugi's *Decolonizing the Mind*, and the archive bears witness as well. "The position with Ngugi's novels is this. We have accepted WEEP NOT, CHILD, which Chinua Achebe, who is editorial adviser to our AWS, saw and liked when he was in Kampala last year and suggested to Van was worth publishing. This is now with us being typed from the original manuscript for setting, and a contract was sent to Ngugi in Makerere on 21 November" (Keith Sambrook to Charles Richards, East Africa Literature Bureau, February 25, 1963). Thus, throughout the time of his advisement on the AWS, Achebe's counsel was Olympian. Currey put it dramatically in his notice to Kole Omotoso on the acceptance of his novel: "Chinua has given his Imprimatur, 'he is a good writer and I recommend you to publish'. I am now getting your contract tied up."[206] Achebe not only provided strategic advice and editorial recommendations, he was very "proactive"; and unlike Gurnah, he was reputed to have read all the manuscripts himself: "I am as disappointed as you are that no final decision has been taken on *A Wreath for the Maidens*. Keith Sambrook was in Nigeria recently and saw Aig and Chinua in Ibadan and emphasized how very much we wanted their decision about the book. As you know, Chinua is extremely conscientious and insists that he read manuscripts very carefully. This is as it should be but it does have some unfortunate side effects."[207]

Two important moments that are crucial for our understanding of the development of African literature in the 1970s ought to be foregrounded: the stepping down of Achebe as editorial adviser to the AWS and the simultaneous formation of an editorial consultative team. Both events coincide roughly with the publication of an essay that has by and large been ignored within the corpus of Achebe's important critical writings or essayistic statements. This may be because the essay in question was part of an edition of a collection that circulated, as do all published works, only within territories for which production and circulation rights have been obtained. My first encounter with this essay was in the Heinemann archive and the feeling of having uncovered an important unpublished Achebe writing quickly faded as I soon discovered shortly after that the essay "Publishing in Africa: A Writers View" was indeed published in the Doubleday/Anchor Books US edition of Achebe's first collection of essays: *Morning Yet on Creation's Day*. The mystery as to why the essay was not published in the Heinemann edition took a little longer to solve and only with the discovery of Achebe's correspondence with James Currey on the matter was it put in relief (Fig. 4.2).

October 2, 1974

Dr Chinua Achebe
73 Blackberry Lane
Amherst
Mass. 01002
U.S.A.

Dear Chinua,

We have run into a snag on the paper you gave at the Ife conference. I gather Ife University Press is bringing out a collection and they did insist on the right to do this when inviting participants to the conference. I don't know how you feel about this, but though we could possibly talk them round in the time available it would only lead to delays. It would also lead to increased costs and a very awkward print extent. As it obviously didn't figure sufficiently largely in your original ideas on the selection then perhaps we ought to drop it. I hope you feel this is all right. It would have been nice to have had it in and we were willing to overcome all the technical difficulties, these copyright problems are liable to lead to delay on the whole book.

Yours sincerely,

James Currey

cc: Aig Higo

Scan1683, June 07, 2004.max

Fig. 4.2 James Currey, letter to Chinua Achebe, October 2, 1974. Courtesy of James Currey

There was no reason to allege any act of editorial repression of Achebe's work. The essay in question had been given as a lecture at the University of Ife in 1973, and as with matters of rights, it appears those discussions were instrumental in the delay that prevented Achebe's last minute attempt to include the essay and may also explain why it had not been part of the original submission. Studying Achebe from a location that grants access to

the US edition in the first place was helpful in motivating and directing the pursuit and prosecution of the matter to a conclusion in the archive.

The argument of this chapter was originally conceived as a conjecture from my encounter, for the first time, with the essay "Publishing in Africa: A Writer's View" as an archival manuscript that at the time I thought was an unpublished work of some significance. The essay was a manifesto that fitted into the vision of publishing that Heinemann implemented through the AWS. If the essay was as influential as I thought in shaping the publisher's agenda, then it would be proof of how the author function incarnates the publishing apparatus.[208] It becomes quite easy from the constellation of these causal relations to posit the notion of "author as method" as a way of demonstrating how great writers bring to their work as editors and advisers, whether as advisers of the public or the publishers, what was already part of their advance consciousness as authors. Author as method repositions the author from the object of analysis to the method of analysis. This is because the premise of the proposal in the essay can be linked directly to an ideological principle already established in his very first novel *Things Fall Apart*. The essay could also be linked to a major change in the editorial policy of Heinemann in the mid-1970s to decentralize its editorial work. This decentralization would come to have a significant effect on the development of African literature because it brought onboard a significant number of African editors and readers whose opinions became highly consequential in the selection of texts. This argument about how Achebe's essay as a rearticulation of the principle in his novel might have shaped the editorial policy of Heinemann and the development of African literature was complicated by a number of factors.[209]

Notwithstanding the absence of the formal report on the change in editorial policy, there are contemporaneous notes and letters from the archive that records the event. All of these began in 1974, although James Currey's chronology of important events published in *African Research & Documentation* was more exact as to the date of the change in editorial organization, which he puts as 1972.

> 1972 Tenth anniversary of AWS celebrated. Chinua stood down as
>
> Editorial Adviser of AWS with the publication of his stories called Girls at War, which was No. 100 in the AWS. Ngugi initially agreed to take over, but quickly decided that it would interfere too much with his own writing. Henry Chakava in Nairobi, Akin Thomas in Ibadan and James Currey in London formed a triangle of editorial consultation for AWS. Promising

> manuscripts and accompanying reports were circulated to the two other offices for consideration. Nobody had the veto. Enthusiasm led to publication. Practically everybody agreed about novels and short stories. Poetry was much more an individual choice. We depended on active stage producers for representative anthologies of plays. (2006: 9)

In the side note scribbled on the letter below dated March 27, 1974, by James Currey, he refers to the change as "new order": "Though under our new order we should also let Ibadan see" (Fig. 4.3).

In July of 1974, another reference appears in the correspondence on *The Return*. And there are a few other significant references I have put in blocks quotes:

> This is to say that we have had good first reactions to *The Return* in Britain and would now like to send it to our Nigerian Company so that they can sum up its potential in their market. They will then pass it to our East African Company with their report. This letter is just to assure you that your manuscript continues to be actively considered.[210]
>
> I am very anxious to have the book also read in East Africa and I suggest that you are patient with us a little longer while we get their reactions. I am so sorry this is taking time but as our English reader says: "This is a first-rate novel of a kind one does not encounter very often: long, detailed, a complex and carefully worked out plot, admirably written in a plain and straightforward style." However, it's essential in an International series that we should have full backing from all our African companies.[211]
>
> Manuscript: However, the first thing we need to see is a manuscript of the translation. Shall I ask Gerald to let me borrow his copy to Xerox for ourselves and for Nairobi? You will appreciate the reasons why we no longer take unilateral decisions in London on the African Writers Series. Henry Chakava and Laban Erapu and their readers in Nairobi will be able to give us their verdict quite quickly.[212]

This letter from Currey, with the list of references including Abiola Irele, makes the point that I am attempting to underscore to conclude this chapter: "You will appreciate the reasons why *we no longer take unilateral decisions in London* on the African Writers Series. Henry Chakava and Laban Erapu and *their readers in Nairobi will be able to give us their verdict* quite quickly" (my emphasis). Basically, Currey proudly expects Irele to appreciate that Heinemann no longer makes unilateral decisions in London, which Currey was quick to link to enabling and empowering editorial readers in Africa. Before the "triangle of editorial consultation" was put in

man, and refers to the Rhodesia of the 1930's. It would still do well as a novel but I think its impact is greater if it is published as a document, like Mwase's STRIKE A BLOW AND DIE. I think Ros de Lanerolle's point about authorship (which also intrigues me) must be referred to Samkange. Because if it is true that this is the account of 'The Mourned One' himself, then this must be his book and Samkange its editor.

I rate this book very highly and suggest that we accept it despite the present curbs on the AWS.

Manuscript coming to you under separate cover.

Henry

Certainly this should go to Achebe should he be considered. Though under our new order it should also be Border Sec.

James

27 March 1974.

Fig. 4.3 James Currey, note to Henry Chakava, March 23, 1974. Courtesy of James Currey

place, the recurring roster of readers was dominated by the likes of Richard Lister, whom Currey describes as "a novelist in his own rights and a careful guardian of authors' individuality," Philippa de Cuir, Rosalynde de Lanerolle, and Moira Lynd. However, this "triangle" would bring in Simon Gikandi, Pio Zirimu, Laban Erapu, from East Africa, and from West Africa, Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, and Abiola Irele, especially on translations from French. The widening diversality, to use Glissant's terminology, of the editorial team and publisher's readers marks a moment of significant transformation in the development of the AWS, because it corresponds to, or translates into, the acceptance and promotion of writers who cultivated new and experimental modes of writing in the 1970s. The extent to which one could directly attribute the golden era of African literature in the 1970s to this diversality of editorial judgment, or attribute the changes in policy to Achebe's intervention, is by no means clear. These events cannot be dissociated from each other, since they are historically conjoined. One should add that even if the changes at Heinemann were made in 1972, a year before Achebe gave the essay as a talk at the University

of Ife in 1973, archive records show that the concern about the location of Heinemann has been bubbling up in different ways since the end of the Nigerian civil war. It is unlikely that Achebe kept his views completely away from Alan Hill, who visited him for a week in his hometown of Ogidi after the civil war, most especially since Achebe became very involved in local publishing and actually offered the rights to the coveted Nigerian market of *Girls at War* to Nwamife publishing house in Onitsha.

"Publishing in Africa" can be considered a postcolonial iteration of the trope of the book. In this essay, Achebe takes the book out of its circuitry within the economy of commodity culture and fixes it, like his favorite personal object of spiritual communion, the *ikenga*, as a rosary of interpersonal humanistic communication. This notion that the book is an instrument of interpersonal communication different in kind from all other commodities is what has already been highlighted in the discussion about profundity in his novels.

Beyond the archaic experience of profundity in the traditional setting, books in modern Africa become the beads of a rosary that string the myth of a class community together. The emphasis is no longer on the solitary sensibilities cultivated as an effect of book-learning but on the silent but infinite possibilities of human communion that it facilitates. In the opening pages of *Open City* by Teju Cole, the main character captures this new trope of the book by articulating its conversational character and giving proof to the idea expressed by St. Augustine that "the weight and inner life of sentences were best experienced out loud."[213] In his sparse and solitary apartment in New York City, he practiced the act of reading aloud with himself as audience because "a book suggests conversation: one person is speaking to another, and audible sound is, or should be, natural to that exchange."[214] In this context, the conversational character of the book can be enacted by loudly ventriloquizing, perhaps, with expression. In the context of Achebe's argument, the conversational or dialogic character of the book makes it an intimate object of communication or communion, and the basis for the constitution of a discursive community.

Indeed, Achebe uses the term "communion," as opposed to conversation or communication, as a way of giving weight to what he calls the "inner world of the artist," which is presumably in conversation through the book with the inner world of the readers. He begins the essay with the declaration that the book trade is "a very delicate process of bringing one human mind into communion with the minds of his fellows." By that delicate process, Achebe means in particular the process of publication of creative works.

The process of literary publication, he argues, must enter into the intimacy intrinsic to the fundamentally personal communion engendered by texts. Achebe assumes and demonstrates the sonic requirement of the conversational act of reading that Cole naturalizes above, "when I read, somebody is talking to me; and when I write, I am talking to somebody. It is a personal, intimate relationship."[215] Here, we find the people-oriented ethos that Hughes also felt strongly impelled by exerting a similar gravitational force on Achebe's aesthetic philosophy and his spiritual view of the objective relations constituted by the book, which is set against the currents of the commercial interests at work in book trade.

While Achebe may have been among the first to insist on intimacy as a condition for equality and respect, for a decolonized engagement with the other and his literature, others like Gayatri Spivak have based an entire theory of postcolonial translation on this same philosophical requirement. One way of reinterpreting Achebe in light of Spivak's requirement of intimacy for postcolonial translation is to understand him as asking that the publisher surrender to the organic and intimate field of communion established through textual relationships by being integrated into the geocultural zones of the postcolonial other.

> First, then, the translator must surrender to the text. She must solicit the text to show the limits of its language, because that rhetorical aspect will point at the silence of the absolute fraying of language that the text wards off, in its special manner. Some think this is just an ethereal way of talking about literature or philosophy. But no amount of tough talk can get around the fact that translation is the most intimate act of reading. Unless the translator has earned the right to become the intimate reader, she cannot surrender to the text, cannot respond to the special call of the text.[216]

The publisher of postcolonial literature operates in the translation zone. According to this view, it is only by meeting the requirement of intimacy that one could "earn the right" to the translation or publication of postcolonial literature. Because the publisher exists primarily to facilitate that intercourse between writers and readers, that is, to make possible that intimate, personal dialogue between human minds, he or she must be situated within the geographical zone of that sacred communion. There are two critical issues implicit in this philosophy, one is the notion of proximity, and the second is the notion of surrender that Spivak has highlighted in her own approach to language, as a translator. While she does not state it as such, and one wonders why she never brings it to our direct awareness, Spivak's insistence on intimacy and surrender as the requirements of

postcolonial translation directly contradicts Benjamin who in the "Task of the Translator" posits that "Unlike a work of literature, translation finds itself not in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one."[217] For Spivak, the translator of the postcolonial text cannot stand outside, calling in, without entering into the realm of intimacy. This is precisely the same principle that Achebe had very early on before the emergence of postcolonial theory articulated in his capacity as publisher's adviser; for he certainly published the essay as an advisement.

> If I am not entirely deluded in my vision of the writer and his community moved together by a common destiny, of the artist and his people in a dynamic, evolving relationship, then the go-between, the publisher, must operate in the same historic and social continuum. It stands to reason that he cannot play this role from London or Paris or New York.[218]

The operation of the publisher from the outside, in Achebe's view, creates an artificial distance between the writer and his audience. This view assumes the original mythic scene of the storyteller in which the writer's audience is proximate, and the story does not happen without that essential proximity. In another essay, Achebe evokes this mythic scene indirectly by alluding to Igbo traditional art that culminates in the holistic celebration called mbari, where "*There is no rigid barrier between makers of culture and its consumers.*"[219] The experience as fetters of colonial languages and of colonial/postcolonial institutions of publishing that operate from metropolitan centers is a reflection of an advancement of consciousness that is already in the grips of an ideology of a new mode of relations.

In Chap. 6, I hope to show how Ngugi's take on the language question is a variation on this theme of intimacy, and the organic circle of relations between writer, publisher, and reader. While Achebe is attempting to restore the harmony of the creative circle *vis à vis* acts of publication, Ngugi is attempting the restoration of the harmony of the creative circle *vis à vis* the language in which the literature itself speaks. Both respectively want to restore publishing and language to their integral and organismic role in the production of culture. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi encapsulates his quintessential argument thus: "The home and the field were then our preprimary school but what is important, for this discussion, is that the language of our evening teach-ins, and the language of our immediate and

wider community, and the language of our work in the fields were one. And then I went to school, a colonial school, and this harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture."[220] While Ngugi would agree with Achebe that postcolonial literary publishing is problematically exterior to the continental community of African literature, it is the language policy adopted by the school systems in Africa that he chose to highlight as creating the barrier between the makers of culture and its consumers. "I would like to contribute towards the restoration of the harmony between all the aspects and divisions of language so as to restore the Kenyan child to his environment."[221]

If the restoration of the harmony between the language of life, the language of the home, and the language of literature is for Ngugi the ultimate act of decolonization, the restoration of literary publishing to the culture of a literature's provenance, or the integration of publishing culture and literary culture, was equally conceived by Achebe as a basic gesture toward decolonization. It is interesting that Ngugi uses the term "harmony" to capture the essence of his position on the language question. This is because it takes us back to the ideology of practical pedagogy and education by "all the acts of life." As Langston Hughes put it: "every inner and outer act combines to form the single harmony, life."[222] Achebe attempts to integrate and harmonize the productive forces of literary production in such a way that is consistent with his overall pedagogical mission.

We come to this conclusion that Achebe's advice to publishers in Africa on a publishing structure that is integrated into the dialogic environment of literary speech was informed by the advance consciousness of decolonization as can be seen in a subtle passage in *Things Fall Apart* that nevertheless demonstrates an already fully developed ideology of the requirements of intimacy and proximity. In a conversation with Mr. Brown, the missionary, on the subject of the use of *ikenga*, which he describes as an unnecessary fetish, Akunna postulates a theory of *ikenga* as an intermediary that is necessary but also personal. However, his failure in translating this necessity of personal intermediation or finding its equivalence in the missionary conception of the world underscores how missionary and colonial institutions that operate from outside produce alienation.

> "….You are the head of your church."
> "No," protested Mr. Brown. "The head of my church is God Himself."
> "I know," said Akunna, "but there must be a head in this world among men.

> Somebody like yourself must be the head here."
> "The head of my church in that sense is in England."
> "That is exactly what I am saying. The head of your church is in your country."[223]

In Akunna's view, the idea of God must be personal to be conceivable, which is why his object of worship is "the carved image of a deity that expresses an individual's power."[224] This carved image is necessary for proximity and intimacy with God. For the missionary view of the world to make sense to Akunna, Mr. Brown must have to be the head of the church in Umuofia. However, Mr. Brown takes the idea of the head as the absolute authority, which he displaces twice in deference to God and presumably the Archbishop of Canterbury. Akunna runs down his ideas through the hierarchy of colonial institutions in general but leaves us with this ironic moment of deconstruction in which Mr. Brown succeeds in estranging the church even further by bringing church and country together and situating both as absolute authorities in distance geographies, so remote that they are mere sounds to Akunna. "The head of my church in that sense is in England." "That is exactly what I am saying. The head of your church is in your country." This begs the question of conversion because it merely presents it as the rule, an imposition from another country.

The implicit contention of this view is where the head of operations or the command center of these foreign institutions should be located. For Akunna, it cannot be in England if it is to be the expression of the power of individuals. By that paradigm, it cannot be in London, either, if it must serve the African writer and his African readers. This proposal for institutional disalienation is amplified by Achebe's pedigree and role as adviser. It is the basis of the pedagogical function of the writer that he famously asserted, "The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. In fact he should march right in front …."[225]

The diversality of editorial judgment that results from these kinds of writer–publisher relations and authorial interventions is perhaps the most compelling example of functional transformation that we oppose to institutional determination in this book. The rejection of the one-sidedness of the missionary, colonial and postcolonial institutions, and their totalitarian impulses corresponds to the decentering of editorial judgment that is a requirement for challenging all forms of totalitarian one-sidedness of global institutions of literary production. The colonial experience constituted the grounds of conditioning and the relations of material

reproduction through which writers acquire advance consciousness that enables them to anticipate conditions of postcolonial institutions even before those institutions take root. It is this advance consciousness that explains their experience of global institutions of publishing and the Europhone languages of postcolonial literature as fetters, at the same time that it defines the postcolonial from our dialectical approach as supersession with retention and incorporation of the preceding eras. But if by summation we arrive at the point in which artistic consciousness because of its advancement is decisively out of sync with material relations, especially at the levels of publishing institutions and language, it means that we have reached the precise point of intersection between the imperatives of art-pedagogy and art-neurosis.

Chinua Achebe's career could be argued to have been dominated by an extensive engagement with colonial enlightenment. The pedagogical mission of African literature proclaimed by Achebe represents the most important statement by the author in regards to his understanding of the purposiveness of his art and the early period of the AWS. In the next chapter, we will examine how the expanded pool of readers corresponded to the shift in the 1970s, exemplified by Wole Soyinka's challenge to the pedagogical function as such, to the dissemination of African literature in a predominantly school market, and as set texts for the School Certificate examinations, what he calls, the "artificial test of manhood." "As a practising poet I am naturally concerned with the reduction of what I consider a continuing dialogue with humanity to an instrument of torture for teachers and pupils."[226] This challenge to the pedagogical function I will demonstrate, ironically and dialectically, emphasized neurosis as the only possible expression of the objective structure of production.

Notes

1. Achebe, *Morning yet on Creation Day: Essays*, pp. 57–58.
2. Derrida, *Ethics, Institutions, and the Right to Philosophy*, p. 14.
3. J. Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (Taylor & Francis, 2012).
4. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture* (London; Newbury Park, CA: Sage in association with Theory, Culture & Society, Dept. of Administrative and Social Studies, Teesside Polytechnic, 1990).
5. Ibid., p. 192.
6. Ibid., pp. 196–197.

7. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004).
8. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).
9. Derrida, *Ethics, Institutions, and the Right to Philosophy*, p. 14.
10. In Chinua Achebe, *The Education of a British-Protected Child: Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009).
11. Emphasis in original, ibid., p. 39.
12. Ibid.
13. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Translating in a World of Languages* (2010), p. 37.
14. Chinua Achebe and Abiola Irele, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2009), p. 132.
15. James Currey, *The African Writers Series at 30*, 1993.
16. Hill, *In Pursuit of Publishing*, p. 122.
17. Ibid., p. 67.
18. Ibid., p. 93.
19. Ibid., p. 176.
20. Ibid., p. 201.
21. Van Milne to John Reed, October 1, 1962.
22. October 9, 1962, Reed to Milne.
23. Hill, *In Pursuit of Publishing*, p. 120.
24. Ibid., pp. 122–123.
25. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 17.
26. Ibid., p. 80.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Paul G. Edwards, *West African Narrative: An Anthology for Schools* (Nelson, 1964), p. 3.
30. Chinua Achebe "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation" in G. D. Killam, *African Writers on African Writing* (London: Heinemann, 1973), p. 12.
31. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert, 1821–1857* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 47.
32. Ibid., p. 35.
33. Ibid., pp. 28, 44.
34. Ibid., p. 38.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., p. 37.
38. Ibid.

39. Karen Evans and Gerald Heidegger. "Proposal: Situated Learning and 'Re-integration Initiatives' for Young People: Policies and Practices" (1999). http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00001279.htm
40. My emphasis, K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* (Prometheus Books, 1976), p. 42.
41. While the language of the worker may recall the leftist rhetoric of the Cold War that has since fallen out of use, the concept of work as a non-verbal ideological form that incarnates the objective structure remains important enough to revive in the attempt to extract the dialectical materialism in Achebe's works.
42. Sartre, *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert, 1821–1857*, p. 35.
43. Bessie Head, *Serowe, Village of the Rain Wind* (London: Heinemann, 1981).
44. Milton H. Kreiger, associate professor, Department of Liberal Studies, Western Washington University to JC Watson: November 18, 1981.
45. Chidi Amuta, *The Materialism of Cultural Nationalism: Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God*, 1996.
46. Biodun Jeyifo, *For Chinua Achebe: The Resilience and the Predicament of Obierika*, 1990a.
47. Biodun Jeyifo and B Lindfors, *The Problem of Realism in Things Fall Apart: A Marxist Exegesis* (New York: Modem Language Association, 1991).
48. Note 208 Serowe: Village of the Rain-Wind Queries, April 9, 1980.
49. Achebe and Irele, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism*, p. 101.
50. Achebe to Currey, November 11, 1974.
51. Sartre, *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert, 1821–1857*, p. 42.
52. L. Hughes and A. Rampersad, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), p. 313.
53. Ibid., p. 3.
54. Henry Louis Gates Jr, *The Trope of the Talking Book*.
55. Hughes and Rampersad, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography*, p. 26.
56. Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*.
57. Hughes and Rampersad, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography*, p. 83.
58. His emphasis, ibid., p. 87.
59. Sartre, *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert, 1821–1857*, p. 38.
60. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), p. 137.
61. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 37.
62. Hughes and Rampersad, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography*, p. 311.

63. Ibid., p. 208.
64. We must not ignore the overbearing figure Okonkwo cuts both with his wives and in the killing of Ikemefuna. His hyper-masculinity is undercut by the fear and insecurity that haunt him throughout the novel. These issues will be taken up in a discussion of the critique of masculinity.
65. Achebe describes an equally divided world too in *Things Fall Apart*.
66. W. E. B. Du Bois and H. Aptheker, *The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques, 1906–1960* (Monthly Review Press, 2001).
67. Ibid., pp. 112–113.
68. Achebe, *The Education of a British-Protected Child: Essays*.
69. Ibid., p. 122.
70. Du Bois and Aptheker, *The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques, 1906–1960*, p. 208.
71. Ibid., p. 114.
72. There is no doubt that the pattern of practical education described here is for the men, and excludes the women. The male perspective of social relations emphasizes a dominance in the practical realm that has been rightly critiqued in *Things Fall Apart*. Despite depicting him as part of the hardliners, unreasonable, rigid traditionalists, a curmudgeon who abuses and scares his wives and kids; later, a tough old grandfather, my contention is that Achebe is sympathetic toward Okonkwo and much affection could be seen in his characterization.
73. Hughes and Rampersad, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography*, p. 211.
74. Achebe and Irele, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism*, p. 122.
75. Achebe, *The Education of a British-Protected Child: Essays*, p. 7.
76. Achebe and Irele, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism*, p. 134.
77. Chinua Achebe, *Home and Exile* (New York: Anchor Books, 2001), p. 19.
78. Achebe and Irele, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism*, p. xii.
79. Ibid., p. 3.
80. Ibid., p. 117.
81. Achebe, *The Education of a British-Protected Child: Essays*, p. 37.
82. Achebe, *Home and Exile*, p. 18.
83. Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters* (London: Heinemann, 1970a), p. 99.
84. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), p. 10.
85. Ibid., p. 14.
86. Achebe and Irele, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism*, p. 3.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid., pp. 3–4.

89. Ibid., p. 5.
90. Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 6.
91. Achebe and Irele, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism*, p. 40.
92. Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 5.
93. Achebe and Irele, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism*, p. 95.
94. The paradox of Achebe's sympathy for Okonkwo has always been that it is complicated, if not contradicted, by the hereditary complex that he is to compensate for, an inferiority complex due to the inferior nature of his father, which comes out with the stuttering and bullying. He is projected against the reasonable and artistic types, playing flutes and owing money, who appear more reassuring.
95. Achebe and Irele, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism*, pp. 16–17.
96. Ibid., p. 102.
97. K. Marx and M. Nicolaus, *Grundrisse* (Penguin Adult, 1993), p. 106.
98. Achebe and Irele, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism*, p. 88.
99. Ibid., p. 83.
100. Ibid., p. 42.
101. Emphasis in original, ibid., p. 17.
102. Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*, p. 204.
103. Achebe and Irele, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism*, p. 12.
104. Ibid., p. 33.
105. Ibid., p. 96.
106. Ibid., p. 100.
107. Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, p. 78.
108. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 611.
109. Ibid., p. 602.
110. It could be argued that the decision to sacrifice Ikemefuna is met by a divided community, not One … and that before the coming of the white man. The point is not to state that Achebe sees the community as united but that the drivers of its historical motions compels a form of synchronicity that is totalitarian.
111. Achebe and Irele, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism*, p. 134.
112. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 599.
113. Achebe and Irele, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism*, p. 74.

114. Ibid.
115. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 91.
116. Achebe and Irele, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism*, p. 143.
117. Ibid.
118. Ibid., p. 134.
119. Ibid., p. 35.
120. Ibid., p. 41.
121. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 603.
122. Achebe and Irele, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism*, p. 134.
123. Ibid.
124. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 599.
125. Ibid., p. 598.
126. Emphasis mine, ibid., p. 615.
127. Ibid., p. 595.
128. This is similar to references made by Hegel in his letters concerning Napoleon as the man of action, practical-minded man, or the incarnation of the telos, the World Spirit. See: G. W. F. Hegel, J. Hoffmeister, H. B. Nisbet and D. Forbes, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (Cambridge University Press, 1975); also: J. Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Aubier, 1974), p. 478.
129. Wole Soyinka and Simon Gikandi, *Death and the King's Horseman: Authoritative Text: Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism* (New York: Norton, 2003).
130. Wole Soyinka, *The Trials of Brother Jero, and the Strong Breed; Two Plays* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1969).
131. My emphasis Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*, p. 210.
132. Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*, p. 115.
133. Achebe and Irele, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism*, p. 9.
134. Ibid., p. 15.
135. My emphasis, ibid., p. 103.
136. Olufemi Taiwo, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).
137. Achebe, *Home and Exile*, pp. 19–20.
138. Thiong'o Ngũgĩ wa, *Dreams in a Time of War: A Childhood Memoir* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), p. 203.
139. Ibid., p. 9.

140. The perception is that it is western book, western thinking that was popularly associated with demasculinizing. Examples are Soyinka's plays, or lots of popular plays of the period about men putting on aprons, women becoming bosses, like the heavily anthologized poem by Nigerian poet, Frank Aig-imoukhuede, "One Wife for One Man".
141. Okot p'Bitek, *Song of Lawino & Song of Ocol* (London; Exeter: N. H. Heinemann, 1984), p. 117.
142. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013), pp. 27–28.
143. There is also a key scene of this in *I'enfant Noir*; though not as macho.
144. Euzhan Palcy and Copyright Collection (Library of Congress), *Sugar Cane Alley*, 1984.
145. Achebe and Irele, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism*, p. 102.
146. Ibid., p. 101.
147. Robert M Wren, *Things Fall Apart in Its Time and Place* (1991a), p. 42.
148. This is classical colonial ideology, especially as seen in all the novels and memoires of the period and after. Especially Nwapa, Ba, Kane, etc.
149. C. Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* (Anchor Books, 1994), p. 12. These references are not only a change in this man over that man, that is a contemporaneous set of options, but one over time, a generational change, which is more how it is represented. See *Arrow of God* for instance or *Death and the King's Horseman* or better *The Lion and the Jewel*, which works for our paradigm over real manhood being emasculated with western "book."
150. "What Babies Know About Physics and Foreign Languages" By ALISON GOPNIK NYT, July 30, 2016.
151. Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, pp. 127–128.
152. Along these lines, Dennis Duerden's book on Africans' choice not to adopt alphabets in *Dennis Duerden, The Invisible Present: African Art & Literature* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) is pertinent. His overall argument is that writing fixed power, but orality could change and respond to human pressures.
153. Mbembe, *The Power of the Archive and Its Limits.*
154. James T. Campbell, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787–2005* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), p. 270.
155. W. E. B. Du Bois and B. H. Edwards, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), p. 11.
156. Ibid.
157. C. Achebe, *Arrow of God* (Pearson Education, 1986), p. 215.
158. Sartre, *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert, 1821–1857*, p. 43.
159. Achebe, *Arrow of God*, pp. 234–235.

160. Richard A. Barney, *Plots of Enlightenment: Education and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).
161. Hamidou Kane, *Ambiguous Adventure* (New York: Walker, 1963), p. 159.
162. Ibid., p. 49.
163. Mariama Ba's statements about her schooling under the French mistress, where she talks about how beautiful her teacher was, is another example as is Emecheta's memoir about her British school Ma'am on chapter 5 of *Head Above Water*, where she talks about the Methodist Girls' School and her teacher, Miss Davies.
164. Achebe, *Arrow of God*, p. 85.
165. F. J. D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (Taylor & Francis, 2013), p. 105.
166. Kane, *Ambiguous Adventure*, p. 152.
167. C. Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (Penguin Publishing Group, 2012), p. 52.
168. Ngũgĩ wa, *Dreams in a Time of War: A Childhood Memoir*, p. 61.
169. Ibid., p. 253.
170. Ibid., p. 67.
171. Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
172. Wole Soyinka, *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), p. 25.
173. Theater/Public, no. 76–77, July–October 1987. Interview by Jean-Gabriel Carasso [Interview conducted in Paris, November 1986] FROM "SYMBOL TO THE SCENE" ....
174. Ngũgĩ wa, *Dreams in a Time of War: A Childhood Memoir*, p. 120. It is misleading to think this was unique to Africa, when corporal punishment and elitism were attached to public education in the first half of the twentieth century, probably everywhere within the European sphere. The basic relationship was replicated in Africa, not invented under colonialism. That is why the curriculum was basically the same: the teachers taught what they took to be education, not western education, using practices they took to be universally valid. Perhaps, a classic example of corporal punishment in Catholic schools is the vivid and elaborate passage from James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young man*, where Stephen was unfairly "pandied" by a priest.
175. It is proper to wonder if there was much less of a radical ontological shift in cities as opposed to villages that had no strong colonial presence, especially if we were to consider the very great paucity of high schools, which were like universities in those days, and which were much more agents of

assimilation than elementary schools. This might have been even truer in francophone settings; or maybe it depended on schools, where some were vocational and others academic.

176. Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*, p. 124.
177. Ibid., p. 5.
178. Ibid., p. 16.
179. Ibid., pp. 124–125.
180. Currey. Aig Higo, August 1, 1967.
181. Robert Scholes, *The Rise and Fall of English: Reconstructing English as a Discipline* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
182. P. J. Waller, *Writers, Readers, and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain, 1870–1918* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
183. Ibid., p. 669.
184. Ibid., p. 73.
185. Ngũgĩ wa, *Dreams in a Time of War: A Childhood Memoir*, p. 17.
186. The move here of redeploying the author from the usual position as object of analysis to the method of analysis is similar to the one made by Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
187. Emily S. Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London; New York: Verso, 2013).
188. Hill, *In Pursuit of Publishing*, p. 222.
189. Ibid., p. 374.
190. It is possible to overstate how Foucault's and Barthes' arguments held sway during this period, but after their work, there is a shift back to biographical, archival work that is displacing the postmodern and poststructuralist orientations. I situate my work in the publisher's archive here in that "post-of-posts" era.
191. Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, pp. 292–293.
192. Thompson, *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century.*
193. Cited in, Waller, *Writers, Readers, and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain, 1870–1918*, p. 142.
194. I have to acknowledge the limits of extrapolating into a general condition. Things may be too complicated to reduce to Waller's description. Division of labor did not quite exist at Heinemann Educational Books for instance, between series editors and acquisition editors who work on getting manuscripts, try to fit them into lists already in place, and then sell the acquisition to the boards, that is, to the publishers. The working over of texts would be closer to what a series editor might be expected to do in trying to judge whether a manuscript is desirable or not, based on

readers' reports. All these functions were performed by James Currey and other editors at Heinemann at the time and we can't put them together to neatly describe other presses or smaller presses that are less susceptible to larger pressures than for instance, non-university presses that have to be self-sustaining. The costs of a book matter: the cost of paying for a translation; getting rights, images, and so on. The choices of what to promote are thus subjective, entirely, although readers matter more for other presses. And I wouldn't discount them for us either.

195. Waller, *Writers, Readers, and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain, 1870–1918*, p. 668.
196. Ibid., p. 118.
197. Ibid., p. 127.
198. The specificity and variations of editorial practices from press to press cannot be overemphasized. The description and analysis here are to illuminate Heinemann's operations and not aimed as an all-encompassing theory of editorial practice.
199. Natalie Warren-Green email to Bob Osborne, July 21, 1995.
200. Ibid.
201. Ibid.
202. January 2, 1964, Sambrook to Aluko.
203. From Keith to D. E. Priestley, July 2, 1963.
204. February 20, 1995.
205. Foucault, M. and Bouchard, D. F. Language, *Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Cornell University Press, 1980) p. 115.
206. James to Omotoso the combat, January 14, 1972.
207. November 24, 71.
208. The notion of author function as incarnation of institutional models complicates the broader notion of institutions and their interpellations *à la* Althusser. However, rather viewing this approach as overstating or giving too much autonomy and agency to the author/editor and his or her decisions, the theory of incarnation relates autonomy and dependence, institutions and subjects in a process of dialectical becoming. At the same time, the context of the moment and the pressures of the "world" that come to bear on the thinking of the editors, authors, publishers at the moment, as well as the contingency of their power to effect decisions has to be considered part of that essential relation.
209. The essay on the writer's view on publishing as already indicated was not an unpublished archival manuscript that I was discovering for the first time, it has already been published in the US edition of *Morning Yet on Creation's Day.* In addition, the internal memorandum announcing the policy could not be published here because the copy I extracted from the archive for that purpose was lost among other personal belongings that

were stolen at the Victoria Coach Station on my return from the archive. My personal notes put the date of the memo as 1974, which would make it contemporaneous with the publication of the essay. However, James Currey's chronology of the important dates of the AWS puts the date of the change as 1972.

210. Currey to Yam Brunner, July 9, 74.
211. April 18, 1975.
212. November 8, 1977, James Curry to Abiola Irele. File: Beti's *Remember Rufus*.
213. Teju Cole, *Open City: A Novel* (New York: Random House, 2011), p. 5.
214. Ibid.
215. Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays*, p. 86.
216. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Politics of Translation* (na, 1992), p. 183.
217. Walter Benjamin, *The Task of the Translator* (Illuminations, 1968), p. 258.
218. Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays*, pp. 88–89.
219. Italics in original, Achebe, "African Literatures as Restoration of Celebration." *China Achebe: A Celebration*. Ed. Kristen Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford, p. 29.
220. Thiong'o Ngũgĩ wa, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London; Portsmouth, NH: J. Currey; Heinemann, 1986), p. 11.
221. Ibid., p. 28.
222. Hughes and Rampersad, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography*, p. 311.
223. Achebe and Irele, *Things Fall Apart: Authoritative Text, Contexts and Criticism*, p. 102.
224. Ibid., p.101.
225. "The Novelist as Teacher," 1965.
226. "Unpublished Preface to Poems of Black Africa" (Soyinka Archival files).

CHAPTER 5

Wole Soyinka: The Pan-African Literary Practice

[I]n each age one or two men of genius find something, and express it. It may be in only a line or in two lines, or in some quality of a cadence; and thereafter two dozen, or two hundred, or two or more thousand followers repeat and dilute and modify. (*Ezra Pound* How to Read)

The Specter of a Masterpiece

The debate over the canon did not fully resolve the debate about the masterpiece. The term "masterpiece" seems to have survived the fraying of the canon, especially in art criticism, and more so in editorial criticism, perhaps because unlike canon, masterpiece retains the considerable appeal of being a concept of pure aesthetic judgment, referring to works that demonstrate real mastery of a craft through the production of new standards. In the age of mass production, however, the term is sometimes used to imply bestseller, which falsely suggests a correspondence of artistic and market value. Both canon and masterpiece are signals of a more durable status than bestseller; they resonate all the way up and down the ladder of culture. It is this status of consecration, authority, and hegemony, the sacralization of a group of texts and authors, whose fixity or closure is guaranteed by the reproduction of their enabling values that would come into crisis in the 1980s.[1] The crisis was a product of the erosion of consensus within the culture, which is the fundamental basis for the formation of

O. Ibironke, *Remapping African Literature*, African Histories and Modernities, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69296-8_5

the canon. The literary culture writ large is underpinned by the patterns of consumption that have been threaded by established models. The critical query in this chapter is not a reprise of the old question of how great models are constituted, but a study of the reverse impact they have, once they are constituted, on literary production and the agenda of publishers and editors. It is my argument in this chapter that the object of editorial criticism, of its preferences, judgments, and choices about the manuscript, is the replication of the cultural work and standards of great models. While T. S. Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent"[2] was more interested in how the ideal order that existing great models constitute is incrementally extended and simultaneously modified, I am more interested in the practical application of the notion of great models or "the masterpiece" in the decisions of editors and readers. I argue that masterpieces dominate the culture in their moment, and also cast a long shadow forwards on what is produced or producible in their aftermath. The dominance they project over culture is, paradoxically, not entirely their own. What makes them succeed is that they answer a need already present in the culture, which though in a sense is external to them, they yet fulfill in advance. The potential of masterpieces to shape the field of production is subject to the precise requirement that preselects and exalts them.

Editorial criticism, defined here as the critical assessment of literary works, typically by editors and publishers' readers during the internal process of production, is performed with a view of determining suitability for production. It is distinguishable from the literary critical in the sense that literary criticism can only take place postproduction and in the form of public discourse. We can reduce this distinction to reviewing before and after production. Another important distinction between the editorial and the literary critical lies in the different views of the field available to editors and academic critics. The editor has a view of all that is being contemporaneously offered, the totality of the possibilities against which existing works take shape. An example of this aerial view of the field, as well as the procedure by which editorial criticism makes its determination in comparative terms, that is, by comparing works with one another and allowing those works to set the standard among themselves, can be seen in James Currey's rationale for rejecting Leslie's collection of poetry:

> I am afraid that after the Manuscript was read in Ibadan, London and Nairobi we decided not to publish Omolara Leslie's *Flowers Hidden Womb*. We are only able to publish the very occasional and "truly exceptional"

> collection. Obviously, one's judgement as to what is "truly exceptional" is very subjective but nobody in Heinemann felt that these poems were outstanding enough to compare with other manuscripts we are considering at the moment.[3]

Part of the strategy of this chapter is to assume the vantage point of the editorial critic as a means of recalibrating African literary history. The orientation of criticism that selects texts is different from that of criticism of the already selected texts. The field of production provides the standard of selection in the manner of peer elimination, and the dominant force within that field, the tree of heaven that only permits its own kind to breed and flourish, is the "truly exceptional." What may be wrong about a manuscript may in fact be the company in which it arrives. The masterpiece is crucial to the editorial criticism of fiction because it is the standard of the editorial critical; not just the masterpiece of the past, or the present, but also of the one to come. The laws of editorial criticism are derived from the examples set by the creative practice; they follow after the practice, and are more or less tethered by it. Literary criticism is more at liberty to stray from creative practice especially in the mode in which critics speak to critics about criticism.

It is not sufficient simply to highlight the processes of editorial criticism and its impact on the production of the African novel, to reflect simply the perspective of editorial criticism or reveal the inner workings of its archive. My attempt in this chapter to reread the literary models and masterpieces of the 1970s is built upon the editorial and readers' reports generated from Heinemann companies in Kenya and Nigeria. The strong rejection of novelistic styles modeled after Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as outmoded came mostly from Kenya. The Nigerian editors continued to support the selection of those texts since most were coming from Eastern Nigeria. At the same time their readers, that is, publishers' readers in Nigeria, like in Kenya, were becoming more enthusiastic and more likely to recommend texts that were stylistically complex like Soyinka's *The Interpreters*. London at this point was not in the business of picking favorites though it remained strongly enamored of Achebe, while also embracing experimental styles. The complicated history of production in the 1970s is worthy of analysis in itself. But I want to move beyond what was the observable editorial preference of editors and their readers for books following *The Interpreters* model. My aim is not to echo the analysis of the regional variations and rationality of selection that was done in Chap. 3, but first to highlight the

difference between how Africa was represented within the archive of editorial criticism and in the mainstream of literary criticism. While this is a critical point, it is nevertheless a partial account of my focus. I hope also to show how the great novelists of the time Armah, Farah, and Mphalele were influenced by Soyinka's formal inventions in terms of sensibility, form, and narrative structure and how the popular culture of the 1970s was similarly more aligned with or inspired by the tropes in Soyinka's novel than has been hitherto recognized. These two factors, layered on top of the internal consensus of those Kenyan editors who rejected the Achebe style, the Nigerian editors for whom the Soyinkan style became a vogue, and the experimental trends of literary and cultural forms of the 1970s, compel us to reexamine and rewrite the literary and cultural history that hypercanonized Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in the literary criticism. Finally, this chapter will help close the loop on the overall question of determination and autonomy, on the relation of the base to superstructure, and specifically, on how editorial judgment is constituted and modified, in this case, by the literature itself: how masterpieces such as Soyinka's *Interpreters* shaped editorial preferences, and the literary landscape of the culture as a whole.[4]

The Eclipse

An important aspect of the study of editorial criticism must include how the reception of texts sometimes confounds the science of modern marketing by contradicting prepublication judgments. The interplay of editorial criticism and literary criticism allows the tracking of the dynamics of texts as a measure and an account of deviations in expectations and outcomes. Outcomes in production have never been fully explained by any precise or direct reference to pregiven plans and judgments. An example of how editorial preferences may not always be good predictors of a critical heritage is the major shift in the 1970s in editors' preferences and their excitement about Soyinka's *The Interpreters* as the new African masterpiece. While this eclipse of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in the internal deliberations of editors and publishers' readers did not acquire wider resonance in literary criticism, it is the objective of this chapter to unveil it as an alternative orbit and explore its implications for rethinking African literary production of the 1970s. I use the term "alternative orbit" advisedly, as a way of disinviting the notion of a counter-factual literary history that says: What if *The Interpreters* did turn out to be *the* pivotal

novel that editors expected it to be? As part of an exploration of the trail of this lost alternative orbit, I want to assert that while Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*, profoundly shaped the development of the African novel of the 1960s, it is around Soyinka's *The Interpreters* that any coherent understanding of the regime of literary production in the 1970s may be more aptly organized. The disalignment between editorial criticism and literary criticism on this subject may be illustrative of the different channels through which texts travel and how they engender disparate economies of taste, values, and judgments. As editors and readers revolved around a new masterpiece as a point of reference for their selections in anticipation of a new direction in African literary practice, so did some major writers of the time.

Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, though originally published by André Deutsch in 1965, was republished in 1970, in paperback, by Heinemann Educational Books. The novel as I have argued elsewhere embodies the social character of the postcolonial cities of Lagos, and Ibadan where Soyinka, along with Ulli Beier, John Pepper Clark, and Eskia Mphalele founded the Mbari literary club.[5] These writers were personally involved in the processes of literary and artistic production to such an extent that those engagements shaped their practice. The central question of the previous chapter was how the imperative of African literature to teach, articulated by Chinua Achebe, may have been informed by the years he served as Editorial Adviser to the African Writers Series (AWS), published by an educational press.[6] Similarly, the intense literary activities of the Mbari club constituted a material condition for the practice of the African novel of the 1970s.

It was not the obvious choice between novels set in the village and the past, and those set in the city and the present—Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City*[7] and *Jagua Nana*[8] had appeared in 1954 and 1961, respectively; nor was it the easy choice between simplicity and complexity that explains the shift in editorial preference. Soyinka's novel represents a genuine attempt to reinvent the genre as a grand canvas of existence. The publication of this novel by Heinemann prompted editors and readers later to make comparisons with Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), and Nuruddin Farah's *A Naked Needle* (1976) and *Sardines* (1981). Heinemann editors expressed great interest in these texts because they were, like *The Interpreters*, formally innovative, informed by expansive and radical intellectual vision, and were focused on the production of

an African modernity. This form, as well as the intertextuality it generated, is what we might categorize as the literary practice of pan-Africanism.

The practice of Commonwealth discussed in Chap. 2 describes, at a macro level, the external field of determinations that exerted an influence on the production of African literature, especially at its inception. Identification and contestation within the Commonwealth produced an imperative that was experienced pedagogically. The pan-African practice, though operating both within and alongside a common imperial language, English and the heritage of an imperial structure and culture, is in this chapter an attempt to uncover the internal field of determinations that sometimes intersect with or disrupt the *struculture*, that is, the structure and culture of that macro field of production. The relationship of the "Common" in Commonwealth and the "pan" in pan-African is denotative of that tension between the homologies and unification effects, on the one hand, and the reproductive and dispersion effects, on the other, of production.

The alteration of the "village" model in *The Interpreters*, Soyinka's first novel, announced the arrival of a celebrated poet and playwright who was determined to both upset the Commonwealth canon founded on the literary principles of pedagogy and realism, and write himself into the canon of the African novel on multiple levels. The republication of *The Interpreters* by Heinemann is indicative of an editorial reconfiguration and shift that correctly perceived the promise of a new direction for the African novel, especially at a time when a certain weariness with *Things Fall Apart* was becoming palpable. The analysis of *The Interpreters* that I perform in subsequent sections of this chapter will locate the novel within this editorial reconfiguration at Heinemann with an attempt to articulate an alternative way of thinking about the understanding of texts and their place on the literary stage and the anticipation (sometimes erroneous) of their future place in the canon. Beyond the context of the editorial debate, however, I posit that precisely because Soyinka was a poet and playwright, the novel demonstrates a reflection on the conditions of its production, as well as the editorial management of its own generic moves, what I term "editor function." The genre-bending attribute of the novel: poetic/lyric/"performative prose" combined with "uncanny realism" all suggest an experimental preoccupation that is at once an attempt to refashion ideas about "modernity" as it is a statement about the writer's experience of the artistic requirement of African modernity as "art-neurosis." Art-neurosis in the last chapter we acknowledged was originally a Sartrean

concept. This requirement is certainly a dramatic contrast to the art-pedagogy of Chinua Achebe.

To state that *The Interpreters* portrayed the requirement for the representation of African modernity as neurosis is a reinterpretation of Soyinka's novel that seeks to reposition it within the canon, and a deviation from the default staple of citing Dorris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*[9] (1962), Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*[10] (1973), Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Condition*[11] (1988), Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*[12] (1975) and *The Innocence of the Devil*,[13] and some of the writings of Assia Djebar, which somehow have been read as if to suggest an association of African feminism with neurosis, even though we know that Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and *This Earth, My Brother*[14] (1971) by Kofi Awoonor are texts that not only come a little earlier but are quite illustrative of the cultural requirement of art-neurosis in the transitional movement of African modernity. What James Currey and R. G. Davis-Poynter corresponded about Bessie Head reflects the general sense in which she was regarded by her publishers and some of her associates: "Thank you for your letter of 9 June 1976. How tragic. I certainly don't want to hear the lunatic details. It is too painful to see a person shooting down people on impulse. I will now step forward into the firing line expecting a bullet to the heart. A UCH psychiatrist friend described *A Question of Power* as an essential piece of reading for his students when they are studying schizophrenia."[15] Currey was responding to a letter in which R. G. Davis-Poynter, of Davis-Poynter Ltd. was reporting an accusation directed toward him by Head: "I am sorry to tell you that Bessie Head has decided that I am a crook, so that with great regret I have written to her to say that I can no longer be associated with her in any way. I don't want to go into the lunatic details in a letter. If you want to know what it is all about do by all means phone me." It is important to avoid the distraction of this legend. This is why the choice of Soyinka's text in this chapter allows us to cut through the psychoanalytical fallacy and the anecdotal narratives that have surrounded Head's work, and get to the relationship of the art, neurosis, and feminism without the necessary inference or attribution of neurosis to the author.

The change in editorial personnel and direction of the series around 1967 is clearly the most convincing explanation for the shift toward the publication in the series of experimental and highly stylized novels of the 1970s. What is equally important about this shift is the active participation of African editors and readers, which did not happen as a matter of corporate policy, and at such regularity and scale, before the 1970s. A significant

moment in the development of the editorial vision of Heinemann Educational Books came with the appointment of James Currey as the publisher of the series in 1967. Currey's predecessor, Keith Sambrook, came to African publishing at Heinemann in 1963 from Nelsons to replace Van Milne, the first series editor who was himself returning to Nelsons having joined Heinemann in 1962 to start off the series. Sambrook came to Heinemann with a keen awareness of all that had been published by African writers and a decade of involvement in African educational publishing and school book publishing—but had done no literary publishing of any kind. Currey, on the other hand, whose parents were both writers, had grown up in an environment of great literary presence, and was less predisposed to the educational criteria for publishing African texts in the series. One of the very influential neighbors of Currey's parents was Henry Swanzy whose weekly BBC radio program, "Caribbean Voices," gave first hearing to, and had helped in bringing forward, the highly successful first wave of writers from the Caribbean such as George Lamming, Sam Selvon, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, V. S. Naipaul, Wilson Harris, John Figueroa, and Derek Walcott. With visits to his parents' home by people like George Lamming, Currey had developed "alertness," as he calls it, for good writing that was not encumbered by any tremendous ideological structure. His earlier work with the Oxford University Press, and close relationship with South African writers further established his credentials as a literary and general publisher. In his own words: "Alan Hill and Keith Sambrook decided that there was room for expansion and that they needed a new editor. I was at the Oxford University Press running the Three Crowns Series, which Rex Collings had started at about the same time as the African Writers Series with plays by Wole Soyinka and J. P. Clark, who were also University of Ibadan graduates."[16]

With Currey's hire came a new inclination that stood in contrast to the earlier years. The exact nature of the African Writers Series and its classification as educational or general publishing remains a subject of intense conversation and often disagreement between these two earlier publisher/editors. The shift from strictly educational to general criteria is demonstrable in the writers that were actively pursued and brought on after Currey became editor. Chief among these is Wole Soyinka, the publication of whom, constituted a significant landmark in the AWS and the materialization of the sense of the AWS' continuity with Black Orpheus and Mbari publications, that is, the ultimate coming together of the exogenous and endogenous genealogies of literary production in Africa. It could be

argued that Achebe was to Sambrook what Soyinka was to Currey. Achebe's pedagogical imperative aligned with the educational publishing of Sambrook as does the humanist ideal of Soyinka with Currey's literary publishing.

The pursuit of Soyinka's *The Interpreters* is a fascinating story in its own right. It is paralleled only by the pursuit of the works by the Ghanaian writer, Ayi Kwei Armah. These two were the outsiders and arch skeptics of the series. James Currey has told the story of how Soyinka's wife was persuaded to sign a sub-lease of the novel to Heinemann while her husband was in prison, a decision that Soyinka would rebuke:

> *The Interpreters* had been published in hardback by the great and imaginative Andre Deutsch. Wole Soyinka did not want it in the orange ghetto, and refused to agree to sub-lease the rights to Heinemann for the Series. It was sublicensed to Panther paperback but put out of print six weeks after publication because of the high rate of returns from paperback booksellers in the UK: more space had to be made on the shelves for selling titles by Wilbur Smith. When Soyinka was in prison in Nigeria, his wife agreed to let Andre Deutsch finally sub-lease the novel for the Series. Deutsch's story was that she said she needed food for the family, while Wole Soyinka in prison was at least being fed. The book has now been in print for over thirty years.[17]

This much can be gleaned from the operations of Heinemann during this period: it sought to have under its imprint the works of all notable writers from Africa. The statements of Heinemann directors from its archive attest to this grand pan-African vision.

About the same time period, similar tactics had been used to acquire Armah's first novel from the Boston based press, Houghton Mifflin, after the author himself had initially declined permission. This would be the beginning of the most adversarial relationship between Heinemann and any of its African authors. Sambrook wrote with regards to Armah almost a decade after the publication of *The Beautyful Ones*, "*Two Thousand Seasons*: we feel that it is now too late for a hardback edition of this book, but we would be ready to put it in AWS. We do not feel it is one of his best books, but I think that we ought to have the whole body of his work under our imprint if this can be arranged."[18] Alan Hill would insist on rights to Armah's works as part of an advance payment bargain: "James: suggest best solution aka is to agree additional advance in return for option on next three full length books. [...] So let us secure! [...]."[19] Though Heinemann's position as preferred publisher attracted applications from

many African writers, they also aggressively pursued writers they considered important. The pursuit of Soyinka's *The Interpreters* may be explained through a multiplicity of factors ranging from the map principle, that is, the will to represent Africa as a whole in the series, as well as Currey's familiarity with Soyinka's plays at Oxford.

The shift in editorial opinion came first from East Africa and could be found in Henry Chakava's assessment of Elechi Amadi, a Nigerian writer. Amadi had been one of the writers from Eastern Nigeria upon whom *Things Fall Apart* had had its most pronounced influence. Chakava's criticism of *The Slave* demonstrates the dwindling interest in the project of recapturing Africa's prelapsarian past to a demand for reinventing Africa through a more complex mode of simultaneously representing and interrogating contemporary African realities. Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* set the stage for an intellectual metafiction that engages the future of the continent through an epic template. Chakava, the Chairman of Heinemann in East Africa, the inimitable publisher of Ngugi, was first to explicitly express the undercurrents of this shift:

> It seems surprising that Amadi should return to this same society of his first two novels for inspiration. I am sure critics have drawn his attention to the fact that his village life is totally devoid of any outside influence. Which means that he has done this deliberately. Why? It is quite obvious that African traditional societies have undergone traumatic changes and I consider it unrealistic and somewhat dishonest for Amadi to write as if such changes have never happened. There may well be such communities left in Nigeria, but the East African reader will feel quite disappointed that after 200 titles in the AWS, we are taking him back to the period before THINGS FALL APART.[20]

The demand for realistic fiction appears to be the main concern of Chakava's criticism, and an important aspect of the editorial preference, especially with the strong charge of "dishonesty," which is why he was willing to concede the possibility that Amadi's novel represents a true reflection of the status of some traditional societies in Nigeria. The questions of aesthetic realism and historical realism are supplanted by contemporary realism. Historical realism was no longer as exciting as it once was, not after 200 titles in the series. Such a return will be quite a disappointment for the East African reader, he argues. Whatever the status or otherwise of Amadi's manuscript as a realistic representation, the issue for

Chakava is that return to the period of or before *Things Fall Apart*, that is, historical realism. It is the dynamics that generated this attitude that we must understand if we are to uncover the relations of production within which the novel in Africa in the 1970s was to develop.

Chakava's reaction is significant because at this point, HEB had developed the tripartite system of review, which Currey describes accurately in his book. Sambrook's acknowledgment letter to Amadi backs up his claim: "Thank you very much for the typescript which arrived safely some days ago. We have immediately taken photostat copies and mailed one each to HEB (Nigeria) and HEB (East Africa) so that they can read your new novel straight away in manuscript. This is what we do now with every title going in to the African Writers Series."[21] It is accurate that "a manuscript only had to have enough enthusiastic support from one of them to get published."[22] This would account for why Amadi's novel got published despite Chakava's strong objection. Chakava reiterated his view in a handwritten note on Currey's follow-up cable: "Laban's report and my memo sent on 7th Oct. I don't envy your position. I don't mind a decision either way—but an acceptance would be retrogressive to Amadi's vision and to the spirit of AWS."[23]

While the report by Laban Enapu that forms the basis for Chakava's strong reaction was more emphatic about a desire for contemporary issues, and by definition, contemporary realism, it is the general weariness with novels like *Things Fall Apart* among some of the editors at such an early moment in the history of modern African literature that constitutes a stunning discovery of this chapter. Currey writes:

> Broadly speaking, coming from Amadi, there is really not much originality in this novel and not many readers who have read The Concubine will be more impressed. Although The Slave is perfectly designed for the African Writers Series, it is a return to the much-flogged themes of the earlier novels like Things Fal1 Apart to the much desired concern with contemporary issues. But Amadi is a polished writer working to formula and making an easily acceptable job of it, though his wor1d may still be so limited that its awareness stops at the village level. In the village setting.

In short, what some perceived to be the anthropological trappings of the novel in Africa as exemplified by *Things Fall Apart* was beginning to appear formulaic and raised significant concerns for editors. The "much desired concern with contemporary issues," and complexity, is thus readily

channeled into the embrace of *The Interpreters*, and of novels that reflect its formal innovations. This is a turn away from prescriptions of publishers' readers in the 1960s like Paul Edwards who celebrated and advocated the Achebe-type simplicity. This turn, I will argue based on the practice of realism and authenticity, would come full circle in 1980, a decade after Heinemann published *The Interpreters*,[24] with the publication of an unusual book of criticism by Chinweizu, *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*,[25] which mounted an all-out assault on Soyinka's style. With the dominance of Ngugi and his *Decolonizing the Mind* in the mid 1980s, the language of reality and realism as the basis of African aesthetics was effectively restored.

The literature of the 1970s is to be understood as constituting a radically new orientation for the strategic elaboration of form in the African novel. Molara Ogundipe-Leslie wrote, regarding Farah's *Naked Needle*, a statement that in its entirety could be applied to Mphalele's *The Wanderers* or Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* expressing the admiration shared by many publisher's readers for this new elaboration of form: "An intellectual novel about an intellectual's dilemma in Africa … here are characters who actually live through contemporary issues, who do not only cerebrate about them as in *The Interpreters*. We see the characters here live in a concrete social and human context not in some intellectual limbo. I have found this novel enjoyable to read and I hope other readers will. It is one of the few genuinely global and non-parochial African novels in which the contemporary African experience is a felt and living reality."[26] The genuinely global African novel that Ogundipe-Leslie identifies in Farah's novel is part of the dimension of the African novel of the 1970s that exhibited a sense of "the world is too much with us." It may indeed have taken decades of separation from this moment to appreciate precisely how global novel and concrete social and human contexts capture *The Interpreters* in more profound ways than Ogundipe-Leslie was willing to permit.

An acute consciousness of the ever-widening world in which modern African history unfolds is echoed through the correspondences from African writers to Heinemann publishers. When Nuruddin Farah first informed his publisher about the manuscript that Ogundipe-Leslie would later review, published under the title *A Naked Needle*, he first conceived it in terms of world citizenship. He wrote, "I've just begun a novel—provisional title is *A Native of The World*."[27] The world in this regard is not simply the imaginary world; it is the world as a living space. The conceptualization of the world is mirrored by Farah's own living situation,

what Rushdie described as "the translated man." Currey would later invoke it in jest: "We have greater difficulty keeping in contact with many people who stay in the same place. Obviously you are a practiced nomad!."[28] Nomadism is a less fancy term for worldliness, but it is a condition of post-coloniality first theorized by Edward Said.[29]

Travel or the exigencies of translation, rather than turning the writer or the text outward, haunts both with a kind of separation anxiety, a talented tenth guilt that drives them inward in their devoted attention to the struggles of particular peoples and particular places. This is the tension alluded to earlier between the Commonwealth and pan-Africanism. This deep consciousness of a pan-African particularity is clarified by the worldly experience of the Commonwealth. Achebe's reminiscences in *Home and Exile* about his first travel to London, the capital of the Commonwealth is significant: "Perhaps I could make a living here merchandizing my inchoate perceptions of the city fabricated in the smithy of a gigantic unfamiliarity. But could I see myself taking that as my life's work? I would rather be where I could see my work cut out for me, where I could tell what I was looking at. In other words my hometown. And from there I would visit again when I could, happily without the trepidation I had had when I had imagined London to be all-powerful."[30] Mark the contrast between the imagined London and the real London that has become part of a lived experience. Achebe is describing the same feelings that empowered the Negritude poets in Paris at the beginning of the twentieth century—a feeling that African and African American returnees who fought in World War II no doubt had—namely, a clarified consciousness of a particular place transformed by travel and experience in the world. This mode of being-in-the-world is not simply self-constellation but an acute sense of "worldliness," a worldly orientation of a particular sense that is a unique consequence of the "migrations of the subject." The worldly oriented selfhood, a selfhood based upon worldhood, the worldhood of African literature as a product of dispersion and dissemination through international travel and marketing.

The disconnected motions of influx and dispersal could characterize the world in the African writer's experience. The wave of South African exiles in Nigeria in the 1950s and 1960s started off the period of intra-African exile of writers that peaked in the 1970s. Most literary exiles after this period later became domiciled in the West. The Mbari club became a meeting point and an outlet for works by some of these exiles. The characters of Soyinka's novel were drawn from this exilic group and blended quite well

with their Nigerian hosts. The stage was set for a new mode of representation to emerge that was not preoccupied with the restoration of the truth of precolonial history, but viewed Africa globally and futuristically as the object of its commitment. The experience of the novel thus reflects this early moment of intra-African expatriation. The key question from Ogundipe-Leslie's report then is: did the experience of intra-African expatriation underwrite the development of a genuinely global and non-parochial African novel? Additionally, what would be the example of a parochial African novel from which Farah, Soyinka, Mphalale deviate? The intense mode of experimentation and metafiction in the novels of the 1970s provided ample opportunity for any publisher of African fiction who would dare to take the risk, what Currey called in a letter to Ronald Blythe, "the chance to experiment": "Ralph and Stella will possibly have told you about how I have run the African Writers since 1967 for Heinemann. We have been so successful with the big names that *it has given us the chance to experiment* and I was particularly glad to be able to include *A Question of Power* after it had been declined by the usual string of big publishing names on both sides of the Atlantic."[31]

Along these lines, Simon Gikandi's report regarding *Sardines* adds another layer to the essential attributes of the 1970s novels: "I honestly think Farah will become one of the great masters of the African novel. … in *Sardines*, Farah brings to the African novel complexity and a consciousness of style unrivalled, except by that Soyinkan creation, *The Interpreters.*" We can establish that the 1970s novels were defined by an insistence on contemporary realism, globality, worldliness, or expatriation, and a consciousness of style, all of which I will presently demonstrate are embodied in Soyinka's *The Interpreters.*

Editor Function as Technique

Part of the novelty of *The Interpreters*, its consciousness of style, is the quest for a metaform, the form through which both the moment in its atomic, enclosed essence, and the totality of experience are simultaneously captured. Most of the characters of the novel are made to individually explore different techniques in their realization of this singular objective either through dance, drawings, paintings, sculpture, musical performance, ritual, and so on. But if as I have suggested at the end of Chap. 3, the unifying aesthetic principle of the novel is the selective principle, I want presently to illustrate that principle in the novel's dramatization and metafictional staging of the editor function. I take the editor function outside

its role of selection and tinkering, pruning and shaping a material based on a set of pregiven requirements or standards, with an awareness of, and editing for, a particular audience, and even beyond its manifestation as a by-product of actual debates among editors and their readers. Editor function as a theoretical proposition is a metaphorical position or mode from which the reading of the novel could be articulated as a factor internal to the management of its stylistic operations.

Egbo's quarrel with the selectiveness of Kola's painting, that it had frozen Ogun at the "height of carnage" with no "poetic possibilities;" leaving out the "Ogun of the forge, Ogun as the primal artisan"[32] bears perfect resemblance to the concept of "the decisive moment" that Teju Cole associates with photography in his novel, *Open City*.

> It was from him, and from this picture in particular, that Henri Cartier-Bresson had developed the ideal of the decisive moment. Photography seemed to me, as I stood there in the white gallery with its rows of pictures and its press of murmuring spectators, an uncanny art like no other. One moment, in all of history, was captured, but the moments before and after it disappeared into the onrush of time; only that selected moment itself was privileged, saved, for no other reason than its having been picked out by the camera's eye.[33]

Earlier in *Open City*, Cole describes a silent transaction between artist and subject though an evocation of the quiet strokes of Brewster's brush on canvas[34] that, just like the eye of the camera, renders invisible whatever is outside of the ambiance of its privilege. All art in this manner is selective and always requires the editorial management of its subject: what spotlights, and what possibilities, to turn off, or on.

Soyinka dramatizes this transaction between artist and subject, and foregrounds the dilemmas implicit in this transaction through the story of Sagoe the journalist who had taken pictures of insalubrious conditions of the city but was prevented from publishing them by his editor. Sagoe's piece about the night-soil men would have to be published without the pictures because "Nwabuzor by some curious reasoning expunged his pictures from the page, said they would offend the general reader."[35] Nwabuzor is the editor of the newspaper and through him the editor function is formally introduced in its journalistic instance. This is also an important moment of reflection on the relations of literary production. Sagoe is not a writer, but a journalist, who has to interact on a daily basis with an editor; as such he provides a better, albeit direct, view of the editor

function. There is the initial stage of repression, that is, the editorial function constrains him; but after that, inducement, and the general direction of his work is set for him. The editor function operates to discipline the authorial intuition, simultaneously manage and channel creative energies, but also as a simple demand, an urgent need, and a challenge.

Soyinka, as argued in an earlier chapter, acknowledges the inevitability of editorial intervention as a professional reality, especially with the suppression of sections from his preface to the anthology of black African poetry that he edited. That event occurred about ten years after the publication of this novel. It is interesting to compare Soyinka's handling of that matter with his depiction of a fictional character in a similar situation. In other words, Soyinka had already fictionalized the scenario he would later himself encounter.

Sagoe does not resign, even when his story about Sekoni, the engineer, was suppressed. Sekoni is the creator of the sculpture, "The Wrestler." He arrives from his studies abroad with an enormous promise to modernize the country. Because of his uncompromising stance, the chairman of the committee for rural electrification connives with a white expatriate to frustrate his efforts and dismiss him from service. The story is suppressed in "a swap of silences" by the news organization. When the editor asks the chairman what to do with the story, he is told to file it away. "Yes sir. About the 'revelations', can we use it now, sir?" "No. File it away."[36] Nwabuzor comes back to hand Sagoe a professional survival kit: "In the end you'll find it's every man for himself."[37] Retelling the experience to Mathias, a messenger in the office, Sagoe agonizes not over the suppressed story but the idea of a professional practice or line he has to toe: "they tell me, no they don't even tell me, they rub my face in it, quite calmly. You belong to the Morgue, they say, now go back to work."[38] The Morgue is the nickname he gives Sir Derin, the chairman of the news organization. Through this experience, Sagoe learns the professional acts of silence that are integral to his work. "Silence, Mathias. Silence. I have known all kinds of silence, but it's time to learn some more."[39] When later he pursues the story of Lazarus, the one who claims to have resurrected from the dead and proclaims himself a Christ, he tells his friends, "I suppose as a journalist I should take it all in my stride. Trouble is I don't see any of it that my editor can use."[40] He has mastered and internalized the rules, and one can now expect he'll have a better fate than his friend, Sekoni.

Sagoe may not have told Sekoni's story, but the "elasticity and strain"[41] reflected in Sekoni's sculpture, "The Wrestler," even if inspired

by a different event, conveys his story in a more lasting way. This fictional story of Sagoe, written as early as 1965, can be read as an allegory of the relations in a publishing house. The story of Sagoe shows an understanding of the dynamics of publishing, and why that should matter for our understanding of African literature. While African writers, to a great extent, embraced the platform of colonial and western institutions, they did so in full awareness of the constraints inherent within those institutions, as reflected in Sagoe's story. Like the local music groups who do not own the stage but exploit "intervals and other silences"; they engaged the institutions of literature with the aim not only of countering its effects but also of changing the functions, and practices of those institutions. Soyinka's recognition and understanding of the relations of production as demonstrated in the editor function in the novel challenges the presumption of editorial overdetermination of African literature.

The novel uses journalistic editing as a mirror of the repressive editorial function that reflects the function of the eye of the camera or the brush of the painter. The question of repression always returns to the question of what is not repressed, what is irrepressible. This applies to the distinction between the requirements of art-pedagogy and art-neurosis to the extent that art-pedagogy represses sexuality but art-neurosis, in the classic Freudian formulation liberates and emphasizes sexuality. If the editorial profession is marked by what it cuts, editor function in *The Interpreters* is instead marked by the image it reproduces as a decisive moment. The novel packaged experimentation of form along with experimentation in explicitly rendering characters' sexuality. The 1970s was a time when an educational publisher could defend a writer after a reader suggested the text should not be published because "there are at least two sexual episodes that would have to be seriously reconsidered if the novel has to fit in the AWS—a series that predominantly caters for the school market." James Currey wrote on the edges of the report in longhand what amounts to the decisive moment in which the outlook of the publishing firm could be argued to have changed: "You surely are not serious. Anything sex, religion, politics can be landed in the AWS as long as it is successful in literary terms. Please don't worry about this. The AWS is a general series which happens to sell well in schools and other educational institutions because we are good at marketing in that area. There seem to be no problem about getting books prescribed because they are explicit" (Fig. 5.1).

There are at least two sexual episodes that would have to be seriously reconsidered x if the novel has to fit in the AWS – a series that x predominatly caters for the school market.
The strongest points for the novel are characterisation which is built up convincingly and the traditional element depicted on the verge of change in the vein of Things Fall Apart , though without the underlying tragedy. This infact reveals another weakness in the novel in which several strings are left loose – e.g. the role of Tom Big Harry who remains in the shadows, Ejiaka's fears over the killing of the dog (reminiscent of Ikemefuna's killing) which are hardly exploited to the end, Christian's mysterious death, e.t.c. I also found the constant use of names like Nelson, Christian, Janet, e.t.c. irksome and x unconvincing in the traditional setting.

x If we don't mind backtracking every now and then, this could make it into the AWS but I don't think it will make a great impact.

LABAN ERAPU.

You surely are not serious. Anything sex, religion politics can be handled in the AWS as long as it is successful in literary terms. Please don't worry about this. The AWS is a general series which happens to sell well in schools and other educational institutions because we are good at marketing in this area. There seems to be no problem about getting books prescribed because they are explicit.

Fig. 5.1 James Currey note written on Laban Erapu's report on Aniebo's *The Journey Within*. Courtesy of James Currey

A Worldly Canvas for the Pantheon

The style of the novel may require a "trigger warning." It is a style that invokes a history of sexuality, of the revolution in sexuality that poetry has traditionally championed, and of which nationalist poetics made a specialty. Imagine a sexist image on a national flag with the central image of the immense and voluptuous backside of a female dancer frozen in the motion of gyration. Imagine that flag as the symbol or dream of a new nation. Then, imagine this flag as the flag of neo-Negritude, as a new

phase of black struggle in which bourgeois good life and pleasure are mixed in with the excesses of decadence. Imagine this phase as one in which the right to, and the pursuit of, pleasure are upheld as the highest stage of political self-actualization. It is no secret that "The Fathers" whose pleasure is figured in the backside image founded the nation. The canvas of the black female body marks the inseparability of male pleasure from the bourgeois notion of self-reproduction, that is, a canvas that projects pleasure as the lubricant of the human machine—that which prepares and enables the machine to be presentable, each time, *feeling* both in need of and ready for productive labor. Ironically, these images of bourgeois pleasure are not to be imagined anew—they are part of a network of images that already saturate African literature from Senghor to Clark, and Wole Soyinka would not be left out, but he would make his own strokes upon this canvas. In a characteristically unorthodox manner, what Soyinka impresses on this canvas is strictly speaking, neither the self nor the nation, but a pantheon. What is this pantheon? And, how is this pantheon related to pan-Africanism?

The metaphor of a woman's naked body or erotic backside functions as a bourgeois symbol of pleasure for men, and it pervades the imagery of the authors in the discussion that follows. Linking the novels and their imagery to the symbols of male pleasure is an attempt to underscore the decadent turn African writing took in the 1970s. It should come as little surprise that the strategies for representing the nation and the continent in the nationalist and pan-African era, which overlap and are in many ways only a variation in scope, found a happy confluence in the image of the black woman who is either being the victim of rape by colonialists or the supreme object of desire, a figure of inspiration for pan-Africanists or Negritudinists. The nationalist revolution was a revolution of sexuality in much the same way that the socialist revolution was a revolution of sexuality: a revolution because it foregrounds and advocates freewill, expressiveness, and egalitarianism. Soyinka, in some accounts, dealt the death blow to Negritude in his proclamation of tigritude. But, as will be argued in this section, a central symbol of Senghor's poetry may have survived, or perhaps was reborn, in his early works.

> Naked woman, black woman
> Clothed with your colour which is life,
> with your form which is beauty!
> …I come upon you, my Promised Land,

> And your beauty strikes me to the heart
> like the flash of an eagle.

Exerpting the above makes it clear that Senghor's poetry was not merely aestheticized romance or fantasy. How these vivid images of physical love became lost to the element of sublime musing is even more puzzling if we consider the lines that follow: "mouth making lyrical my mouth" "savannah shuddering beneath the East Wind's eager caresses" "I sing your beauty that passes, the form that I fix in the Eternal."[42] Perhaps, we can account for the tidy and repressed interpretation of the poem by Senghor's invocation of form and eternal form at the beginning and end of the poem, thus giving it its ultimately subdued but deceptive appearance.

While not precisely the anthem of Negritude, the popularity of the poem "Black Woman," first published in "Chants d'Ombre"[43] in 1945 makes it the most canonical and, even synonymous with Senghor's brand of Negritude. With resonances in the poetry of Hughes and MacKay, the idealization of the black female body as a canvas for mapping racial, national, and continental totalities acquired its most lyrical height in Senghor, and arguably, its most superfluous and decadent, in Soyinka's *Interpreters.* The expressive and egalitarian ethos of sexuality in Soyinka's novel is avant-garde for 1965, when it was originally published, even by US standards. For Senghor, the fantasy of the beautiful black female body is the dream of the "Promised Land" of the savannah that stretches and shudders "beneath the East Wind's eager caresses."[44] The orgiastic scenes and orgasmic rhythm of Soyinka's novel, takes a page from Senghor's lyricism. The fantasies that animate his poetics, that spurs the intellectual production of his characters, as Senghor puts it, "delights of the mind," should be contextualized within the Negritude aesthetics of black bodyscapes, even if Soyinka disavows Negritude.

If Senghor's Negritude idealized the black female body as a "form in the Eternal,"[45] and reproduced it as an object worthy of poetic fantasy, Soyinka's tigritude seizes its essence in the materialism of romance. It is important to underscore how the association between sexuality and autonomy came to serve as the signifier of a new, radical order of political independence in Soyinka's novel; how in both Freudian and dialectical senses, romance became the libidinal energies of the material struggles for political liberation. The nation and the lover are the montage of overwritten fantasies.

The narrative of the novel juxtaposes times of leisure and work of a cohort of friends, whose individual and collective memories are of moments spent together in their haunts: the clubhouses and art studios, but with a constant "interlude from reality."[46] This group of intellectuals and artists are not in a world of their own, as Ogundipe-Leslie supposes. They are enmeshed in real life situations, which they are simultaneously distilling and refracting in different forms, either as Sekoni does with the sculpture of the Wrestler, or as Kola does with the drawings and the paintings, or as they all do through their arguments and discourses. It is the secondary correspondence of discursive and aesthetic apparatuses within the novel that gives it the semblance of an "intellectual limbo" and makes it one of the most difficult African novels. Part of the atmosphere of the club scene with which the novel begins, and which sets a series of labyrinthine metaphoric operations in motion throughout the novel, is the rain, the music, and the wet dance of an anonymous woman. Sagoe, the journalist, expressed this connection between the music and the rain as follows: "And then this transition from high-life to rain *maraccas* has gone on far too long. Rain rhythm is too complex and I am too slow to take it in."[47]

The novel begins with this intrusion of rain, apparently amid "party privacy" at Club Cambana Cubicles where patrons were being treated to drinks and highlife music. This is the scene of enjoyment as the ultimate badge of bourgeois status. The ineluctable sense of dissonance, and frustration with an aborted pleasure, brought about by the coming of the rains is captured in Egbo's reaction: "The 'plop' continued some time before its meaning came clear to Egbo and he looked up at the leaking roof in disgust, then threw his beer into the rain muttering. 'I don't need his pity. Someone tell God to not weep in my beer.'"[48] In the midst of this intrusive rain, along comes a woman who takes "possession of the emptied floor":

> She had no partner, being wholly self-sufficient. She was immense. She would stand out anywhere, dominating. She filled the floor with her body, dismissing her surroundings with a natural air of superfluity. And she moved slowly, intensely, wrapped in the song and the rhythm of the rain. And she brought a change again in the band, who now began to play to her to drape her in the lyric and the mood.[49]

This woman who now commands both the music and the attention of the patrons, it must be noted, takes the stage at the same time and in just the same manner as the *apala* musicians, who also take to the stage, without invitation or warning, after the highlife band had been disrupted by the rain:

> A new band took the stand, but they had not come to duel the rain. The small *apala* group had slowly begun to function as the string trio, quartet, or the lone violinist of the restaurants of Europe, serenade of the promising purse. This was an itinerant group, unfed; their livelihood would depend on alms. Normally their haunts were the streets, the markets and even private offices where they could practice a mild blackmail. […] First their tunes, then their instruments—the talking-drum especially—invaded the night-clubs. And later they re-formed, and once again intact, exploited intervals and other silences wrought by circumstance. As this group now did. Just the one box-guitar, three drums which seemed permanent outgrowths of the armpits, voices modulated as the muted slur by the drums' controlling strings. And they gauged the mood, like true professionals, speaking to each other not to their audience, who would, if they chose, not *know* this language. But fashion had changed. Denial was now old-fashioned and after the garish, exhibitionist, bluff of the high-life band, this renewed cause for feeling, hinted meanings of which they were, a phase before, half-ashamed.[50]

Apala and other similar folk musical groups all functioned as the array of cultural forms that competed for visibility and prominence in the postindependent era, especially with the epochal spirit of unbounded energies that permeated life in most of Africa in the 1960s. Jeyifo may be right, after all, in pointing to the youthfulness of the author at that time as a factor in the exuberance of the novel,[51] but that exuberance may indeed be a reflection of the youthfulness of the nation, or the continent, which the novel attempts to capture as a totality.

The boom experienced in the production of these musical forms is a ripple of larger bursts in the production of the culture of enjoyment to which the Mbari club, and we might add, the African Writers Series, contributed immensely. In the case of the *agidigbo*, it was the transformational power of the art of musical poetry that captured Soyinka's imagination. *Agidigbo* and *apala* are both more culturally rooted and localized than Highlife, which is not only transcultural and cosmopolitan in style but also elitist. According to the narrator of this scene, as the *apala* band started to

play, "The manager [of the club] stormed out suddenly, waving his arms about and shouting 'Who let those people in?' But that was only to test the reaction of his wealthier patrons. They waved at him to shut up and chuckling he went back behind the bar."[52] The reference to "those people" marks the obvious class distinctions that Soyinka deconstructs through their portrayal in the text. The fate of "those people" is now in the hands of the nationalist bourgeoisie who, as the new lords of the land, appear completely caught up in their own fantasies of power and the enjoyment of good life.

The "chain reaction," to use Soyinka's phrase in defining the relations of the poet and the poetic process, is that of "the interpreters," the audience, who consume the spectacle of the wet dancer as they do their alcohol and the music:

> They watched her slowly lose herself, her head thrown back the better to hold private communion with palm fronds, with banana rafters or with whatever leaves faked tropical freshness on the artifact of the floor's centerpiece. The lead drummer moved on her, drawing, as it were, her skin on the crook of the drum. Rain ribbons in club greens and orange ringed her, falling off the edges of the open "state umbrella", and her reflections were distorted on the four sides of the mirror stem.[53]

While this is going on, Egbo "turned to the dancer leaning back against the wall […] losing himself immediately in her own self-immersion," thereby acquiescing to the implicit demand of Romanticism: the lure and enthrallment of others by one's self immersion, and vice versa. The atmosphere of the club assumes a most enchanting dimension: "And on nights like this, to the clang of iron bells and the summons of shaved drums, even old women opened their wrinkled thighs to heaven."[54] In the rapture of the dance, with the world shut out completely, Egbo "looked again at her breasts, seeing them as huge moments and longing to seal himself in time."[55] The material effects of fantasy take hold such that even Sekoni, the religious one among the group, begins to philosophize about the "creative symbols."[56] These, for Egbo, are "the fruits of God's own cornucopia."[57] It is in this spectacle that one could argue Soyinka inserts "big" into the negritudist maxim: "black is beautiful." The ideas of big, black, and beauty are on full display: "Before you, the exultation of the Black Immanent,"[58] Egbo pronounced. Sagoe joins in to highlight the neo-Negritude stakes of their discourse: "You know, a white woman that size would be wholly amorphous."[59]

The wet dancer is the figure through whom we are introduced to Egbo's amorous proclivities and sexual dalliances, which run through the novel like a major artery. Biodun Jeyifo has convincingly revealed with evidence from Soyinka's autobiographies that the character of Egbo shares striking similarities with the legends of the author himself.[60] A true lover of life, Soyinka no doubt relished the creation of characters such as Egbo. The classic of this type is Elesin-Oba in *Death and the Kings Horseman* who renders what could be described as the author's deprecative humor about his own legend: "And they tell me my eyes were a hawk in perpetual hunger. Split an Iroko tree in two, hide a woman's beauty in its heartwood and seal it up again—Elesin, journeying by, would make his camp beside that tree of all the shades in the forest."[61] Elesin-Oba, as the courier who must accompany the king in death, has license that no one else has to a life of total enjoyment right from birth. A life of enjoyment will prove to be the deadweight, the very wrong preparation for one whose sole responsibility to his society is to die in ritual suicide as the celestial escort of his king. It is in *Death and the Kings Horseman*, his most lyrical play, that Soyinka would fully develop what in *Interpreters* is the nascent exploration of the contradictions of privilege, social responsibility, and self-sacrifice. Privilege maintains itself through the sacrifice of the other, the other as scapegoat.

The wet dancer, more significantly, introduces the women in *The Interpreters* who, perhaps with the exception of Laye's mother, in *L'enfant Noir*, are for the first time in the African novel strong women and share center stage with the men. The trope of the matadora would return in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* in the image of Anoa, the prophetess. It is also in this period that Farah started what would become a lifelong obsession of writing about female protagonists. These are aesthetic feminists who deploy in their novels images of women in a wide array of motifs.

Is this wet dancer the resurgent and seductive force of nativism that will ever challenge and threaten to displace the order of any new, global, or cosmopolitan form? Wrapped in the more localized and adaptative language of the music produced by the *apala* group, is she the resilient and ineradicable Dionysian force of the folk cultures that subtend national culture? Does she dance in affirmation or critique? These would remain in the form of questions to the extent that Soyinka's ambivalent representation allows few, if any, definitive interpretations. What the wet dancer shares with Senghor's black woman is the subaltern position, the shame and retreat, out of which she has been called forth, to take the center

stage, without permission, and unapologetically without regard for "the garish, exhibitionist, bluff of the high-life band."[62]

Soyinka's description of the pomp and rousing style of Highlife seems to betray his preference for the local groups who do not own the stage but exploit "intervals and other silences,"[63] a clearly reflexive moment on the style of the novel itself. The description of the *apala* band is continuous with the description of the poet who is talking to himself. The band on occasion tactically sheds the pretense of mutual indifference between poet and audience. The novel carries throughout an insurrectionist impulse that constantly colors and motivates the narrative. The invasion enacted by *apala* is culturally counter-hegemonic from within and below. The irony associated with this band is that the wealthy patrons who welcome their intrusion pretend not to recognize the subversive counter-cultures of the music.

If as Gikandi opines, a consciousness of style marks *The Interpreters*, the novels of the 1970s share this consciousness as part of the ensemble of the pan African literary practice. The Ibadan writers in particular: Soyinka, Clark, Okigbo, and so on, were in search of the unbounded capacity of "poetry" to effect "humanistic development." Perhaps, the most illuminating description of the artistic impulse animating the novels of the 1970s (with their roots in the 1960s, in the Mbari experiment), is buried in the said unpublished, suppressed portion of the preface to *Poems of Black Africa* by Soyinka; it bears reproduction at some length:

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

> It is a chain-reaction and it is endless. But now imagine one such market-place lunatic who is fortunate in moments of lucid recollection when he can set down such a rag-bag of sensations and physical reality, and, there you have your "difficult" poet. The only difference is that the poet does not have to be actually mad. And he does organise his material but he does often talk to himself, and in a language which, at first glance, is seemingly incoherent.[64]

Soyinka can never fully and successfully dislodge the charges of deliberately cultivating obscurity. At the turn of the 1970s, Chinweizu in his *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*, said that what needed decolonizing was Soyinkan stylistics, which he called Hopkins' disease. While Chinweizu attacked Soyinka for what he perceived as Eurocentrist modernism, it was the class sensibilities implicit in such highly stylized form that would underlie Ngugi's celebrated challenge of non-indigenous languages as the languages of literary and cultural expression, as the languages of self-reproduction. In the above passage, Soyinka defined his version of the lyrical poet. If we are to accept his definition of the African writer at this historical moment, we are bound to observe a movement in the nature of writing itself, one that turns away from and against historicism in its radical lyricism.

The never before articulated and never since witnessed intensity of the attention to style by these writers is what, at the end of this chapter, I hope to categorize using Alain Badiou's concept of the age of the poets. What Christopher Okigbo says of his poetry is equally true of Soyinka's novels: "a poet-protagonist is assumed throughout; … a personage for whom the progression from Heavensgate through Limits through Distances is like telling the beads of a rosary; except that the beads are neither stone nor agate but globules of anguish strung together on memory."[65] Though Kola in *The Interpreters* is not a poet, as an artist, he has the last word; he is left with the final act and the responsibility of drawing all the other characters into his canvas to complete what he calls "the pantheon." The age of the poets represents a turn from depicting the hero as a village-protagonist framed by the tradition–modernity debate, to the hero as a poet-protagonist framed within the subjectivity–humanism debate. This requires the fusion of the epic narrative and the lyrical form. In Soyinka's description, the madness of the poet-protagonist is symptomatic of the problem of language and the impact of that problem on style in communicating the "comprehensive instinct to phenomena."

The tension generated as this comprehensive instinct, "the swell of the silent sea, the great heaving dream at its highest,"[66,67] pushes against the unbreachable levees of language and spills over the boundaries of the canvas, is both the source of the pleasure and derangement unique to the lyrical poet. It is "the cruelty of the rose."[68]

The performance of the dancer is traditionally part of orature, and the defining aspect of orature is lyricism broadly conceived: the lyricism of poetry, the lyricism of dance, and so on. This implies that a main feature of the style adopted by Soyinka in the novel is the performative prose. Performative prose, like dance, evokes action through spectacle and rhythm, the spectacle and rhythms of the body proper. This may explain why pan-African practice in literature deploys the symbol of the black woman, the sensuous and moving black woman, so often. From the start of this novel, Soyinka projects the image as embodiment of the lyrical. The dancer in *The Interpreters* is also recognizably J. P. Clark's "Agbor Dancer," a poem published by the Mbari club, under Soyinka's codirectorship. What we have in *The Interpreters* is double evocation of the trope of the black woman as a bifurcated symbolism: Senghor's black woman infuses romance into the plot of the novel and Clark's Agbor dancer provides the canvas of an epic, the epic of *Ozidi*. In this way, the epic and romance are interwoven into a multilayered style. There are several protagonists in the novel, each personality bearing the strand of his or her uniqueness; contrasting, and completing the dimensions of the others within the grand metaphysical canvas that not only brings them together but also binds them to each other within a pantheon. Bob Windsor's 1971 report on John Munoye's use of a similar strategy in *A Wreath for the Maidens* captures its effectiveness: "The idea of two central characters with complementing characteristics prevents a single figure from having to carry the simple moral truth."[69] This is the essence of the metaphysics of pan-Africanism. But let us return to the material canvas of aesthetic feminism of pan-Africanism: "Black Woman," and "Agbor Dancer."

> See her caught in the throb of a drum
> Tippling from hide-brimmed stem
> Down lineal veins to ancestral core
> Opening out in her supple tan
> Limbs like fresh foliage in the sun

> …I should answer her communal call
> Lose myself in her warm caress
> Intervolving earth, sky and flesh[70]

Soyinka's wet dancer embodies both Senghor's romanticism and Clark's cultural nationalism. Romanticism and nationalism share a similar revolutionary language of stirring lyricism. The personality of the dancer is integral to the essence of the lyrical as much as the femininity of the dancer helps to release the fantasy of the lyric. The dancer is the incarnation of lyrical poetry. The dancer's solo performance mirrors the musical signification of the band to be "speaking to each other not to their audience"[71] at the same time as the rhythm of her body blends into that of the drums, and the space whose essential character it animates. Oblivious of the spectators, she becomes a spectacle. In this spectacle we see patterns of sensibilities and imageries that in Soyinka's case are deeply Bohemian Romanticism.

According to Jonathan Culler, this privileging of the lyrical is significant to the extent that

> Lyric is the foregrounding of language, in its material dimensions, and thus both embodies and attracts interest in language and languages—in the forms, shapes, and rhythms of discourse. If we believe language is the medium for the formation of subjectivity, lyric ought to be crucial, as the site where language is linked not only to structures of identification and displacement before the consolidation of subject positions but especially to rhythm and the bodily experience of temporality, on the one hand, and to the formative dwelling in a particular language, on the other.[72]

The present task of this analysis is to uncover in Soyinka's novel that precise nexus between bodily experience, subjectivity, and language; and to see how the novel illustrates the forms, shapes, and rhythms of discourse in their material dimensions. In an effort to defend the Mbari school against charges of a deliberate cultivation of obscurity, Soyinka emphasized the notion of the lyric as a dramatic monologue and proposed an examination of poetry as a form of subjective dwelling that fundamentally reconstitutes the world. This is the epic of modernism that proceeds with the poet-protagonist as a seeker whose moment of truth resides in self-sacrifice like that of Okigbo's initiate: a casualty of the mystery that he attempts to unravel on behalf of society. This is what *The Interpreters* is not

saying. We must read that silence from the spectacle and lyric, the vicariousness of the temporal and material experience of the interpreters in their presubject status or what Culler argues is "before the consolidation of subject positions."

The nexus of tigritude is a philosophy and a technique, as the editorial management of complementary moves can be traced by juxtaposing the actions and narratives of three of the interpreters in the novel: Egbo, Sagoe, and Kola. The trajectory of the analysis would necessarily encompass a move from worldliness (sexuality and the body proper) to nationalism (land and the nationalist bourgeoisie), and finally to pan-Africanism (the canvas and the Pantheon). Egbo's character can be seen as the expression of the materialism of romance, how a tiger displays its tigritude. His sexual behavior is not stereotypical. His journey from innocence to experience is the medium for the formation of his subjectivity. His first sexual encounter in the hands of a dominant female partner represents a rite of passage through which he is to make the decisive break from the oppressiveness of the past, the oppressiveness of tradition, the oppressiveness of belonging, and the oppressive and constricted class expectations, all forms of drowning, that are comparable to the recurrent and haunting memory of the fatal drowning of his parents as a young child. This is the phrase that he repeats and that serves as the very last words in the novel: "he was saying … only like a choice of drowning."[73] A psychoanalytical strand links the fatal tragedy of his childhood to how he chooses to express and exert his radical sense of freedom.

Egbo is not presented as a predator; he is not in the mold of the colonialist-rapist or the bourgeois-abuser. His sexual expression is a humanistic expression that is crucially linked to power and the formation of subjectivity, a way of dealing with the fundamental oppressiveness of being. In a key moment when Soyinka brings to bear in the novel his exceptional talent as a playwright and poet, he depicts a theatrical scene that contrasts sharply with everything Egbo represents:

> They both jumped as the hum of machines was harshly supplemented by a sudden H-r-r-r, and a strangulated sound froze Sagoe to the spot. The sound had come from the direction of the receptionist's corner, but there was no longer any receptionist or desk. Instead Sagoe only saw an indoor tent made of ankara cloth and with a design of "Nigerian Independence 1960" […] The sound came again, a ripping sound, and this time Sagoe saw the blade of an office knife hack a straight line down a taut portion of the

> cloth, a female head pushed through the phony tent, gasping a weak "Help, he's choking me." […] And like a masquerade gone to ground, the tent was thrown suddenly back, and an *ikori* cap, the long pouch askew over a high brow, swung nearly seven feet above the ground. […] Like a demented soul the girl began to fight the folds all over again, her one concern to keep her head in air. […] His was a state of deep alcoholic amorousness, but for a man in such an exalted state of tipsiness, Chief Winsala had remarkable balance. He rocked backwards as far down as any igunuko could boast at public display, and his weight made the performance all the more impressive. […] "What is -the matter with that woman today, enh?" said the Chief when he eventually recovered from his mirth at Mathias's surprise. "Chief, dat na new receptionist. E no sabbe you yet.' 'New receptionist? No wonder.' And he went into another rocking-chair spasm.[74]

Part of the difficulty in analyzing Soyinka's novel is his deployment of scenic presentation as a unit of narration. This singular theatrical scene encapsulates the archetypal image of postindependence political leadership that would become widely appropriated in the African novel. Anyone familiar with Achebe's *A Man of the People*,[75] published in 1966, a year after *The Interpreters* was originally published, would see in Chief Nanga, the Chief Winsala archetype. Joseph Koomson in Armah's debut, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*,[76] and T. M. Aluko's *Chief the Honourable Minister*,[77] are all examples of how the nationalist bourgeoisie came to be brutally satirized. The searing critique of the postcolonial condition in *The Interpreters* is foregrounded in moments like this one in Sagoe's narrative: on the day of Sagoe's interview at *Independent Viewpoint*, a newspaper outlet, a member of the board of a newspaper organization forcing himself on his director's secretary in the full view of an interviewee and other staff. Dressed in a mountainous garb of national independence, this aggressor, with all the grotesque imagery of his impunity, is not yet an autocrat. The interpreters constitute the generation from which the autocrat would emerge. He is the godfather, relic of the ancien régime, grandfather if you will, of the figure of the autocrat that Achille Mbembe theorized in *On The Postcolony*.[78] We might make a further link to Soyinka's own figure of the autocrat, Kongi.

Egbo's relationship with Simi is marked by a different dynamic to separate youthful experimentation from the corruption of power. "Drunk on the harmattan euphoria of approaching freedom, six young daredevils, released at last from the tyranny of School Certificate, made a brassy first

assault on a night-club."[79] It was at this club that Egbo would meet Simi, whom he calls "the goddess of serenity."

> In company Simi would sit motionless, calm, unacknowledging, indifferent to a host of admiring men. And yet she noticed them, and when they had gone, bluster emptied, pocket drained, manhood disgraced—for Simi matched them glass for glass and kept her mystery while the men were hollowed out and led out flabby or raucous, sadder but never wiser—then would Simi make her choice, her frozen eyelids betraying nothing.[80]

Here the image of a lady who makes her choice is revolutionary. The nation is modern. What flows from this simple statement is the project of overturning everything that is not modern within the nation. At the beginning of the novel, Dehinwa braves "blood cruelty" to be with Sagoe, whose northern-sounding name invites opposition from Dehinwa's family. We read this in one of their quarrels: "He sounded hurt and Dehinwa thought, men, they are just like children. They really cannot bear much pain. She sat beside the bed and took his head in her lap, suddenly tender. Sagoe at first submissive, grew ashamed of his weakness."[81] Ayo's mother to everyone's surprise admonishes the couple to divorce each other when she says, "better now for them to go their different ways before they have children to complicate their lives."[82] Not only have they gained greater visibility and presence in aesthetic production, all the women in the novel exhibit strength and entertain choices that would not otherwise have been available to them in the same degree and for as many under the tome of the ancien régime, even the new secretary!

Simi is one of the more fully developed female characters in the novel. Her options are plentiful and great. "The men came and left chastened, big business, law, and the doctors were the most confident of all, for at the time this was the prime profession, the sign of maximum intellect, the conquest of the best and the innermost mystique of the white man's talents. But Simi remained the thorn-bush at night, and the glow-worms flew fitfully around and burnt out at her feet."[83] Drunk on his youthfulness, Egbo makes his move by asking if he could get Simi a drink and was deflated when he got the response, "you are very young, … don't start wasting your money."[84] He was already on his way home, dejected, when a little boy runs to call him back to meet Simi who was waiting for him with a taxicab.

Simi is a little more than the black woman of Senghor's Negritude, the object of poetic fantasy. She is Clark's ancestral anchor, the call of community, and much more. She is the empress of eternal delight; she is pure pleasure. Egbo's initiation is rendered in volumes of poetic text that deserve analysis of their own, and that along with the copious theatrical scenes in the narrative makes the novel a complete creative expression, the type that Ngugi advocates in *Globalectics* that combines dance, lyric, narrative, riddle, and so on.

If access to the club and the relationship with Simi are expressions of Egbo's new found afterschool freedoms, his encounter with an anonymous student of his friend, Bandele, whom he too would initiate into the world of sexuality closes the novel with a major twist. The novel ends with Egbo leaving Simi and his friends in search of this younger girl. Like the peasant girl in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*,[85] he never learns the name of this undergraduate. He realized that the student is already pregnant from their single encounter. The novel anticlimactically moves from pleasure to responsibility. Bandele's shocking imprecation on his colleagues and their friends who had gathered at a lobby during the intermission of a performance to unveil the Pantheon: "I hope you all live to bury your daughters,"[86] reveals the bitterness of this unspoken turn toward responsibility. This is what Robert W. July calls the artist's credo[87] or David Maugham-Brown, practical criticism.[88] The bourgeois culture of the novel is riddled with the hypocrisy, artificiality, pretense, and debauchery, which becomes intolerable in the end, especially at the very moment it hits home. Egbo is now forced literally to think about how the burden of that culture is coming around to rest on him, personally. This moment of disalienation that serves as the matrix of subject formation is also the moment that elicits in him a libidinal response of violence and determination.

It is necessary to recapitulate at this point the two aims of this chapter and to relate them to this central moment of disalienation. The first aim is to show how Soyinka's novel, *The Interpreters*, functions within the relations and processes of literary production in the1970s by initiating a reading of it through the perspectives of editorial criticism, and by an attempt to reconstruct literary history on the basis of that reading, that is, measure its resonances. The second aim is implicit as part of the overall objective of the book as such, which is to ask how African writers think about the relations of production of their time; how, in short, do they position their works within those relations? The posterior discovery of the key moment

of disalienation at the end of the novel can be applied in a reverse order to our reading of the entire novel to help highlight the indirect, or unconscious, ways in which the novel reimagines the order of social production, starting as we have done from the place and representation of women and the libidinal impetus of change.

Before we proceed with this, Bandele's remarkably baleful closer on the last page of the novel, "I hope you all live to bury your daughters," requires some contextualization. From the contrastive themes of sexual awakening and perversion to the portrayal of appalling squalor, and human and environmental degradation, Soyinka enigmatically interweaves the poetics of Eros and ecopoetics. In both cases, the images are shockingly bold. The consistency of this pattern makes a parallel to the principal technique of the French Decadent poets of the late nineteenth century—*épater la bourgeoisie*, shock the bourgeoisie, almost inevitable. In the public gatherings depicted in the novel, something disruptive always happens. Ayo's wife refuses to wear gloves to a cocktail party and orders local palm wine to Ayo's chagrin. Sagoe throws out the European wax works of decorative plastic fruits at another cocktail, a fictional event that anticipates Marechera's hurling of plates and wine bottles at the chandeliers during the garden party in his honor for winning the fiction price in 1979. Noah jumps out of the window to his death in shock from the homosexual advances from the Black American professor of History. Most spectacular is the ritual sacrifice of a live black bull on stage just before the recital at the unveiling of Sekoni's exhibition, with a fountain of blood striking the ceiling of the studio and a thin streak of blood marking Bandele across the shirt; an event that seems to have actually occurred, recalled in Soyinka's autobiography *Ibadan*[89] and Eskia Mphalale's autobiographical novel, *The Wanderers*.[90]

The immediate source of Bandele's malediction, which in the cultural context of the novel is the highest level of spiritual negation, is the lamentation by these dons and elites of the report from Dr. Lumoye concerning a pregnant student. As Oguazor put it, "The college cannot afford to herve its name dragged down by the meral terpitude of irresponsible young men. The younger generation is too merally corrupt."[91] While Dr. Lumoye spoke:

> Over his shoulder he said it, his face lifted in a wide grin transmitting a little of the pleasure of his mirth to the stranger behind him. It was a cheery face he raised to Egbo, twisting his neck to achieve the look without recognition

> and Egbo, whose mouth did not seem at all to move, spat on it. Lumoye staggered forward blinded and shocked, his arm drawn instinctively across the thin squirt, thin because Egbo's lips and throat had long dried and his tongue was freshly soldered at the root. But he spat even without knowing and Faseyi into whom Lumoye staggered was asking, "What is it? Have you something in your eye?"[92]

Soyinka wrote this scene a decade before the spitting ritual on El Hadji at the end of Sembene Ousmane's *Xala*.[93] The spit and malediction are incomprehensible public assaults if divorced from the intimation of Oguazor's best-kept secret: his daughter. "Professor Oguazor had three sons and one five-year-old daughter only and the daughter gave him much sorrow and pain because he could not publicly acknowledge her since he had her by the housemaid—and the poor girl was tucked away in private school in Islington and in fact was Oguazor's favourite child and the plastic apple of his eye …."[94] The student's decision to continue with the pregnancy and to continue in school at the same is a protest against Dr. Lumoye's attempt to take sexual advantage of her when she approached him for an abortion. And here they all are, waxing about morality and the role of the university. The novel itself was written to spit in the eye of the national bourgeoisie. In the Brechtian alienation effect, which has been identified with Soyinka's plays, such as *Madmen and Specialists*, formal alienation effects in *The Interpreters* produce philosophical disalienation, the kind that Marx argues is necessary for cutting through the ideological chimera that distorts reality, and the relation of the subject within, and toward, it.

Connecting Soyinka to the *épater la bourgeoisie* tradition of the French Decadent poets of the late nineteenth century is relevant to any comprehensive understanding of the novel. The sensibilities reflected in Soyinka, Okigbo, Armah, among others, whose works started to appear in the AWS from 1970 onwards, trace a similar trajectory to that of the history of the nation and modernity. The turbulent conditions of urban life exert pressure on social dynamics and relations, mental health and dispositions, and necessarily find their way into imaginative literature. The important point that has been noted about international modernism has been the identical material and political forces that condition it, but more important is the real network of human connections at work in the making of the movement. As Damrosch has demonstrated in the case of Wodehouse, and as is evident in the case of Pound and Eliot, the transatlantic character of Modernism was a result of writers traveling and discovering new ways of

expressing shared realities. The coming of the likes of Ulli Beier and Suzanne Wenger to Nigeria in the 1950s and the going of Wole Soyinka and other African writers, artists, musicians, and so on to Europe and the USA during the same period ensured that the network of international modernism was extended.

Soyinka's autobiography *Ibadan* quite deliberately invokes the author's memory of London and Paris, of the same theaters and cafés that Symons, Pound, and others, some decades earlier had frequented. He had made his debut on the English stage as an actor and playwright in the Royal Court Theatre, London, in 1959 and had thoroughly enjoyed the great literary experience of the time. "Best of all treats was to sneak quietly into the back stalls and watch George Devine rehearsing, consulting quietly with the playwright—N. F. Simpson, Samuel Beckett, Arthur Miller, Sean O'Casey… patiently coaxing the performance of a lifetime from an alcoholic actor …."[95] As a student in Leeds, he had been enamored of the vitality and creativity around him and "he cycled from the remote ends of London to these sessions, his guitar tied to his back, threw himself into the exchanges with as much ardour as any of the others. But constantly he located himself at the outer edge of their concerns, their themes, even their search for techniques and styles."[96] The feeling of alienation is one that he paradoxically felt everywhere he was, even in his home country of Nigeria. On one occasion, he had been invited to Paris by "Mr. Impresario" and abandoned there. He had to make a living for months performing at the cafés. There, he no doubt confronted the substance of the worldview that earlier modernist writers had experienced:

> In that earlier visit he had done no more than take the measure of the Left Bank, amused by its pretentions but caught up nonetheless in its singular vitality, unmatched by the character of its nearest London equivalent, Soho, or Chelsea. Even the smells and the sounds were replicated in no other city of his knowledge. But one virtue above all stuck in his mind: students and pavement artists, wandering minstrels, café philosophers, refugees from real and imaginary tyrannies, black francophonies from the French *"departments"*… out-of-work actors and dancers, would-be-poets and struggling writers etc, all appeared to share one talent in common—the art of survival in the cafés and streets of Paris.[97]

It is not farfetched to connect Soyinka to the *épater la bourgeoisie* tradition. He clearly learnt from this fascinating mix of individuals, the art of survival as a vagabond himself in the streets of Paris. Paradoxically, he would need

that art in Ibadan more than anywhere else during the heady days of political crisis and the civil war when he was jailed and put in solitary confinement for three years. Before then, he helped create with Ulli Beier, in Gbagi market, Ibadan, a unique atmosphere of vitality unmatched by any city in Africa during the 1960s, centering their activities in the Mbari Club. If according to Arthur Symons, "only Soho is Bohemia,"[98] in African literature of the 1960s and 1970s, one is compelled to declare, only Soyinka is Bohemia! (The francophone equivalent is Djibril Diop Mambety.)

If the bohemian quality of *The Interpreters*, with the mix of sexuality and radical politics, are as profound as described in this chapter, how does one understand the interest of an educational publisher in the text? As James Currey describes the approval process:

> All these books had to be approved by a formal committee of directors and editors sitting round a table beneath the chandeliers of the ballroom of a house in Mayfair which had belonged to Lord Randolph and Lady Jenny Churchill. Beti's *Mission to Kala* and Oyono's *Houseboy* were among the first titles which presented questions about what was "appropriate" for a school textbook publisher. … Keith Sambrook and I were doubtful whether we could get certain novels such as Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* accepted because of a sexually violent death in London "in the land of jig jig". Our colleagues reluctantly agreed to the acceptance of Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, in spite of the sustained and shockingly appropriate image of shit.[99]

Soyinka's use of shit imagery in this novel is as visceral as Armah's. Why would Heinemann publish such a text in its educational series and how did it come to dominate the AWS' editorial reference in the 1970s? The answer may be as simple as this: Egbo was not as visible to the publishers and the educational boards as he now is from the vantage of this analysis, fifty years later. Sagoe, the journalist presents a panoramic view of the rot of the society, which he sees by virtue of his profession, in its starkest nakedness. While the starkness of rot can justify the use of shit imagery, nothing, it seems, justifies the use of sex imagery for an educational publisher. Given the degree of interest in postcolonial politics at the time, it is understandable that Sagoe would be seen as the focal point of the novel. What this analysis demonstrates is that one cannot fully appreciate the politics and aesthetics of the novel until one understands its decadence. Shit and sex are related in the novel, just as Sagoe and Egbo's stories are connected. Indeed, shit and sex are the means by which the novel tracks

the moral compass of the nation. Their juxtapositions effect a break in the linearity of the plot, and the poetic language masks the sexual content. Indeed, the mythological structure of the novel adds to its fissures of the aesthetic realism of the nineteenth-century novel style. This may be why the novel has managed to get through the different stages of approval within the educational structures. However we rationalize it, the publication of *The Interpreters* can only signify a shift in the criteria of Heinemann as an educational publisher, either before, or as a consequence of its publication.

The best example of how language masks content is also the best example of the link between sexuality and land. After his first sexual encounter with Simi in Ibadan, Egbo journeys back to Lagos on cloud nine. In that state of inebriation, he debarks before his train reaches its final destination, in the woods, in the middle of nowhere. Being quite late, he finds a rock and sleeps on it until the following morning. He calls this spot his grove and makes periodic visits to the place. When he meets Bandele's student, who had come to drop off her final exam paper in Bandele's house, he invites the student to come along with him on his pilgrimage to the grove. After much banter, she agrees. When they arrive at this "wilderness" of his vindication, he reveals to her what he calls "the masterpiece:"

> "Come this way, I will show you the masterpiece." He parted the leaves some distance away and stood, waiting for her approval as if he unveiled to the world a work of his own creation. "It is, isn't it," he asked almost with anxiety, "the Mother and Child?"
>
> Built spathe form, a broad cowl moulded two figures, uncanny in their realism, like fluid faces in the sky; the wind had given it a rough grain finish and it rose a brown sepulchre amidst dew greenness. The cowl formed an alcove, within it the Mother and Child. A third plane rose behind them both, obelisk, tall against the homage of tassels in the lightest breath …. "If you are not afraid and can stay until the shadows lengthen, you will see it darken behind the pair giving greater depth within the alcove."[100]

Decadence makes the work a masterpiece. Decadence is the surplus of aesthetic pleasure. But aesthetics is anaesthetized without decadence, which bears the revolutionary energies of the political. What is the real of this realism? The obelisk raises behind its castrated mirror image the child, ridged between the arms of the mother: the motherland under the unrepentant authority of the Father. The land reflects the action of the novel.

Given what happens next—the dripping of blood to to to to to as in the praisesong of the god, Ogun; the bathing in the stream, and the pregnancy—the uncanny mimetic realism in the clitoral image of the land is unmistakable.

To turn to the land itself, we must turn to Sagoe who is the junkyard dog through whom we are presented with the unsettling images of a land full of rot and decay, and of a zombified patriarchy represented by the board of the *Independent Viewpoint*, the title a deliberate irony. Many will recognize the maggoty ghost of Sir Derin, the chair of the board, as the judge in the 1962 play, *The Incorruptible Judge* by D. Olu Olagoke,[101] who was caught taking a bribe despite a reputation for being above board. He and Chief Winsala would take bribes for hire, like the judge in Olagoke's play. The political class and the elite are thus caught in the centrifuge of corruption and dissimulation. The critique of the abuse of power and exploitation of the masses is a common thread in the postindependence novel, though not needed for the purposes of this analysis. Soyinka's novel is the first to deploy really shocking images to perform this critique. Sagoe is the image of the novelist who puts his or her nose against the stink like the dogs he describes: "A dead goat, enormously distended, was wedged against a corner of the planks and two dogs tried to pull it out without wetting their muzzles. They held their noses against its stink and went forward."[102]

As with the poetics of Eros, ecopoetics in its critical mode represents the land as an abused body. The character of politics and ethics is inscribed in the land. On his way to the burial of the chairman of the board of Directors, Sagoe encounters a sight whose significance conveys the degenerate character of the society:

> It was hardly five, but already Sagoe had begun to encounter the night-soil men. Next to death, he decided, shit is the most vernacular atmosphere of our beloved country …. [He] encountered first the deserted night-cart and trailer; some distance behind, its contents were spread on the road. To reconstruct the accident—the enormous porthole had flown open and the driver had not stopped fast enough. Over twenty yards were spread huge pottage mounds, twenty yards of solid and running, plebeian and politician, indigenous and foreign shit. Right on the tarred road. Nwabuzor by some curious reasoning expunged his pictures from the page, said they would offend the general reader. "But it is there," said Sagoe, "that shit is still lying there on a main road, in front of a school, in a residential area!" And five days later Sagoe returned to it in flagellating pilgrimage, took more photos

> to show Nwabuzor, who could not be persuaded to go himself—and still it reigned supreme, tyrannous. Diminished admittedly—dogs have peculiar tastes and some drivers were not quick enough and churned through it—but typhous as ever, unified in monochromatic brown.[103]

Here is another moment of the landscape becoming a living symbol of uncanny realism. Littered with human waste left to decompose in nature, the land reflects the realities of the times. Through a direct and unambiguous correspondence of the symbol with contemporary realities, the novel offers the best example of contemporary realism. Contemporary realism is the aesthetics of the ugly, which in itself presents a basic contradiction. As Kant has argued in *The Critique of Judgment*,[104] the ugliness, which arouses disgust, obliterates all aesthetic liking and artistic beauty. In this form of contemporary realism, the symbol contains its own interpretation, as it does its referent. Pungent in its absurdist extremism, it translates tragedy into farce. Soyinka utilizes a zero degree representation, the representation of base life, base in both senses of being lowest and unpleasant. Base life cannot be represented by anything other than itself, in its absolute bareness. The Irish playwright, George Bernard Shaw, famous for his biting wit, once wrote concerning Charles Dickens' novel *Hard Times*: "*Hard Times* was written to make you uncomfortable; and it will make you uncomfortable (and serve you right) though it will perhaps interest you more, and certainly leave a deeper scar on you, than any two of its forerunners."[105] In this case, *The Interpreters* is the forerunner in contemporary realism that attempts not only to shock the bourgeoisie but also the public. The revolting nature of the images is intended to spark a political revolt. Contemporary realism sets off a race to the bottom in zero degree representation, one in which the most direct pathway to an effective and affective order of representation is the deployment of the most insalubrious subjects and objects. How does the work then thread the needle between what Shaw calls discomfort, and what Kant says is the obliteration of aesthetics, that is, without becoming in Benjamin's term, tendentious? This is the function of Kola and *The Pantheon* in the novel to which we shall finally turn.

As the fine artist, Kola is seen sketching every event on paper. He is able to translate the ugly into an object of aesthetics in the only way that Kant suggests this is possible: through the mediation of technique, which the practice of Fine Art entails. "Fine art shows its superiority precisely in this, that it describes things beautifully that in nature we would dislike or find

ugly. The Furies, diseases, devastations of war, and so on are all harmful; and yet they can be described, or even presented in a painting very beautifully."[106]

The archaic method of waste removal, the pothole accident that caused the spillage, and the absence of an immediate clean up are metonyms of the absence of a functioning society. The "shit" is "plebeian and politician, indigenous and foreign." It is the culmination of an almost universal culpability. These extraordinary images of decay are relentlessly depicted in the novel. But they do not become monotonous, ponderous, or produce unrelieved disgust because they are interspersed by the experiences and narratives of the other interpreters, and are rendered in the finest satirical language and form. This is Shaw's bet, that works like *Hard Times*, though they produce discomfort through disgust, might paradoxically be of greater interest and impact. This explains perhaps the editors' attraction to the contemporary realism at work in *The Interpreters* and why other writers may have found that style worthy of reproduction.

The grotesque images of society in the novel may have in fact been part of the *a priori* of editorial criticism that makes those images capable of approximating the real in the first place. Alan Hill, the founding director of the Heinemann Educational Books, publisher of the African Writers Series, described his first encounters with the Nigerian city of Lagos in the early 1960s, the same city where *The Interpreters*, is mainly set:

> Lagos in those last days of colonialism struck me as the most terrible town I had ever seen. The heat, the humidity, the haze of Sahara sand brought by the "Harmattan," were bad enough. The smells were worse. And I saw sights which beggared description. Back streets about ten feet wide, with an open drain down the middle, into which people openly defecated: appalling squalor and filth everywhere.[107]

The realm of the indescribable is the realm of the sublime. If for Hill, Lagos beggars description, for Soyinka the challenge of describing the indescribable in the postcolonial condition is to desublimate reality by presenting it metonymically. "Shit" is a metonym of social and material reality. In this way, description attempts to close the gap between reality and its image. Description hides the fact that it is a representation until representation becomes totally devoid of description. The beginning becomes the end and the end, a new beginning. This is the logic of Kola's pantheon.

The same technique of desublimation migrates to popular culture in the 1970s through the music of the Afro beat king, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the greatest musical legend from the continent, who by the mysterious coincidence of birth, happens to be Soyinka's cousin. His album, "International Thief Thief," created a big splash among the youth in Africa in 1979. The image that caused the rave is none other than the image of shit. In this album, Fela insists that the problem of corruption in Africa is inseparable from the problem of neocolonialism.

> Long, long, long, long time ago
> African man we no dey carry shit
> We dey shit inside big big hole
> […]
> Na European man teach us to carry shit
> […] Start start to steal money
> Like Obasanjo and Abiola
> […]
> We don tire to carry anymore of them shit…

Fela, in this single track, sums the whole argument of *The Interpreters*: "We don tire to carry anymore of them shit." "Them," meaning colonialists and the nationalist bourgeoisie.

Sagoe's book of Enlightenment, which contains his philosophy of Voidancy, the long tract he reads in the novel, begins with a similar supposition that the transportation of human excrement, with its potential for spillage, carried a European veneer of sophistication. He describes a moment in France how he sought to escape the "soul-debasing state of the hostel lavatories" by retiring "with a book and shovel into the nearby woods."[108] This "back-to-the-bush" act, according to Sagoe, was both a mystical and tense experience for him as "the feel of a sudden wet blade of grass in the midst of my devotion made me leap in fear that a snake was trying to lick my balls."[109] Two hiking students would later follow him out of curiosity to discover his act. These two students would become his converts against all admonition: "But they threw Andrew Marvell in my teeth, hurled refrains of 'a green thought to a green shade'. Against their vision of virginal nature and arborial voidatory, my warnings of the snake menace proved ineffectual. It was gratifying to sow the seeds of Voidancy on the continent of Europe, but in a way, it was a small defeat, for I was powerless against their damned regression …."[110] It is from this regressive act of

environmental pollution, the desecration of the land, that he would develop a philosophy and a language of reality, the ecopoetics that he would apply to the postcolonial condition.

This philosophy would grow into even more complex macabre imagery. Joining the procession to the burial of Sir Derin, the chairman of the board of directors of the *Independent Viewpoint*, he observes another procession with a hearse that has been involved in an accident bearing its protruding and mutilated corpse to the public. "He caught a reflection of death in the glass and turned, exclaiming, 'What a joke!'A battered car—it looked like a nineteen forty-five Vauxhall—moved so slowly that the two immediate followers often knocked their shins on the rear bumper. It was the greatest farce ever enacted before death. For the car was moving with an open boot and the turd which stuck out so disgustingly was the coffin … the dead man stuck out his tongue at them, tottered inanely, and dared the mourners to let him fall."[111] The profound metaphysical implications of this event require no further elucidation. It is however not until Fela takes up the same imagery in another album that the full political significance becomes evident:

> Deadi body get accident, Yepa!
> Confusion breaki boni, Yepa
> Double Wahala [trouble] for deadi body
> and the owner of deadi body….
> [It is a bad and hopeless situation that has been made even more worse!!]

What have dead bodies and shit got to do with the black woman? How is romance related to sociopolitical critique? The seemingly tangential imageries of romance and politics provoke a dialectical reading of Soyinka's strategy. The creative tension within the text is informed by its interplay of fantasy and disgust, of romanticism and counter-romanticism. The interruption of romance does not institute a break in the narrative motif in so far as interruption is not a permanent condition; otherwise, it would be a disruption, the dissolution of continuity. A narrative rebound of romanticism could be postulated in the commitment of the work to the concept of totality, and the holism of the Pantheon. The body and land are determinants of subjectivities, the material conditions of the relations of production. There is no autonomy that is not also the autonomy of subjectivities from all rigidly deterministic relations. Soyinka uses the black woman and the material environment to illustrate how the work of decolonization is incomplete. As

Kuan-Hsing Chen has argued, "decolonization no longer refers only to the objective structure of the historical movement, but also to action, subjectivity, thought, cultural forms of expression, social institutions, and global political economic structures."[112] In depicting the state of the physical environment, the geography of the nation, and juxtaposing it with the romantic and cultural imaginary of the nation, as well as with its sexuality, Soyinka injects materialism into the conversation of nationalism.[113]

A consummate saxophonist, Soyinka names love of country as his muse in "Etika Revolution," his musical album released in 1983, performed with the Highlife legend, Tunji Oyelana. Here is another alignment of romance and nationalism: sociopolitical critique is itself an act of love:

> I love my country I no go lie
> Na inside am I go live and die
> I know my country I no go lie
> Na im and me go yap till I die

The Interpreters is the novel that ushered in the age of the poets that has since passed. Soyinka is best positioned as one of those writers that Ezra Pound says finds something of significance that other writers pick up, and replicate.

The Age of the Poets

To underscore the international significance of the 1970s for the development of African literature, we can examine the enthusiasm it generated among some of the English literary elites. Julian Mitchell, an English novelist and TV playwright, in 1973 wrote a major feature in *The Guardian* on the AWS. James Currey would echo his disposition in his letter to John Munonye. "On a more positive note, I have been talking to Julian Mitchell. He is full of enthusiasm for your writing and especially for *Oil Man of Obanje*. We were indeed at Oxford together and I haven't met him for years. He really seems to be hopeful getting your tape on the wireless. He is very enthusiastic about Nigerian writing. He is a complete convert. He feels that writing in Nigeria is more interesting than that which is being published in London."[114] We have attempted in this chapter to compress a long decade of cultural production in Africa considered to be its Golden Age into the analysis of a single novel by identifying the major tropes and literary trends of the 1970s as being prefigured by Soyinka's *The Interpreters*.

In the novel, Kola's painting, The Pantheon, is the model for thinking beyond the singularity of historicism and nationalism. At work in *The Interpreters* is the editorial management of ebullient characters and realities. We are not tracing the single story of a singular hero, but the interweaving profiles of multiple characters, whose personalities translate into the fundamental principles of copossibility. The Pantheon is the principle by which to think, at once and together, about the paradox of multiplicity and unity. Soyinka does not explicitly address pan-Africanism in the novel either as a philosophical principle or political objective.[115] This would be the task of Mphalele's *The Wanderers*.

What Abiola Irele wrote about modern African history is even more pertinent in describing 1965, the year of the publication of the novel, when almost all the key actors of pan-Africanism were still alive and very active. "The modern history of Africa is hardly conceivable without an attentive consideration of the role played in its development by the idea of African Unity."[116] W. E. B. Du Bois was in Ghana with his host; Nkrumah, Azikiwe, and Nyerere were still leaders of their respective countries. Soyinka's idea of the Pantheon related to pan-Africanism as the dominant ideological principle of African political history at the time. What he presented is the metaphysical canvas for thinking about the unity of the Whole, through which it becomes possible to assert in a fashion similar to Alain Badiou's "the age of the poets," that the novel defines an epoch of the Great Whole, of writing and thinking about the Great Whole.

The canvas is the aestheticization of human existence and experience. The body and the land are themselves canvases, as is the novel as a genre, for the larger ideas of identity and being. They also serve as human and material templates for the canvas of the artist. This rolling of canvases into canvases is a reflection loop, the infinity of reproduction that occurs when two mirrors are placed face to face with each other: the dialectical image. The Pantheon is a finite conception of infinity within the closure and completion of the canvas. The infinite idea of the Great Whole is realized on the canvas of the land, the body, and the novel. The task of the writer is to translate his intimations of the momentary and disjointed fragments of human and material presences, through what Badiou calls **reversals**, into the unity of the Whole. The writer, in order to realize and transform reflections of reality, must "shake out events one by one,"[117] pick up and piece together with devotion,[118] and even substitute pieces of the shattered godhead in the creation of new poetic possibilities and aphorisms. "He had felt this sense of power, the knowledge of power within his hands, of the will to transform; and he understood then that medium was of little

importance, that the act, on canvas or human material was the process of living and brought him the intense fear of fulfillment."[119] The "act" is not only the process of living, but also a mode of thinking.

The strokes on the canvas can be classified in Badiou's terms as "the incisions of thought." If the canvas functions as the compendium of thought, it does not do so with the same strategies of thought as philosophy. The canvas as a mode of thinking, as a template for thought is presented as acts because "the poem offers itself only in its act."[120] Acts of literature become philosophical acts. Badiou, perhaps the greatest explainer and critic of Macherey, argues that to ask a writer to think about his position in relation to production is not the same as asking him to relate his work to external conditions of production. Thought in literature is intrapoetic, that is, literature thinks about its own instruction concerning the truth and about the truth that it instructs: two different internal operations. The advancement that Badiou claims over Macherey in thinking about the theory of literary production is that he places the autonomy of the aesthetic process within the transformed contents and not within the "*operators* of transformation" as Macherey and Marxism in general tend to do. The cultural work of great works and author function continue to generate significant force within field of production.

In October 1968, Ngugi, along with two of his colleagues at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, had written the seminal essay, "On the Abolition of the English Department." This is a theme that would form the basis of his most recent theory of globalectics. The centrality of orality, a particular mode of seeing that he claims to be authentically African, became a more celebrated feature of the African novel. Ngugi slowly emerged starting from this period as one of the most fascinating and controversial literary figures on the continent. His dramatic decision to abandon the English language altogether and write his primary works in Gikuyu established him as an authoritative and alternative voice to Achebe and Soyinka. It was not until the publication of the Troika's *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* that a big swing back to the Achebe style would be recorded. The self-styled bolekaja ("come down, let's fight") critics, Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, and Ihechukwu Madubuike, through their polemics guaranteed that a series of highly sensational exchanges between them and Soyinka on what African literature ought to be would be widely reviewed.

Laban Erapu who was first to be critical of works that imitated Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* was also first to complain about the complexity of the

novels of the 1970s. "The Echewa read quite well though I thought it was just one of those stories we have read before. The Jumbam too looks quite easy-reading, written with a charming simplicity that one so rarely comes across nowadays."[121] The age of the poets is the age of the poet protagonists. To assert this is to recognize the time lag between editorial criticism and literary criticism. There are aesthetic and political reasons that explain the eclipse of *Things Fall Apart* and the time lag. Soyinka's influence did not quite register in the study of the novel in the 1970s as he was better known as a playwright and poet, yet there was a consensus in both editorial criticism and literary criticism by the end of the 1970s that the age of the poets had come to an end.

Notes

1. Some of the best arguments of that debate were: Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); John Frow, *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1995a); Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); C. D. Throsby, *Economics and Culture* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), also, with relation to the making of a masterpiece: James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).
2. Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, 1982.
3. James Currey to Mr. Satoru Tsuchiya, January 20, 1981.
4. Works on the novel before now have emphasized its complexity and mythopoetics but fall short of commenting on its broader influence on aesthetic practices in Africa. For example: Kathleen Morrison, *"To Dare Transition": Ogun as Touchstone in Wole Soyinka's The Interpreters*, (1989); L. R. Early, *Dying Gods: A Study of Wole Soyinka's the Interpreters* (1977); Florence Stratton, *Wole Soyinka: A Writer's Social Vision* (JSTOR, 1988); Biodun Jeyifo, *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001); Brenda Cooper, *The Two-Faced Ogun: Postcolonial Intellectuals and the Positioning of Wole Soyinka*, 1995.
5. "The Ibadan Origins of Modern African Literature: African Writers Series, Mbari Club & the Social Character of Ibadan", *History Compass* 13/11 (2015): 550–559.

6. His famous essay, "The Novelist as Teacher" first published in *New Statesman* in 1965, about three years after his appointment as editorial adviser may be read as a form of retrospective resignification of his own practice informed by his new role as editor.
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8. C. Ekwensi, *Jagua Nana* (Hutchinson, 1961).
9. Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962).
10. Bessie Head, *A Question of Power; a Novel* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1973).
11. T. Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1988).
12. N. Sa'dāwī and S. Hetata, *Woman at Point Zero* (Zed Books, 1975).
13. N. Sa'dāwī and S. Ḥatātah, *The Innocence of the Devil* (Methuen, 1994).
14. K. Awoonor, *This Earth, My Brother* (Pearson Education, 1971).
15. June 15, 1976; June 9, 1976.
16. James Currey, *Chinua Achebe, the African Writers Series and the Establishment of African Literature* (2003), p. 577.
17. Ibid., p. 584.
18. September 20, 1977, Keith Sambrook to Aig Higo.
19. Alan, August 10, 1978.
20. Henry Chakava to James Currey, October 7, 1977.
21. Sambrook to Amadi, September 14, 1977.
22. James Currey, *Africa Writes Back*, p. 8.
23. Chakava to Currey, October 12, 1977.
24. Soyinka, *The Interpreters*.
25. Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike, *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980).
26. November 10, 1974.
27. Farah to Currey, October 7, 1969.
28. Currey to Farah, May 18, 1970.
29. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978a).
30. Achebe, *Home and Exile*, p. 103.
31. My emphasis, To Ronald Blythe, August 20, 1980.
32. Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p. 233.
33. Cole, *Open City: A Novel*, p. 152.
34. Ibid., p. 38.
35. Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p. 108.
36. Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p. 94.
37. Ibid., p. 96.
38. Ibid., p. 98.

39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., p. 201.
41. Ibid., p. 99.
42. L.S. Senghor, J.O. Reed and C. Wake, *Prose and Poetry* (Heinemann Educational, 1976), p. 105.
43. L.S. Senghor, *Chants D'ombre, Suivis De Hosties Noires: Poèmes* (Éditions du Seuil, 1948).
44. Senghor, Reed and Wake, *Prose and Poetry*, p. 105.
45. Ibid.
46. Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p. 22.
47. Ibid., p. 19.
48. Ibid., p. 1.
49. Ibid., p. 22.
50. Ibid., p. 21.
51. Biodun Jeyifo, *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics, and Postcolonialism* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
52. Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p. 21.
53. Ibid., p. 22.
54. Ibid., pp. 23–24.
55. Ibid., p. 25.
56. Ibid., p. 26.
57. Ibid., p. 25.
58. Ibid., p. 24.
59. Ibid., p. 25.
60. Jeyifo, *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics, and Postcolonialism*, p. 24.
61. W. Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman* (Norton, 2002), p. 18.
62. Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p. 21. The ways in which Highlife music gave expression to the spirit and forces of national independence in West Africa will be the subject of a resultant project.
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67. Okigbo, xiv.
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71. Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p. 21.
72. Jonathan Culler, *Why Lyric?* (2008), p. 205.
73. Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p. 251.

74. Ibid., pp. 73–74.
75. Chinua Achebe, *A Man of the People* (London: Heinemann, 1966).
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78. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
79. Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p. 52.
80. Ibid., p. 51.
81. Ibid., p. 67.
82. Ibid., p. 212.
83. Ibid., p. 56.
84. Ibid.
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86. Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p. 251.
87. Robert W July, *The Artist's Credo: The Political Philosophy of Wole Soyinka*, 1981.
88. David Maugham-Brown, *Interpreting and the Interpreters: Wole Soyinka and Practical Criticism*, 1979.
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91. Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p. 250.
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96. Ibid., p. 27.
97. Ibid., p. 40.
98. P. Brooker, *Bohemia in London: The Social Scene of Early Modernism* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2004), p. 33.
99. Currey, *Chinua Achebe, the African Writers Series and the Establishment of African Literature*, p. 578.
100. Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, pp. 132–133.
101. D.O. Olagoke, *The Incorruptible Judge* (Evans, 1962).
102. Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p. 220.
103. Ibid., p. 108.
104. I. Kant and W.S. Pluhar, *Critique of Judgment* (Hackett Publishing Company, 1987b).
105. C. Swisher, *Readings on Charles Dickens* (Greenhaven Press, 1998), p. 130.

106. Kant and Pluhar, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 180.
107. Hill, *In Pursuit of Publishing*, p. 193.
108. Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p. 96.
109. Ibid., p. 97.
110. Ibid.
111. Ibid., p. 111.
112. Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*, p. 112.
113. Harry Garuba has observed that Soyinka's mythopoeia is informed by materialism. Harry Garuba, *Explorations in Animist Materialism: Notes on Reading/Writing African Literature, Culture, and Society*, 2003.
114. May 2, 1973, Currey to John Munonye.
115. This is perhaps why O. Balogun argued instead for a literary form of African socialism. F. Odun Balogun, *Wole Soyinka and the Literary Aesthetic of African Socialism* (JSTOR, 1988).
116. Abiola Irele, "Pan Africanism and African Nationalism" *in Odù: A Journal of West African Studies* (University of Ife Press, 1969) p. 111.
117. Soyinka, *The Interpreters*, p. 244.
118. Ibid., p. 224.
119. Ibid., p. 218.
120. Badiou and Bosteels, *The Age of the Poets: And Other Writings on Twentieth-Century Poetry and Prose*, p. 5.
121. March 23, 1979 from Laban Erapu to James Currey.

CHAPTER 6

Ngugi: Language, Publics, and Production

Thus, all works of the mind contain within themselves the image of the reader for whom they are intended
(*Jean-Paul Sartre*: What is Literature?)[1]

Much of what constitutes postcolonial theory has been the effort of making the subaltern speak, of resurrecting the attenuated forms buried under the constraining authority of the colonial episteme and culture. Edward Said was the first to give new life, through postcolonial theory, to what in the African context was pronounced dead by Wole Soyinka in his interview with Biodun Jeyifo: the idea of "writing back" as a form of *Prospero-Caliban* syndrome.[2] One of the key distinctions of African postcolonialism is the disarticulation of the very condition of postcolonialism as writing back, the most radical form of which is Ngugi's imperative to write for his mother, in a language that she could understand. The language question is important as a factor in the calculus of producers of culture in determining what they are willing to risk their capital on.

African postcolonialism charted a decisively different course in probing the problem of alterity. A good example is Mudimbe's canonical text, *The Invention of Africa* (1988)[3] that sought, with much ambivalence, to locate African knowledge systems within the foundations of their own rationality. As I will show in the next chapter, Simon Gikandi's *Maps of*

O. Ibironke, *Remapping African Literature*, African Histories and Modernities, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69296-8_6

Englishness (1996),[4] and Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* (2001),[5] among others, have built on Mudimbe's ambivalence but not on his quest for African foundations of knowledge or African Gnosis. All this has given way to theories of global Africa,[6] such as in Ngugi's *Globalectics*[7] and Soyinka's *Of Africa*.[8] The implications of this shift from the refusal to write back, to "the creative pursuit in global time,"[9] for thinking about the autonomy of African epistemologies and creativity are enormous.

The decade before Mudimbe, Said's *Orientalism* (1978)[10] remained influential, and was only supplanted momentarily on the global stage by the prospects of Bhabha's notion of hybridity in *The Location of Culture* (1994).[11] The enduring value of Said's postcolonialism may have been its formulation as a simultaneously restorative and emancipatory move, which sometimes is paradoxically expressed in a rather passive tone, especially as exemplified in the last section of the passage below from *Culture and Imperialism*:

> It means remembering that Western writers until the middle of the twentieth century, whether Dickens and Austen, Flaubert or Camus, wrote with an exclusively Western audience in mind, even when they wrote of characters, places, or situations that referred to, made use of, overseas territories held by Europeans. […] We now know that these non-European peoples did not accept with indifference the authority projected over them, or the general silence on which their presence in variously attenuated forms is predicated. We must therefore read the great canonical texts, and perhaps also the entire archive of modern and pre-modern European and American culture, with an effort to draw out, extend, *give emphasis and voice to what is silent* or marginally present or ideologically represented (I have in mind Kipling's Indian characters) in such works.[12]

Saidian postcolonialism in attempting to "*give emphasis and voice to what is silent*" is inseparable from the mission that Spivak set forth in making the subaltern woman speak. Underlying this agenda is the notion that a free agent must first be able to speak freely as a matter of right. It is another question altogether why speech acts came to be the ultimate expression of ontological freedom even as human acts as such remained, in permanency, rigorously circumscribed by laws and codes of morality. Emancipation at the basic level of speech is doubly articulated, first as critiques and reinterpretations of canonical literature, and second, as the counter currents of self-representation by the unrepresented, underrepresented, or misrepresented other, whose representation is attenuated, and whose absence, or token presence in the dominant modes of

representation is reinscribed by their occlusion from political participation. The general condition of eurocolonial repression as the globalized form of mass disenfranchisement serves as background for Rushdie's famous retort that came to define postcolonialism in its early moment: "the empire writes back to the center." Empire places below and alongside the lower classes within the structure of social division of bourgeois history. The subject of Said-Spivak-Rushdie's postcolonialism thus announces its scene of address as the metropolitan centers of power and as the location of the archives of cultural production. The double irony of this target scene is that its addressee never previously, nor in return, directly addressed it; or as Rey Chow framed it, "except through negligence and silence."[13]

Said nevertheless thought it necessary, or even progressive, to pursue a tradition of liberal humanism that makes the "general silence" of power more audible as a means of transforming it. He sought to induce a humanism that is attuned to the effects of the silencing and subjection of the other. Saidian postcolonialism was thus predicated upon what Emily Apter has described as Saidian Humanism. According to Apter, "Said's adherence to emancipatory humanism was profoundly in step with that of Frantz Fanon insofar as it embraced values of individual freedom, universal human rights, anti-imperialism, release from economic dependency, and self-determination for disenfranchised peoples."[14] Saidian emancipatory postcolonialism combines the self-assertiveness that in Black Studies we associate with Du Bois and Fanon, with a critical understanding of the complicity of the great western canon in the projection of dominance and its silencing authority, which were essential elements of the overall symbolism and protocols of colonial relations, and the practice of colonialism that required subjects to be approached with a measure of indifference, confined outside the bounds, or at the very edges of the major currents of metropolitan concerns.

In pronouncing the end of the *Prospero-Caliban* syndrome, or in refusing to write back, African postcolonialism takes a more modest approach to the utopianism of Said, which is itself a historical response grounded in experiences of individual writers. Despite his youthful attempts to throw himself into the middle of exchanges as a student at Leeds University in the 1950s, Soyinka writes in his autobiography: "But constantly he located himself at the outer edge of their concerns, their themes, even their search for techniques and styles."[15] Similarly, Achebe casts this location "at the outer edge," with characteristic dark humor, as the potential discovery of postcolonial writers. "That discovery that one is somehow superfluous is

there, and waiting at journey's end, for the weary traveler from the provinces. The great metropolis is not your little village; it has too many world-shaking concerns to be troubling itself about your insignificant homely affairs."[16] A discovery that ambushes at the end of a traveler's journey leaves little room for maneuver and a lot to lament. The admonishment from the weary-eyed sage to the bright-eyed young writer takes the form of a sardonic paternal reprimand. Achebe's statement was made as part of a series of lectures he delivered in December 1998, at Harvard University. He must have spoken in spite of a full awareness of his hyper-canonization as one of the most annotated writers in the numerous scholarly publications and platforms related to African literature. The case of Ngugi that we examine in this chapter can be seen as an attempt to navigate what early African writers considered the syndrome and superfluity of writing back, but also the silencing, imprisonment, or recolonization of Africa, especially through institutional and linguistic mediation of its creativity as the *Bolekaja*[17] critics have strongly charged. It is quite easy to dismiss Ngugi as grandstanding if the context of his recoil from the literary art of apostrophe and from the herculean task of cultivating a primary audience in the west—the success of which is not guaranteed, is not set against what is sometimes a firmly established insouciance. We are dealing here with a complexity of overlapping mechanisms of repression, from the colonial residual to the institutional and cultural unconscious.

The whole notion of "moving the center" of cultural production or the center of his own aesthetic focus was an obsession of Ngugi for much earlier in his career than has been indicated by the more public and dramatic moments of his radicalism. The "center" in postcolonial discourse has always been construed geopolitically as the "West," but in *Moving the Center: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*,[18] Ngugi is centering Africa as a concern, as the source of his aesthetic methodology, and as his scene of address. He deliberately orients his works, philosophically, toward and around the axis of that center: Africa. In that sense alone, Ngugi's philosophy is literally Afrocentrism, a simple and direct reversal of eurocentrism in language production and scene of address. Ngugi's Afrocentrism as a quest for relevance is a reinvention of the idea of authentic art. Unlike classic Afrocentrism, Ngugi's Afrocentrism is disguised or mitigated by the hierarchical relevancy of a work of art or a natural concentricity of concerns—from the immediate to the remote. Neither exclusionary, nor essentialist, it is graduated, between those extremes. For Ngugi, the world is a literary stage that needs to be organized on the basis of the physical

orientation of the cognitive process. The dual motion of making Africa relevant in African literature and African literature relevant to Africa presents the general question of silence as fundamental. The question, "what is a relevant literature?"[19] posits relevance as a hierarchy of concerns that is contingent on material, historical, and political immediacies. Silence, as an effect of the culture industry or globalization, becomes the antithesis of relevance to be measured in degrees of cultural freedom. The paradox of cultural freedom in this conception is its conservative emancipation. The freedom of culture to be free of foreign domination translates into the freedom to realize and reproduce itself, despite foreign entanglements, ultimately as a transformed self, through the dialectics of those very entanglements. Through this logic, cultural self-preservation never has been, nor will ever remain, passive; nor can it eliminate the dangers of cultural imperialism, of itself becoming imperialistic. Wherever "the center" may be located, it is imperative to simultaneously apprehend the dangers of cultural self-preservation and cultural imperialism. Ngugi has become increasingly aware of the need for this reflexivity. Against the process of continuous alienation, "a continuous process of looking at oneself from the outside of self or with the lenses of a stranger"[20] he proposes a globalectic vision that "is to allow [the text] to speak to our own cultural present even as we speak to it from our own cultural present. It is to read a text with the eyes of the world; it is to see the world with the eyes of the text."[21]

Globalectics is a theory of global reflexivity in which we no longer view the postcolonial text as inert or as an object in nature. The praxis of writing renders reading an interactive act: we are reading a text that may be reading us, just as a performer reads their audience. In general, Ngugi's postcolonialism is a more active and radical reorganization of the scene of address and modes of reading. Not repressed by silence, it forces us to decipher how the text is also reading the world into which it makes an entrance, how it is eliciting a multiplicity of contradictory responses by saying different things to different people at different times and places. Here Spivak's formulation of the act of translation as the most intimate act of reading is applicable to Ngugi's philosophy of writing as the most intimate act of reading. Globalectic reading assumes the prophetic vision of the text in the mode of the classic first encounter between Christ and his disciple, who expressed surprise when Christ called him by name: "Nathanael said unto him, Where do you know me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."[22] The emphasis of globalectic reading is on the exigencies of

the textual moment as the original moment of recognition: the "before …, I saw you" that aims to give some control over the public's attention back to the text and to the author. It is a pole reversal that turns the mechanisms of silence inside out.

Locating a core area of concerns generates areas remote to those core concerns and therefore subject to the indifference or iconic memory of power. The silence of subaltern voices within the great works of western canon that Said deconstructs are related to the silence that often enshrouds the circulation of subaltern texts. The purported death of Prospero-Caliban syndrome in African literature is the upshot of the exasperating futility of a discursive exchange that is structured by power dynamics as expressed in Achebe's statement above. It could also be read as a necessary posture for the cultivation of the professional mystique of the writer. Graham Huggan devised the term "Native authenticity"[23] to describe postures of artistic autonomy in Aboriginal writings: "The search for authenticity in such an obviously compromised context involves the reaching out to alternative readerships, including the people one regards as being one's own."[24] One would assume that this terminology automatically applies to Ngugi's move to write for his mother, in his mother tongue. If as Henry Staten has argued, "Every culture, no matter how civilized or advanced, is constituted at its most elemental human level as a space of nativeness in a strong sense, as a space of knowledge and relation that must in principle remain largely implicit …"[25] and if the canonical writers that Said identified have indeed written exclusively for people they regarded *implicitly* as being their own, then, the term native authenticity must have a much wider application than Huggan intended. It is the view of the condition of literary publishing in Africa as a "promiscuous affair" (Soyinka), or "compromised context" (Huggan), or as instituting silence (Wali, Chinweizu, Ngugi) that in some respect explains various strategies deployed by authors to re-exert a measure of their influence.

The main contention in this chapter points to the various ways in which the imperatives of the condition of literary production may have informed Heinemann's embrace of Ngugi's "Native authenticity" as a progressive agenda. In the very early stages of his writing, like Nuruddin Farah and Bessie Head, Ngugi displayed a penchant for engaging his publishers in personal correspondences that seem to offer justification or underpinning philosophy for his writing (Fig. 6.1):

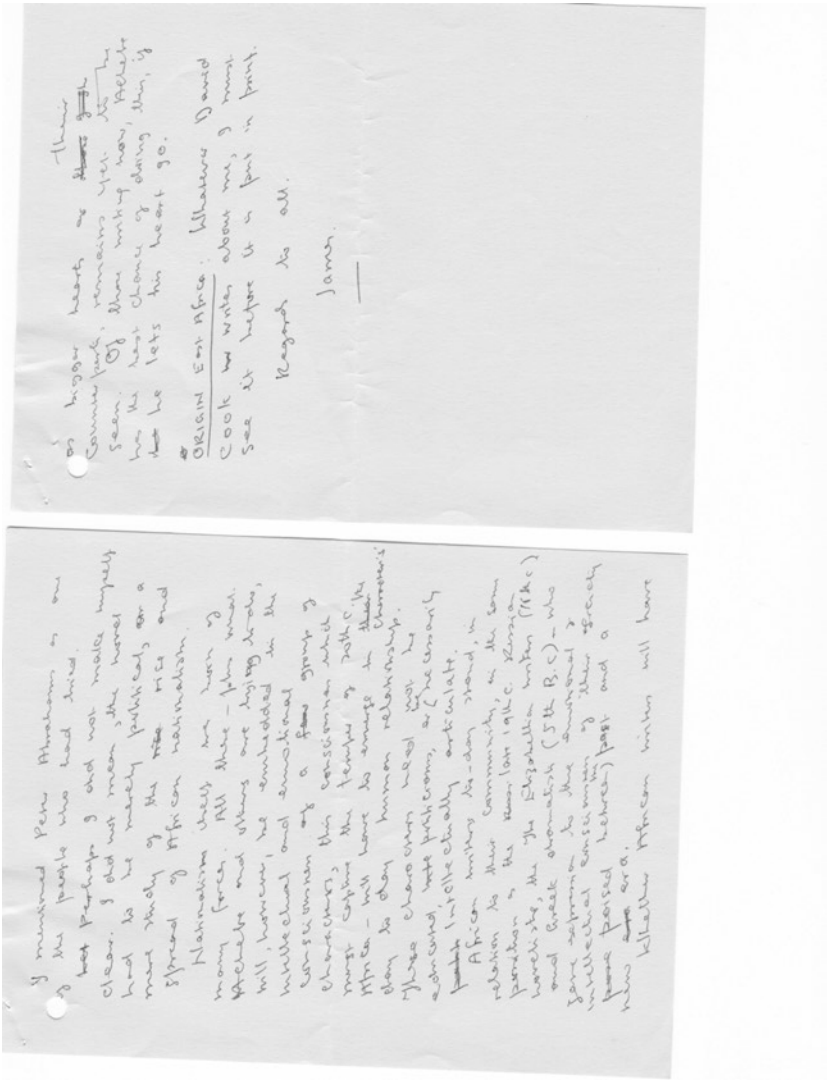


Fig. 6.1 Ngugi wa Thiong'o letter to Keith Sambrook, October 12, 1964. Courtesy of Ngugi wa Thiong'o

> You remember the talk Judith, you and I had over the novel in Africa at one of your pubs. I said that the great novel from Africa must take account of the impact of African nationalism, that it seemed to me this one big movement that has affected the lives of so many millions could not possibly be left out of any creative writing that aimed at capturing the whole vision of Africa. African writers to-day stand in relation to their community, in the same position as the late 19thc. Russian novelists, the Elizabethan writers (16th C) and Greek dramatists (5th BC)—who gave expression to the emotional and intellectual consciousness of their society poised between the past and a new era. Whether African writers will have as bigger hearts as their counterparts, remains yet to be seen. Of those writing now, Achebe has the best chance of doing this, if he lets his heart go.[26]

I will return to the notion of "big heart" to frame Ngugi's ideological position on language. Writing in social time as opposed to writing in what Soyinka calls global time is how best to distinguish Ngugi's original posture in the above letter from his later evolved position in *Globalectics*. Social time captures the concentrated realm of implicit and uninterrupted knowledge and relations.[27] Huggan's native authenticity is the same phenomenon that Sartre describes as the "Social time" of literature. The twists of oscillation between two different temporal scales have defined the disjunctions of temporality in African writing. Each of the words "native" and "authenticity" transmit connotations that, combined, consign any work to the dustbin of the literary antique. But the philosophically contracted responsibility of a writer to deliberately select and engage a specific public is not new, especially if it is a public with whom the writer shares historicity and class interests. There is, of course, the problem of ascribing collective class ideology and consciousness to postcolonial subjects in literature. This problem is magnified by the under-theorization or difficulty of theorizing the subaltern geo-politically as a class, and is not totally resolved in Ngugi's writings. What his early letters reveal is an advance consciousness about the function of the writer and his situation in relation to his community, and to his epoch. His immediate interest in that letter lies in locating where "African writers *to-day* stand in relation to their community …." (my emphasis). But it is equally important to be attentive to his ideological deployment of "stand" and "in relation." The view of history as a gigantic and interminable struggle is fundamental to Ngugi's oeuvre. It is a struggle in which the writer is not expected to stay neutral and where he or she "stands" in

that struggle determines the relevance and ability of their work to impact society and history.

Perhaps, it is their shared philosophy of dialectical materialism that makes the Sartrean frame of reference relevant for our discussion of Ngugi's engagement with the institutions of African literary production. Our critical question goes beyond the one asked more than half a century ago by Jean Paul Sartre, "For whom does one write?" The writer's audience was important for Sartre because he conceived of literature, and the freedom of the writer, as "*being situated*,"[28] or contingent, upon its public: "One cannot write without a public and without a myth—without a *certain* public which historical circumstances have made, without a *certain* myth of literature which depends to a very great extent upon the demand of this public."[29] Sartre's emphasis is on the word "certain." For him, the definition and redefinition of the character of writing and the function of the writer, while they do not, and should not, automatically conform to the demands of the public, have nevertheless been historically constituted or invented on the very basis, or within the ambience of those demands. What is most instructive, as I would soon demonstrate, is Sartre's conclusion regarding the art of Racine: "It is impossible to decide whether he poured his subject into a mould which his age imposed upon him or whether he really elected this *technique* because his subject required it."[30] This imponderable question, which is often taken for granted in postcolonial theory concerning the degree of choice and imposition, is precisely what remains to be determined. The stakes are that mere conformity to the imperatives of the age or demands of the public negates to some extent both elements of choice and craft. In their objection to writing back, Ngugi and others purport to initiate and regain control over the terms of artistic production in spite of the historical circumstances of their making.

Few works have been as rigorous and pivotal in their examination of reception theory as Sartre's in tracking whole epochs of writing and their symbiotic relations with the transformations of their public. From the Middle Ages when the clerks were the writers and operated within the Positivity of a unified ideology and undivided public to the time of Negativity, after the 1914 war, when "the radical unification of his public led the author to write on principle *against all his readers*;"[31] and from modes of circulation by expert subscription to the emergence of the bourgeois reader as the effect of free and compulsory education, Sartre traces an evolution of literature in the west that is inseparable from the evolution

of the public itself. This form of organic literary evolution establishes the basis for the consideration and the understanding of texts through the contingencies of reception and how they circularly reinfuse the contingencies of literary production. If the dictates and demands of a public in any way bear on the formation of the essential character of speech, and the task of writing, then, it becomes crucial to understand the dynamics by which these possibilities mutually engage each other. A certain public will produce a certain demand for a certain myth of literature that every piece of writing in Sartre's exact formulation aims to "simultaneously enclose, specify, and surpass."[32] The relativity of the simultaneity of enclosing, specifying, and surpassing, appears to coincide with Ngugi's cognitive and spatial order of relevance because there is an inevitable progression in their listing. This underscores the importance of Sartre for our understanding of Ngugi's attempt to situate himself as a writer first in social time, and then in a relative simultaneity, to transcend the historical circumstances of his situation in global time.

A reflexive turn to labels of native authenticity risks privileging the abstract and potential public over the concrete and historically situated public. It might miss altogether a critical perspective of the aspirations that animate the texts. In *Moving The Center*, Ngugi develops his early intimations into an elaborate ideology. The question of African languages as the languages of African literature becomes the symbol of his aspiration as a writer to be aligned with his public, or as Sartre put it: "people of a same period and community, who have lived through the same events, who have raised or avoided the same questions, have the same taste in their mouth; they have the same complicity, and there are the same corpses among them."[33] Sartre's shared temporality and spatial proximity of writer and reader is arguably what Michael Warner, in his widely received work *Publics and Counterpublics*, now categorizes as "punctuality." Warner's notion of punctuality goes beyond Sartre's dichotomy of concrete and abstract publics by asserting in a postmodern fashion that a public is not pregiven; it does not exist before its interpellation through discourse, before its attention is arrested in a reflexive scene of address. Warner's reflexive scene is one in which discourse, speech, or text participates in a stream or continuum of exchanges, and concerns. The public is not constituted by mere address alone but by a combination of the reflexive "concatenation" of texts, "previously existing discourse," and "responding discourse." This essential reflexivity that defines a writer's public is delineated by "a context of interaction"[34] that invariably brings us closer to

Sartre's idea of texts being "situated" if not its rediscovery in a new language and frame. While reflection theory is not exactly the same as being situated, it provides a comprehensive way of reading interactions, correspondences, and causalities between seemingly isolated historical situations. For Ngugi, creativity must both be the expression of a situation, and an embodiment of aspirations rooted in "the traditions of orature and of written African literature, inspired by the deepest aspirations of the African people for a meaningful social change, which will also be best placed to give and receive from the wealth of our common culture on an equal basis."[35] Whatever its limits, the evolution and natural logic of Ngugi's manifesto are compelling. The extensive critiques of Ngugi's language ideology rarely respond to the personal story of the evolution that informed his decision to write in Gikuyu.[36] He has insisted repeatedly, "I am on record, in several interviews, as saying that my writing was an attempt to understand myself and history, to make sense of the apparently irrational forces of the colonial and postcolonial."[37]

Only two years after his first published novel, Ngugi portrayed his obsession of writing in his mother tongue as a resolution to a crisis, which had plagued him from the very beginning of his writing career. He expressed this crisis to a group of students in an interview:

AM: Do you have plans for any other books?

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

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

JN: It is very difficult to say. I am very suspicious about writing about universal values. If there are universal values, they are always contained in the framework of social realities. And one important social reality in Africa is that 90 per cent of the people cannot read or speak English … the problem is this—*I know whom I write about, but whom do I write for?*[38]

It is remarkable how Ngugi has evolved with little deviation from the ideology of his early years. If we are to follow Sartre's relativity of simultaneity, the discursive enclosure of the people and their aspirations, the strategies of their specificity within texts, in this case as target audience, and the

demarcation of the outer perimeters of textual dispersion, what Warner calls "circulatory fate," are distinct practical processes to be determined at the same time and in relation to each other. The dissimulation or coyness regarding a writer's target audience is a fairly recent phenomenon, a vogue of the liberalized global order. Despite the increasing appreciation for crossover texts that travel and the normativity of cosmopolitan sensibilities within the intellectual and cultural elite classes across the world, reckoning with the idea that the writer has a home address, as Achebe put it, becomes important especially in moments of profound fissures within the liberal order and the reading public.

Ngugi is not coy about specifying his target audience in advance, enclosing and interpellating them through the reversion to an African language as the language of creative expression, and as a purveyor of his motivated discourse. His vision of writing as a form of social service and the writer as a servant of culture is born of a personal discovery of language as the perfect instrument to affect his audience. Where Sartre invokes the world as both material and ideological, Ngugi invokes language. Indeed, both philosophies would sound the same if we could replace Sartre's "world" with Ngugi's "language:" "And since the freedoms of the author and reader seek and affect each other through a [~~world~~, language] it can just as well be said that the author's choice of a certain [~~aspect of the world~~ language] determines the reader and, vice-versa, that it is by choosing his reader that the author decides upon his subject."[39] Appropriating Sartre's formulation in this mode allows us to set the stage for a theoretical understanding of Ngugi's language practice that is radically different from the approach of native authenticity.[40] Sartre's epigraph to this chapter raises the specter of a primary or target reader over texts in a profound way: "all works of the mind contain within themselves the image of the reader for whom they are intended."[41] We have the invisible image of the reader within the image of the text, or the text as an image. This suggests that the possibility of writing is itself dependent upon the possibility of simulating the image of the reader like a backlit object against a mental reflector. It underscores Warner's point that we can determine the target public of a discourse by plotting its orientation, tracing the contours of the image from which the outlines of the impression of an objective reader are generated. Warner went on to show that the practice of specifying a target audience is more or less the norm, the general condition of writing:

> [A]ll discourse or performance addressed to a public must characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate, and it must attempt to realize that

> world through address. There is no speech or performance addressed to a public that does not try to specify in advance, in countless highly condensed ways, the lifeworld of its circulation: not just through its discursive claims—of the kind that can be said to be oriented to understanding—but through the pragmatics of its speech genres, idioms, stylistic markers, address, temporality, mise en scene, citational field, interlocutory protocols, lexicon, and so on. Its circulatory fate is the realization of that world.[42]

Warner is working through Althusser's notion of interpellation even as he critiques that notion for being abstract, impersonal, and statist. Here we see the model for interpellation at the basic level of communication, whether it be direct everyday communication or indirect, literary and systematized. It is on that personal plane of the interpellation of an actual, existing community as the basis for which it calls a new imagined and unimaginable community into being that I situate Ngugi's writings.

An exploration of Ngugi's biographical explanation for his ideological choice of language is expedient. For him, the formation and evolution of his subjectivity and artistic sensibilities develop in tandem with the evolution of his society and history writ large. He describes his choice as a simple solution to an ensuing crisis of creativity: "Necessity forced a commonsense solution to the issue of language."[43] About two decades after the interview above, Ngugi recalled that decisive crisis of his career in *Decolonizing the Mind*, within the context of his other plays beginning with *The Black Hermit*, which includes his most celebrated, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*:

> In the opening line of *The Black Hermit* the peasant mother is made to speak in a poetic language reminiscent in tone of T. S. Eliot. The elders from a rural outpost come to town for their son, the black hermit, and speak in impeccable English. So does Kimathi, in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, even when addressing his guerrilla army or the peasants and workers in court. Admittedly it is understood that the characters are speaking an African language. But this is only an illusion since they are conceived in English and they speak directly in English. There are other contradictions too: these characters speak English but when it comes to singing they quite happily and naturally fall back into their languages. So they do know African languages! The illusion that in speaking English they were really speaking an African language is broken. The realism in theatre collides with the historical reality it is trying to reflect ….
>
> It was Kamiriithu which forced me to turn to Gikuyu and hence into what for me has amounted to 'an epistemological break' with my past, particularly

> in the area of theatre. *The question of audience settled the problem of language choice; and the language choice settled the question of audience*. But our use of Gikuyu had other consequences in relation to other theatre issues: content for instance; actors, auditioning and rehearsals, performances and reception; theatre as a language.[44]

Reactions to Ngugi's argument on language leave out the personal story of authorial evolution in which it was couched and have not been based on the logic internal to the argument itself, but on what was considered a form of radical conservatism or nativist authenticity ideology. To broach the discussion of Ngugi's linguistic ideology with the allusion to his early letter to the publisher is to complicate our understanding of his reversion by showing how strains of the ideas of "letting go" of having "big hearts," and a comparative sense of his standing in relation to both his local community and the international community of writers, have had deep roots in the formation of his artistic consciousness.

At the end of this chapter, I will explore the epicenter of Ngugi's practice in terms of how he adduces commonsense and natural logic in an attempt to eliminate the illusion and barrier of language, and to approximate reality to the utmost possible extent. Ngugi's specificity about the postcolonial scene of address is best anchored and illustrated through the local theatre, where the very material presence of the audience before the cast is almost always acknowledged and integral to both production and script, and where the alienation of language presents a self-evident incongruity. The passages above from *Decolonizing the Mind* represent Ngugi's arrival at the moment of epiphany, or what he describes as "epistemological break," through real-life engagement with the Kamiriithu Center in Kenya, whose members straddle all the strata of social status, from intellectual elite to peasantry; a center reminiscent of the Mbari Club in Ibadan, where Soyinka, and others initially performed and circulated most of their early works. Ngugi's personal narrative underscores how these initial paths of circulation induced for him, a deterministic relationship between language and literary form, and its audience.

An intersectionality between Ngugi's epiphany and Sartre's notion of social time, which he derived from the perspective of pure philosophical thought, can be established on a similar principle of the mutual and reciprocal selection of writer and public. Sartre's notion of social time has been updated and rearticulated in Warner's concept of "punctuality." Whatever we may recognize in Ngugi as consistent with the whole practice of

authenticity may successfully be repackaged through an insistence on "punctuality" as a condition of writing in which social temporality and relevance govern not only the production and circulation of art, but also how they generate their political force. The political ideology of Warner's concept of temporality is best captured in the passage below:

> The punctual time of circulation is crucial to the sense that discussion is currently unfolding in a sphere of activity. It is not timeless, like meditation; nor is it without issue, like speculative philosophy. Not all circulation happens at the same rate, of course, and this accounts for the dramatic differences among publics in their relation to possible scenes of activity. A public can only act in the temporality of the circulation that gives it existence. The more punctual and abbreviated the circulation, and the more discourse indexes the punctuality of its own circulation, the closer a public stands to politics. At longer rhythms or more continuous flows, action becomes harder to imagine.[45]

Social time, like punctual time, is neither timeless nor boundless. Social time or punctuality functions like the Bakhtinian chronotope in which time and space are interdependent as units of analysis.[46] Warner takes the idea of the text's ingrained image of the reader further than most, in order to entertain the question, "for whom does one write?" Punctuality prompts a stance, and there is a correlation between breadth of distribution (circulation) and a text's effectiveness and politics. Ngugi would agree with the image of the literary text radiating outwards, emitting energy that dissipates through distance and with the passage of time. This formulation best encapsulates not only Ngugi's thought process, but his account of the historical outcome of the language experiment as well. The correspondence of language to subject and public, we are to believe has the potential to generate artistic participation and relevance, and an explosive political situation and response:

> The language of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was becoming part of the people's daily vocabulary and frame of reference. There were some touching moments. I remember one Sunday when it rained and people rushed to the nearest shelters under the trees or under the roofs. When it stopped, and all the actors resumed, the auditorium was as full as before. The performance was interrupted about three times on that afternoon but the audience would not go away. The people's identification with Kamiriithu was now complete.

> […] I myself was arrested on 31 December 1977 and spent the whole of 1978 in a maximum security prison, detained without even the doubtful benefit of a trial. […] On 12 March 1982 three truckloads of armed policemen were sent to Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre and razed the open-air theatre to the ground. By so doing it ensured the immortality of the Kamiriithu experiments and search for peasant/worker-based language of African theatre.[47]

The notion that texts could gain force in circulation with longer rhythms and more continuous flows is in Warner's estimation an optimistic assessment that neither takes into consideration the constraints of circulation, nor the general data on the social life of texts. The paths of circulation, both human and material, to paraphrase Glissant, are fraught with innumerable reversions, diversions, entanglements, and transplantations that make continuous flows exceptions. The basis of what Rebecca Walkowitz calls the "unimaginable largeness"[48] of World Anglophone texts as "born translated" (per Walkowitz) might beyond a certain threshold be considered transplantation; and, transplantation is of a different order of circulation, exhilarating and challenging. The point of transplantation is the critical point in which we might begin to consider the usefulness of the concept of circulation altogether. This is the dividing line of Warner's ultimate position: "If the change of infrastructure continues at this pace, and if modes of apprehension change accordingly, the absence of punctual rhythms may make it very difficult to connect localized acts of reading to the modes of agency in the social imaginary of modernity. It may even be necessary to abandon 'circulation' as an analytic category." The obvious danger with Warner's position is to limit our understanding of a writer's public to a contemporaneously activated public outside which there can only be the "intertextual" and "intergeneric" publics.[49]

Theorizing punctual time ensures that the public, constituted in social time, through the dynamics of punctual rhythms, is not sublimated or subordinated in silence but remains connected to modes of agency in the social imaginary of modernity. The enclosure and specification of the public is only a starting point, surpassing the enclosed and specific public requires big-hearted aspiration as defined in Ngugi's letter to his publisher cited earlier. In making the distinction between the effects of the milieu and the public on the writer, Sartre renders it as the distinction between a determining factor and an aspiration. "The public," Sartre writes, "calls to him, [the writer] that is, it puts questions to his freedom. The milieu is a

vis a tergo; the public, on the contrary, is a waiting, an emptiness to be filled in, an aspiration, figuratively and literally."[50] This is to suggest that writing is by essence the dialectics of the determinative and the aspirational objective causes, between that which stands before, and that which stands beyond the writing subject.

Punctuality and big hearted aspiration are dialectically contained in globalectic vision. Not the soft bigotry of low aspiration.[51] The principle was outlined in the document against the Eurocentric curriculum in literary studies, "On the Abolition of the English Department," authored by Ngugi, Taban lo Liyong, and Henry Anyumba. The basic question they asked was: "Why can't African literature be at the center so that we can view other cultures in relationship to it?" It was a natural step for Ngugi to raise the next logical question: why can't African languages be at the center of imagination and expression in African literature? The answers to these simple questions were self-evident to him, and even more so almost five decades later: "In the Nairobi debate, we questioned the colonially rooted reversal of the 'normal' cognitive process where from 'here to there' had been replaced by from 'there' only, with the hope that one could see here from there."[52] By this inexorable natural logic, it would be impossible to answer "no" to the question of centering African literature and African languages in Africa. The natural and spatial orientation of the cognitive process demands and justifies such centering. The problem for Ngugi became how to emphasize this act of centering without appearing to be hermetic. Ironically, the name of his first play is *The Black Hermit*. Doubly ironically, the only way to defend his anti-European position is to argue that such acts of centering "merely" mimic conventional European practice. We are dislodging Eurocentrism by adopting it as our model. The centering of African languages and literature in Africa is legitimized by European centering of European literature in Europe: "For instance, by centering on African literature, were we not merely substituting our own for the foreign national tradition? Of course, it makes sense for any country, any nation, to prioritize its literature with the hope that the people would be able to see their own in other literatures and not study it in isolation. We were centering our own and building around it in a certain order Caribbean, African-American, Asian, and Latin American—what's largely taught today as postcolonial—and Euro-American and European. But in reality our "own" was not nation-bound, Africa alone being constituted of many nations and cultures. The language of use alone would have undercut its claim to a self-enclosed nationhood."[53] The focus of this

analysis is not the merits or otherwise of naturalizing language and literature as vehicles of cultural patrimony but the ways in which this argument, because of its deployment of the criterion of relevance, became influential in reorienting not just the teaching of African literature but also its production.

A review of Henry Chakava's 1996 book *Publishing in Africa: One Man's Perspective*[54] reveals how completely persuaded he was, as the major Kenyan publisher, by Ngugi's argument. Through Chakava, Heinemann would adopt Ngugi's cultural program as a progressive act of empowering local initiatives. Chakava details his rapprochement with Ngugi, and how his publishing career was influenced by Ngugi's ideological fervor and insistence:

> Not only did we publish many more new books by Ngugi over the same period but we also witnessed a transformation in the author publisher relationship that had existed between Ngugi, Heinemann London, and Heinemann Kenya, and finally the transformation of Heinemann Kenya itself into an independent African imprint with the new name, East African Educational Publishers. … Ngugi, who was then chairman of the Department of Literature at the University of Nairobi, was constantly reminding me of the need to—"localize" my publishing program so as to better fulfill the needs of the new curriculum. In response, I commissioned the first ever textbook of oral literature, which became an instant bestseller when it came out in 1982 … *If we accept that our literatures are to be found from among our own communities, in what language(s) must we express them? How should we share them among ourselves? Although it was agreed that the English language was vital for international communication, it was felt strongly that our writers should write for our own people and that, if the rest of the world saw any merit in what we were producing, they could access that material through translation into their own languages.* We felt that it was time to prepare our communities and awaken them to the reality that they were the creators of their own literature. It was during this period (1976) that Ngugi (with his namesake, Ngugi wa Mirii) wrote *Ngaahika Ndeenda*-with the full critical participation of the people of Kamiriithu, who were later to stage it at the Kamiriithu Community Centre before large audiences.[55]

Echoes of Ngugi's entire argument could be heard succinctly in the above passage. From writer to publisher, the code of practice dictates a conscious engagement first with "our own communities" and then "the rest of the world." Ngugi has completely reversed the extroversion of the scene of address and reorganized the literary stage. The highlighted section shows

that Chakava was drawn into Ngugi's construct of an essential harmony between the language of life, of natural and social intercourse, and the language of education and reproduction. "The future of the African novel," Ngugi declared in *Decolonizing the Mind*, "is then dependent on a willing writer (ready to invest time and talent in African languages); a willing translator (ready to invest time and talent in the art of translating from one African language into another); a willing publisher (ready to invest time and money) or a progressive state which would overhaul the current neo-colonial linguistic policies and tackle the national question in a *democratic manner*; and finally, and most important, a willing and widening readership. But of all these other factors, it is only the writer who is best placed to break through the vicious circle and create fiction in African languages."[56] At the heart of the language question is the question of democracy.

That writers do not take the proposition as self-evident and self-validating that literature should be expressed in the languages the people themselves speak, makes urgent, for Ngugi, the task of decolonizing the mind. Niyi Osundare has expressed the sentiment that Africa is due for a second or third wave of decolonization. This argument, even applied to the role of the translator, found resonance with none other than the publishing director of the African Writers Series (AWS), James Currey, who wrote the following on the publication of Ngugi's first novel in Gikuyu, *Devil on the Cross* (Fig. 6.2).

"It will be possible during 1981 for non-Gikuyu speaking readers in Kenya and throughout the world to learn what has so captured the interest of the Kikuyu people that both books are already in their third impression." We need to know first, he is saying, how it played in Peoria,[57] how the Gikuyu speaking readers react, to gauge if it would be of interest to a wider public. This is not a terrible marketing idea. Translated into a marketing strategy, Ngugi's idea is double-edged. The local market is being asked to perform the function of screening and pruning the product, further refining the work of the machine, like quality control for the ultimate destination, the global market. But that is precisely what is implied by Chakava, that the rest of the world is entitled only to those texts that "our communities" have deemed to be of "merit" or in Currey's words of "interest." The only way to guarantee this model is to first publish locally in local languages and see what bubbles up. Ngugi would instinctively object to this screening function being the necessary implication of his position. This is a disguised form of "upscaling of the humanities at a global level"[58]

Ngugi and the Language Question

A new entertainment has entered the bar life of Kenya following the publication of Caitaani MutharabaINi, the first novel in Gikuyu by the internationally known writer Ngugi. A man will read Ngugi's work aloud to the drinkers until the voice and his glass run dry. He will then lay the novel page downwards on the bar until another drink is bought for him.

Ngugi says that nowadays people - who were previously unknown to him - come up to him when he enters a bar and will introduce themselves by the name of one of the characters in the play Ngahika Ndeenda which he and Ngugi wa Miirie wrote together. These people do not give him their own names but those of the characters they have read in bar performances.

At the launching of Petals of Blood in July 1978 he promised the audience that he was, as he put it, writing something in the language that his mother could understand. This play was the first stage in the most recent development of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's writing.

Limuru Cultural Centre is a semicircular open air ampitheatre made by the local people out of canes. These very people took the parts over a period of some six Sundays while they developed the play by the two Ngugi's in front of a perpetually full house. It was through the actors that the powerful work songs were integrated into the text and related to the present day. For the first time Ngugi found that he had an audience among the ordinary people and not just the English-reading and speaking Kenyan elite. The authorities seem to have taken fright because they not only banned performances of the play but, possibly as a direct consequence of th eplay, detained Ngugi without trial from January until December 1979.

Ngugi had already started a novel in English but the experience at Limuru clarified his mind about what intellectuals call - in English - the "language question". As he recounts in his forthcoming prison diary Detained he used coarse prison lavatory paper. It comes in flat packs which enabled him to conceal what he had written further down the pack. The nearly complete manuscript was discovered only a short time before he was released but, quite unexpectedly, returned to him.

The Gikuyu play and novel were published in April 1980 by Heinemann in Nairobi. Henry Chakava, the Managing Director, never hesitated about publishing them although they were obviously a commercial risk. Lip service is paid to publishing in Kenyan languages but the experience of all publishers has not been encouraging

Fig. 6.2 "Ngugi and the Language Question." Courtesy of James Currey

unless a book is prescribed for an exam. There were in the event early signs that the reception might be exceptional. Ngugi rushed in to see Henry Chakava to say that the books were on sale and demand why he had not been given a copy. Henry Chakava protested that he had not seen a copy either. The answer was simple. Such was Ngugi's fame that some copies had been stolen from the printers. There was of course in addition a strong fear that some oform of administrative action would be taken to ban the book.

Ngugi has proved that as a renowned, indeed a martyred writer, he will be bought and read in Gikuyu. His words have been broadcast across Gikuyu-speaking Kenya by ordinary people. They have yet to be carried by the Voice of Kenya.

It will be possible during 1981 for non-Gikuyu speaking readers in Kenya and throughout the world to learn what has so captured the interest of the Kikuyu people that both books are already in their third impressions. Heinemann will publish in Nairobi and London Ngugi's own translation of the play I Will Marry Whom I Choose (African Writers Series 246) and the novel Devil on the Cross which has been No. 200 on the African Writers Series list since before Ngugi's detention.

James Currey is Editorial Director of Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.

Fig. 6.2 (continued)

or the practice of hierarchies.[59] The imprint on the reputation of the text by first readers as gateway readers carries a weight that offsets the implicit problems of that initial function. This suggests that texts never shake off the reputation they may have acquired from their first readers in the sense that subsequent readers are being asked to validate or refute the premise of that reputation. As Moretti has illustrated, as markets for texts expand, the option when placing them in the "right market niche" is between directing the attention of the readers backwards to what they already know or to what they don't know. While the appeal of the exotic may be powerful in its immediate but transient arrest of attention, publishers have had more success pointing attention backward to "what has so captured the interest of" gateway readers, even if that is signaled directly through announcements that tee up texts, such as Currey's write-up, or by opaque things "that escape our attention."[60] The contention in this chapter, that a public is defined by both "duration" (Warner) and "situation" (Sartre), and not the exclusion of either, allows us to account for what Derrida has called the condition of a tradition: "If we sought to analyze *The Conflict of the Faculties* today, we would have to attend as much to its 'content' as to the conditions of its tradition: for example, what philosophical, institutional, editorial or political reasons explain the difference between the French eclipse and the American eclipse?"[61] Derrida is addressing the eclipse and reappearance of Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties* by suggesting that there are philosophical, institutional, editorial, or political reasons that could account for the reception or silence of texts in different locations. Those "reasons" are external to "content" and make the universal uniformity of reception impossible, but are inseparable from the ecological situations that do transform content to relevant content. Ngugi and his publishers share the correspondence of subject and public as a primary basis of relevance and the right of visibility. The interests of others only serve to present the text before us with their annotations, excite our own curiosity, and lead us down the trajectory of our own engagement and re/discovery, within the context of what is known and anticipated in our specific discursive ecology, even if we never would know what exactly captured their interests. The case of films, independent films, is a good illustration of the mode of circulation based on closed previews, especially films that go directly to film festival circuits, before attaining home distribution—if ever they get it.

It was not the first time that Heinemann had published in an African language. There had been the Swahili volume of poems collected by Jan

Knappert in the early 1970s. Chief Fagunwa's proposal for a comprehensive program in Yoruba would have significantly transformed Heinemann's publishing agenda but for his untimely death in 1963. That moment of transformation had to wait another decade for Ngugi. Although the contributions of Ulli Beier in the publication of Yoruba oral traditions and Obiechina's Onitsha market literature shows Heinemann was predisposed to a wide range of interests, as Currey's write-up on the subject indicates, it was Ngugi who moved the agenda strongly in the direction of oral literature and publishing in African languages. For Currey, the opportunity of an expanded readership in Yoruba or Gikuyu did not only make good business sense, it was also a progressive cultural agenda that they were enthusiastic to support despite constituting a significant shift from the original idea of the series as an English language series. Chakava explicitly stated the extent of Ngugi's influence at the end of his chapter, "Publishing Ngugi":

> It is Ngugi's advice and the resultant exchange of views that encouraged me to give priority to oral literature in my publishing programs. It is Ngugi's conviction and my own willingness to experiment with some of his ideas that made me venture into publishing in African languages. Had Ngugi continued to live in Kenya, write more books in this line, and encourage his colleagues to support this venture, the program would have succeeded. In spite of my present setbacks in publishing in this area, I am waiting for the day when he will return home so that we can continue from where I stopped.[62]

Ngugi has not relocated back to Kenya since his imprisonment and exile in the eve of the 1980s. Chakava wrote the above lines around 1996; and if his publishing program in African languages has stopped since Ngugi's 1979 imprisonment, it shows how much that program relied on Ngugi for its intellectual force, and strategic implementation.

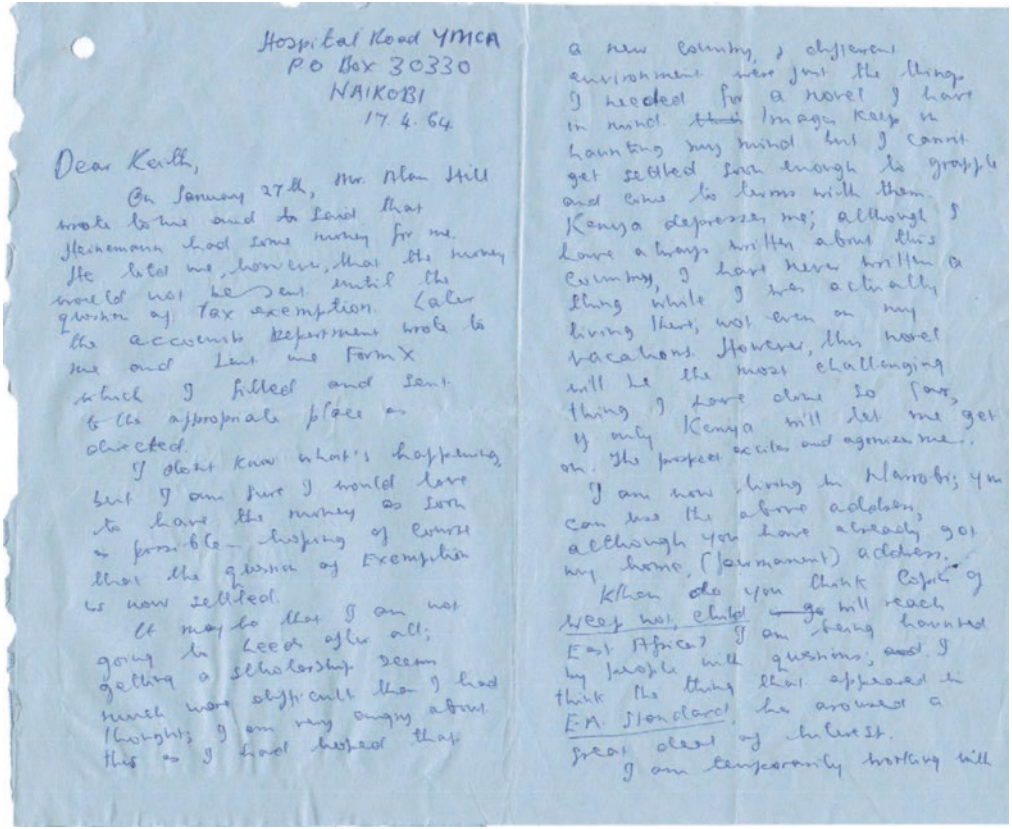
Ngugi has been the main driving force of the language question in African literature. Regardless of how much Africa itself has changed, and how widely the foreign languages are in use, those realities at the heart of Ngugi's concerns remain: the class position of the peasantry and workers, the survival of the languages and forms in which they reproduce themselves, and the difficulty if not impossibility of acquiring those foreign languages in the first place. Within this Fanonian framework of the rejection of the nationalist bourgeoisie as the vanguard of the nation, national culture does not derive its character and vitality from the elite classes. Sembene Ousmane's representation of Wolof resembles Ngugi's elevation

of the everyday language of the peasantry and working class to the status of an African language that authentically carries the material and aesthetic culture of the people.

The term "people" has been the subject of much reflection long before Giorgio Agamben's "What is a People?" The notion of heteroglossia, which has come to inform how we think about culture and the social space as a whole is simultaneously infused with the concept that space no longer has homogeneous value or that there are no pure monolanguage situations; cities are different from villages, each of which are different one from another. In Sembene's Dakar, French is mixed in with Yoruba, and the life styles and language of the big city is different from that which obtains in the villages. But even in big African cities such as Lagos or Nairobi, the language of the majority serves to provide the unitary tissue structure that runs across its irreducible heteroglossia. And, while the reading public may be concentrated in the city, the circulation of texts is not entirely restricted by the city-village divide. This is what Bessie Head's *Serowe, Village of the Rain Wind* has clearly demonstrated. So that the idea of a majority peasant class motivating the subject of national literature in a very divided and fragmented space is not only credible but remains pertinent. The continued relevance of the language question is evident in the decision of the Senegalese writer Boubacar Boris Diop whose publication of *Doomi Golo* (2003),[63] marks the rejection of the French language and his first novel in Wolof. We see reenacted in Francophone Africa in the last decade similar debates around the question of language and audience. Much more covert ideologically, Diop's passionate and affective appeal makes his language turn less contentious and controversial: "writing in your mother tongue makes you experience feelings…you would have thought absolutely impossible before … The words I use to write *Doomi Golo* do not come from school or from a dictionary. They come from real life. These words rise up to me from the very distant past, and if their sound is simultaneously so familiar and so pleasing to me, it is because I belong, with every fibre of my being, to an oral tradition."[64] His narrative, like Ngugi's, is also grounded on a personal exploration of language as a means of self-discovery and self-understanding: "When I write in Wolof, more than anything, it makes me feel that I am taking my place in an emerging national literature. And when I compare my earlier novels to *Doomi Golo*, I realize now that the words of 'the Other' helped me articulate as much as they reduced me to silence or a pathetic stammer."[65]

The postcolonial African writer by choice of profession was inducted into the elite class and his or her work embraces that class interest. Obscured by the classic critique of native authenticity is the function of Ngugi's language ideology as a radical rejection of the class position of the modern African writer. Perhaps the least appreciated aspect of his ideology is its psychoanalytical dimension as a mode of compensation: African languages are the symbol and memento of a vanishing Africa. For many who lived through the era of colonial transition, especially for exiles of that generation, Africa is vanishing, both literally and figuratively. The evanescence of Africa generates contradictory responses: for a writer like Nuruddin Farah, it activates memory; for Ngugi it is depressing; and for Edward Said it elicits a blasé attitude. Farah writes, "all my major writing has taken place outside Somalia. [...] For me distance distills, ideas become clearer and better worth pursuing. [...] One of the pleasures of living away from home is that you become the master of your destiny, you avoid the constraints and limitations of your past and, if need be, create an alternative life for yourself. That way everybody else becomes the other, and you the center of the universe. You are a community when you are away from home—the communal mind, remembering. Memory is active when you are in exile. [...].[66] Said could be said to be working through similar experiences as Farah in *Reflections of Exile*, but unlike Farah, it is exile that Said embraces if not alienation itself: "Now it does not seem important or even desirable to be "right" and in place (right at home, for instance). Better to wander out of place, not to own a house, and not ever to feel too much at home anywhere, especially in a city like New York, where I shall be until I die."[67] Ngugi best illustrated the complexity and problem of engagement with home from the margins of diaspora. In 1964, he was haunted by exile: "Kenya depresses me; although I have always written about this country, I have never written a thing while I was actually living there; not even on my vacations. However, this novel will be the most challenging thing I have done so far, if only Kenya will let me get on. The prospect excites and agonizes me"[68] (Fig. 6.3).

In the letter cited earlier, Ngugi prescribes letting the heart go for Achebe; here, he wishes that Kenya would let go of him. The fetters come off temporarily in the production of his first Gikuyu play, *I will Marry When I Want*; we are able to imagine he feels free enough to write while residing in Kenya because the play is in his mother tongue. The liberation Farah derives from being away from his public Ngugi experiences in being



Hospital Road YMCA
PO Box 30330
NAIROBI
17. 4. 64

Dear Keith,

On January 27th, Mr. Alan Hill wrote to me and to said that Heinemann had some money for me. He told me, however, that the money would not be sent until the question of Tax exemption. Later the accounts department wrote to me and sent me Form X which I filled and sent to the appropriate place as directed.

I don't know what's happening but I am sure I would love to have the money as soon as possible – hoping of course that the question of Exemption is now settled.

It may be that I am not going to need after all; getting a scholarship seem much more difficult than I had thought; I am very angry about this as I had hoped that a new country, a different environment were just the things I needed for a novel I have in mind. ~~that~~ Imagen keep is haunting my mind but I cannot get settled soon enough to grapple and come to terms with them. Kenya depresses me; although I have always written about this country, I have never written a thing while I was actually living there, not even on my vacations. However, this novel will be the most challenging thing I have done so far, if only Kenya will let me get on. The prospect excites and agonizes me.

I am now living in Nairobi; you can use the above address, although you have already got my home (permanent) address.

When do you think copies of West not, child ~~go~~ will reach East Africa? I am being haunted by people with questions, and I think the thing that appeared in E.A. Standard has aroused a great deal of interest.

I am temporarily working with

Fig. 6.3 Ngugi wa Thiong'o letter to Keith Sambrook, April 17, 1964. Courtesy of Ngugi wa Thiong'o

closer to his. The danger of punctuality is that by not needing to consider or "presuppose forms of intelligibility already in place, as well as the social closure entailed by any selection of genre, idiolect, style, address, and so on," the subtleties of presentation may be lost to raw emotional realism, and the reliance on the codes of implicit communication may override deliberate improvisation.

While punctuality as a principle of form may be controversial in Ngugi's argument, its exploration of the relationship between language and class, and how language can serve as an instrument of exclusion in predetermining which publics are integrated into the "context of interaction" established by the text, and which ones are excluded from that immediate and core context by the very choice of language, genre, idiolect, style, is more compelling. While Soyinka does not endorse Ngugi's attempt to reorganize the scene of address or language ideology, he does seem to equate forms of writing back, termed the Prospero-Caliban syndrome, to elite dependency and conspicuous consumerism.

The punctual principle of literary production could be assessed within the two extreme poles of self-referentiality articulated by Soyinka, in which intercultural exchanges and consumption occur, as "a failure to see the creative product as a phenomenon that transcends its immediate borders."[69] Soyinka paradoxically critiques and validates the punctual principle, or renders it more sympathetic than Ngugi has been able to. The negative poles of intercultural exchanges are chauvinism and hermetism. Chauvinism consigns the other to silence. Hermetism, in giving voice to the silences effected by authoritative voices within the dominant culture erects barriers of its own. Hermetism, according to Soyinka is a self-defeating posture of an already defensive and prostrate culture, while chauvinism can be understood using Rey Chow's argument, as the ultimate "enforcement of self-referentiality."[70]

Wole Soyinka's observation that textual or artistic dispersion is as inevitable as the unfolding of historical processes is the basis for his contention that African literary practice must, against the temptations of defensive localism, operate in global time: "It is an ancient agenda, globalization. The history of cultures and their arts has always been one of contact, resistance, accommodation and/or assimilation and of course—suppression and even outright supersession. Isolationism has ever encountered short shrift—a fate from which even the invading culture is never spared."[71] Many will contend that the history of modern African literary production

demonstrates that African literature has always operated in global time, in the very history of suppression and supersession; and, attempts to insert the situation of punctual time has only been partially and temporarily successful.

> Given the nature of Cultural encounters which come through, historically, as somewhat akin to a criss-crossing high tension wire netting, a product of creative tension from the motion of dialogue and interpenetration on the one hand, and chauvinism and hermeticism on the other, it is hardly surprising that the forecast for the creative enterprise leans towards blurring along once recognizable lines of identity. Chauvinism is the word we tend to apply to cultures that consider themselves pure and superior, while "authenticity" is reserved for cultures struggling to extricate themselves from the aggressiveness of the intruding, which of course is the hallmark of products of the colonized or imperial penetration. Since the latter adventure, again historically, had its roots in expansionism, one can only marvel at the innate contradiction, a case of double standards which manifests itself as—I keep what is mine, you drop what is yours and embrace mine. Not surprisingly, the rejectionist response tends to move massively, inflicting more than mere pinpricks in the body of the cultural landscape of the invading culture.[72]

The double standards that Soyinka claims here apply to the unproblematic acceptance that western writers until mid-twentieth century could write with an exclusively western audience in mind without being seen as nativist until Said highlighted it in his critique as a profound deficiency of that great canon of literature. Against the backdrop of surpassing that critical limitation is set the obligation, as if a mark of a higher level of responsibility to universal humanism, for postcolonial writers to address a universal or global audience, which paradoxically turns out to be located primarily at the centers of global production and power. Global audience has really meant little more than western audience. From a western point of view it would be untenable, even retrograde, to propose in this age that African writers follow a similar path of writing with an exclusively African audience in mind, that is, to cater to what is theirs, as did writers that were based in Ibadan in the 1950s and 1960s, or as Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Our inquiry is bound to take this direction if we are to understand the effects of Heinemann's global dissemination of African literature, and of the mediation of western readers in the early debates over "authenticity," a term which Soyinka, tongue in cheek, says is "reserved" for insurgent literatures. Also important is the claim by other African writers, who though

not agreeing with Ngugi on the question of language, claim that they too actually do write for an African audience. The classification of publics along the lines of "mine" and "yours" is a reflection of the crisis of writing that Ngugi initially confronted as an ambivalent young writer. The postcolonial tradition of writing is defined by this separation of "mine" and "yours" as its original conflict. Sartre said that the condition of writing in general is always defined by an original conflict and "the objective aspect of the conflict may express itself as an antagonism between the conservative forces, or the real public of the writer, and the progressive forces, or the virtual public." While real and virtual publics may not always map neatly over "mine" and "yours," the event of global readership prompts a conflict between the conservative and revolutionary forces of aesthetic and cultural production and consumption.

The premise of contemporary theory of world literature is the intensification of cosmopolitan production and consumption, which requires the transcendence of linguistic and cultural points of origin.[73] If the separation and alienation of subject and public are the problems on the "conservative-mine" spectrum of global production, in the chapter "What Is Yours, Ours, and Mine," Apter outlines alienation as the equally critical problem of the "progressive-yours," making general alienation the universal condition of the world literary tradition. Citing Damrosch's definition of "world-literary text as that which estranges a reader from her or his own nationality," Apter notes Robbins' point that the "estrangement [of the reader] can only be partial," which underscores the degrees of estrangement across the field of world literature. "This dispossessive stance casts World Literature as an unownable estate, a literature over which no one exerts proprietary prerogative and which lends itself to a critical turn that puts the problem of property possession front and center."[74] Ending with a terrifying fable of planetary extinction, Apter predicates the dead-end of world literature on its promotion of "identifying over differing." Here we hear echoes of the insurmountable fragments that Bhabha whispered quietly in his footnotes on Benjamin: "fragments are fragments, and that they remain essentially fragmentary. They follow each other metonymically, and they never constitute a totality."[75] The impossible task of world creation has made harmony into the most powerful quest and motif of history. This is the theology of modern history.

The history of how the public of African literature was constituted, and the attempts to specify and determine its influence on the direction and development of African literature, is being undertaken at a time when the

necessity and feasibility of such a task are no longer to be presumed. These attempts to explain African literature in terms of the public it addresses have been ongoing since its inception, especially those texts published and distributed by international publishers. It is a growing area of academic inquiry. The example of a September 3, 1973 query by J. Beneke to the editors of the AWS, offers some proof. In the letter he requests for sales numbers to verify the accusation that African writers in English cater to "a small, westernized minority only."

It is confusing when writers from a minor culture assert that they write for the audience of their subculture, but counter-intuitive if they are actually doing the writing in a majority language or idiom. How do you address a minority in the language of the majority, unless that minority also speaks the language of the majority? The literature of modern Africa is written in double minor; a minor-to-minor correspondence in which a minority of the minority speaks the majority language and only a minority of the majority finds the materials of interest; this is the very heart of minorizing, of silencing. We can substitute the minority/majority relations with dominant/subculture, or other similar set of relations. This is where Achebe's pungent criticism of Ngugi on the language question may have missed its target. It is not how long and how deep the roots of English have been in Africa but that it has always been the language of the minority, in this case, the elite, since its introduction, and has therefore never ceased to be alienating and foreign to majority Africans.[76] Spivak has insisted on the duty of the majority to learn minority languages if not as a means of cultural expression, at least as a vehicle for mutual, multidirectional accessibility, and understanding. The best argument for the adoption of a majority language is arguably also by Spivak: "Even Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in his book *Decolonizing the Mind*, accepted that for certain kinds of purposes—the structure of the state, for example—you have to appropriate these big, powerful unitary languages."[77] Here, she equates the structure of the state and the structure of language, just as Sartre posits the materiality of language as "a structure of the external world."[78] If that equation holds, we would have to account for the distinction that undergirds the appropriation of one language structure and rejection of the other, especially since the state is also a colonial construct. Is there a discernible strategy for adopting, as Ngugi has done, the concept of language as a form of labor, an instrument of intercourse with material and social life, if the claim is that the writer is indeed writing for a subcultural

audience; or the more mainstream position represented by Achebe? Is that choice a product of historical and circulatory constraints?

Chinua Achebe made the remark to Bill Moyers, as he had done many times before to counter the assumptions that Beneke, too, was seeking to disprove, that he was not concerned primarily with the western audience:

> MOYERS: You've certainly done your share of offending the Emperor. In fact, you draw a devastating picture of government in Africa; ministers living in princely mansions while the peasants and the workers live in shacks. You've talked about the corruption of democracy, the bribery, the vulgarity, the violence, the brutality, the rigged elections. Aren't you concerned that, in these novels which are gaining a growing audience in the West, that you are reinforcing the stereotypes of many Westerners toward your own people?
>
> ACHEBE: Well, I can see that danger, but that doesn't really bother me because I am not concerned primarily with those. I am concerned with the people whose story I am telling; and if I am a bit harsh, that harshness, I think, comes from concern. It is not that I hate my people, or that I hate those rulers even. I don't even hate them. But, I don't know, when you look at the possibilities, the opportunities that we have squandered in a country like Nigeria, you know, it is really so painful because so much could have been achieved. So much assistance could have been given to—not just to the poor in Nigeria but even outside of Nigeria, because providence has been so prodigious in its gifts to a country like Nigeria. And so when you look at that possibility and what was achieved, one feels very, very bitter, indeed.[79]

Achebe, being a writer of great sensitivity was too circumspect in his choice of "primarily" over "exclusively." While we can assume that the question of audience did not arise for Dickens and Austen, Flaubert or Camus, as a conscious or necessary choice, the gravity of such choice for writers like Achebe cannot be overstated, especially because of the economy of prestige[80] or crisis of legitimation associated with the forms and sources of authority that different patrons confer upon or deduct from cultural products. Paths of circulation are not invested with homogeneous value and the heuristic significance of the move from "exclusively" to "primarily" for analysis of publics is enormous. These are the stakes of Beneke's and other such inquiries. If the themes of Achebe's writings are as laid out by Moyer: "a devastating picture of government in Africa; ministers living in princely mansions while the peasants and the workers live in shacks" and so forth, these themes do not square neatly with Said's postcolonial practice of writing back. To imagine what it

must mean for Achebe not to have directed that devastating portrait "primarily" to his Nigerian audience at the time of writing, we must imagine that Dickens wrote *Hard Times* for an audience other than his nineteenth-century English working class in whose pubs and dining rooms he had become a familiar face and legend. If Achebe was not concerned with the "stereotypes of westerners," if his primary concern is with the people whose stories he tells, people identified as "the peasants and the workers," the exact same class of people that Ngugi claims to have encountered face-to-face at the Kamiriithu Center, breaking the illusion that they spoke English, how could the two writers have arrived at such divergent positions on the language question? There is a common denominator, but what is required for the production of African literature to fulfill the moral obligation of writing remains a conundrum for which there is no consensus. This is, perhaps, as it should be.

In a recent interview, Toni Morrison was quoted as maintaining the same position as Achebe, if not more emphatically, that she is writing for black people:

> Most writers claim to abhor labels but Morrison has always welcomed the term "black writer". "I'm writing for black people," she says, "in the same way that Tolstoy was not writing for me, a 14-year-old coloured girl from Lorain, Ohio. I don't have to apologize or consider myself limited because I don't [write about white people]—which is not absolutely true, there are lots of white people in my books. The point is not having the white critic sit on your shoulder and approve it"—she refers to the writer James Baldwin talking about "a little white man deep inside of all of us". Did she exorcise hers? "Well I never really had it. I just never did."[81]

What this means, its basic premise, is that the production of black or postcolonial literature, the question of its significance, is in part, bound up with the question of audience, which as it is, is diverse and divided. This is the Richard Wright moment in Sartre's *What is Literature?*, the moment when there emerges a deep fracture at the very heart of the writer's actual public:

> Thus, each work of Wright contains what Baudelaire would have called "a double simultaneous postulation;" each word refers to two contexts; two forces are applied simultaneously to each phrase and determine the incomparable tension of his tale. Had he spoken to the whites alone, he might have turned out to be more prolix, more didactic, and more abusive; to the negroes alone, still more elliptical, more of a confederate, and more elegiac.[82]

It might be worth taking a step back and, reopening the imponderable question Sartre raised in connection to Racine: did these writers choose their techniques because their subject required it or because conventions and audiences dictated it? Eileen Julien's *African Novels and the Question of Orality*[83] argues convincingly in favor of African writers choosing their techniques on the basis of the aesthetic requirements of their subjects when the question then was whether a generic and essential oral poetics inextricably defines and overdetermines all African literature. The same argument has yet to be made with regards to the requirements of publics, especially on white cultural validation that Morrison abhors. We may here begin to understand why writers such as Ngugi have attempted to extricate themselves from the futile exchange of writing back, and why they feel compelled to specify a primary public that they consider to be their own and to facilitate the production and dissemination of their works starting from within those spaces.

This is not to say that writers cannot attain universal appeal outside punctual and social time, even when the content of their work is both historically and anthropologically specific and grounded. What we are tracking is how the questions of aesthetic functionality and relevance always arise, in the first place, from that space of divergence between the real and the ideal public. According to Sartre,[84] that space of divergence is the space of abstract universality, which maintains itself as an abstraction only because it is perpetually removed, as a rule, from the relativity of concrete historical and anthropological specificities. This is the space of "unimaginable largeness" that Walkowitz explores in *Born Translated*, which every piece of writing has the potential of inhabiting or realizing.

Put differently, the general understanding of the western and global reception of postcolonial African literature is informed by the *a priori* existence of a world-target audience that invites retrograde gestures of juxtaposing patrimonial claims of "possessive collectivism"[85] (Walkowitz) against what Apter calls "collective dispossession." Extending Rey Chow's notion of the world target, "the world-as-target" beyond the rise of self-referentiality in theory, to the construction of the hegemony of the western audience over postcolonial literature allows us to interrogate the subtle mechanisms by which "knowledge of the other—often coded as native or indigenous knowledge—is now part of the enforcement of self-referentiality in a direct sense."[86] Wole Soyinka provides an example of how mechanisms of global production and consumption could function as the reinforcement of western self-referentiality through the predominating imposition

of modes of abstract universalism. The issue for him is not whether universalism should be rejected as a strategy for protecting culture at the local and lower levels but that if cultural universalism is self-referential, it ultimately reproduces unequal exchange: "The propelling agent of globalisation—that is, what is packaged as an innocuous but seductive cultural offering—is not always accompanied by any overt claim to superiority, nevertheless, it implants a relationship that is based on inequality."[87] He further elaborates:

> What elements of one culture predominate in the context of exchange? Are those elements from the superficial, tinsel aspects, or from the deeper reaches of culture, drawn from the more integrative functions, and sometimes even Universalist potential of such cultures? If globalization has taken on a negative import today, it is due principally to the fact that modern technology, as a vehicle of this cultural exchange, appears to carry with it a baggage of the lowest common denominator, with which it bombards the prostrate culture, dragging it down to its own facile, consumerist levels. It was not always thus, needless to say. Even more significantly, such cultural encounters are not necessarily the lopsided one-way traffic that is increasingly apparent on the commercial circuits.[88]

The poles of chauvinism and hermetism mask another set of interactions between freedom and dispossession. Hermetism can be as deleterious to the writer's freedom as chauvinism and dispossession. Ngugi assumes that successfully reaching the African public would be reaching most of the world since the diversity of Africa, "being constituted by many nations and cultures,"[89] guarantees the status of Africa as a true microcosm of the world with the inflow of Asian, Arabic, Mediterranean, and European civilizations. This assumption has been supported by Karen Barber in *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics*,[90] who has argued that the fear that African languages consolidated ethnic identities and reinforced boundaries did not take into account their "capacity to convene publics on several different scales at once."[91] She points to the shifting horizon of Fagunwa's address as "not the result of uncertainty about whom he is speaking to, but rather an attempt to make the universal speak through the local and the local through the universal, to consolidate an immediate readership while projecting a global one." Ngugi's writings in Gikuyu are thus part of a tradition of African language literatures. "In many early African-language publications," Barber posits, "one gets a sense of an imagined world and an imagined public that is simultaneously

very local, and of vast, borderless extent."[92] More than the replication of a tradition, what Ngugi has attempted in the name of moving the center of cultural production is the appropriation of the right of self-referentiality, in defiance of the limits that his location and history have imposed on that right. The non-transferability of the right of self-referentiality to the African context highlights how that transference of that right of self-referentiality—which is how his discourse of "native authenticity" is being reformulated—not only threatens to overturn the central position of the metropolis, but also challenges the exclusive luxury of canonical self-absorption.

I have demonstrated in this chapter the complex ways in which writers like Ngugi confronted and navigated the silences, whether within the western canon or those associated with global production and circulation. These are not the silences of the book that Pierre Macherey claims gives it life, nor are they the silences of implicit communication. Among these are the silences of the applause that drowns out the very voices that it claims to celebrate and empower. They are silences that are fundamentally tied to the relevance of the book; the silence of irrelevance.

Our task has not been merely to highlight the reactions of writers to these silences but to account for the rationality of their choices as the conditions for the invention of African writing against the historical and material alternatives with which they were presented, and that situated them. The language question has served as a symbolic and nodal counterpoint to Eurocentric production; and was pursued vigorously in the spirit of decolonization. Positions on native language publication have been ideological stands that aimed to project a subaltern identity and identification, of both ethnicity and class. The importance of this aim accounts for the radicalism and passion behind the idea of African languages, and the revolutionary impact it had on literary production in Kenya, and Africa. Any account of literary production in Africa or of the circulation and consumption of African literature in general would be incomplete without the language question, especially as framed by an understanding of the historicity and equivalences.[93] The moment of African language production described by Chakava and Currey was indeed a moment when for the first time, the peasant class presented itself in all its elements as a real public for Ngugi. Confronted with the human subject of his representation, Ngugi argues, the illusion that they spoke English was broken. This irreversible moment of recognition that became paradigmatic for Ngugi as an indubitable principle is nonetheless at best individual praxis but not prescribable as a

universal principle, because language by itself cannot confer relevance. While Ngugi's experience and approach are compelling and valid, as an instructive example and possibility, his objective for erecting a transcendental rule of writing on the logic of his personal experience is limited by the equally compelling logic of the experiences of other writers. Still, the fundamental question remains of how democratic practice and language practice can be reconciled in a postcolonial situation in which the masses are excluded from participation in national literary culture by the barrier of language, a direct parallel to mass disenfranchisement in political participation.

Around the same period that Ngugi was formulating his idea of African language literature, and crafting the document "On the Abolition of the English Department," writers such as Dennis Brutus and Nuruddin Farah were asking radically different questions and pulling Heinemann in a different direction. "The values of "authenticity," "tribal realism," and nativist reception [supposedly represented by Ngugi] are seemingly at odds with the cosmopolitan principles of World Literature."[94] Brutus and Farah wanted the label "African" removed from their titles. Farah famously asked Achebe the question "When did you become an African writer?" He repeated this question as recently as 2015 to South Africa's Ivan Vladislavic, "NF: I'm going to ask another question, and this is going to be a very provocative question. I've asked the same question to Chinua Achebe in 1987, and I put this question to André Brink in 2012. And the question is: when did you start to think of yourself as an African?"[95] Nuruddin Farah sums up the aspiration of these writers, "basically this is a cosmopolitan novel, and the novel being cosmopolitan is of itself what we all want." It was only poetry that mattered, not the language or the national origin of the poet. It is as hard to argue against cosmopolitanism as it is difficult to ignore the cultural traditions and needs of peasants and working class people. Writers with cosmopolitan aspirations cannot simply be labeled bourgeois writers. And not all writers of the peasant class are nativists.

Of writers who published in the AWS, Dennis Brutus represents the most vocal cosmopolitan writer. I highlight the contributions of writers like Farah and Brutus to the debate on the concept of African literature as a way of demonstrating that the current debate on Afropolitanism,[96] based on that idea of African multi-localizations in the world, has a longer and deeper genealogy. In a letter dated August 1970, Brutus repeated this aspiration, to be a writer without any label, which would later explain the apparent endearment of the poet, Arthur Nortje, for him (Fig. 6.4).

3 August, 1970.

Dear James,

I was glad to see you on Saturday night and to have a word with you.

I hope it doesn't sound ungrateful but I hope in time people will think of one, not as pigeonholed in the category of "African poet writing in English" but simply as someone writing poetry in English. I think one ought to try to escape a racial or geographical classification. We must talk about it sometime.

Best wishes, sincerely yours,

Dennis.

Scan2395, June 09, 2004.max

Fig. 6.4 Dennis Brutus letter to James Currey, August 3, 1970. Courtesy of Tony Brutus, on behalf of the Brutus family

The aspiration to escape racial and geographical classifications may well have roots in Brutus' own biography as well. A Zimbabwean exiled from South Africa,[97] mostly known for his poetry, athletics, and opposition to the Apartheid regime, Brutus had escaped from South Africa after a period of imprisonment. Each of these writers brings their unique historical situations to the question of identity and the collective destiny of Africa. Easy as it may be to celebrate Brutus, like the nineteenth century writers Sartre described, as one who "discovered himself as a timeless and unlocalized mind, in short, as universal man," the unconscious underpinning of his aspiration, if available, ought to be scrutinized. What we have here is not the case of a dying ideology being supplanted by an emergent universalism but an internal contradiction, a space of divergence, within the ideology of the age based on the sense of which part of the split public of African literature is being hailed, split along the lines of class, and geo-political configurations. The struggle over production is laid bare: which class or public should have the controlling influence on the literature. In a dramatic conclusion, Apter urges "that we take 'ourselves' as readers out of the equation."[98]

There is co-occurrence within the same historical moment of two divergent situations: the emergence of the peasantry as the writer's real public, and the discovery within the writer of himself/herself as an unlocalized, universal man. The collision of competing values and aspirations brings to mind, Ngugi's interview with Leeds University students in 1964, which was in part a consideration of his early writings' universal themes, which he rejected in favor of a "social reality" that "contained" universalism. Ngugi had not become an exile when Brutus was; theirs is a tale of two writers away from home with different responses and choices. Ngugi's choice was against universalism as a vogue of his time, a choice to invent an art relevant to his situation. The choice is not, as it has been portrayed, concerned with "cultural privacy" or the treatment of "language as a form of exclusive cultural property that entitles them to impose monolingualism, or a policy of other-language abstinence, on its speakers."[99] What is being imposed is a specific obligatory relation of writing to language. Since rules and writing are dialectically opposed—great writings surpass the rules, including the rule of language that establishes them—a general rule can only emerge from the totality of writing practices of a period, not from the experience of one great writer.

The meaning of Brutus' escape from racial and geographical classifications would become apparent when a reviewer of Arthur Nortje's

collection of poetry mistook him for a European poet. In the review titled "Some Europeans worth knowing" in the Tribune of December 1973, Martin Booth, reviews Nortje's *Dead Roots* along with *Love of the Scorching Wind: Selected Poems*, 1953–1971 (OUP) by Laszlo Nagy, *Selected Poems* by Joseph Brodsky (Penguin), and *Modern Greek Poetry* edited by Kimon Friar (Simon & Schuster):

> Unlike the other books reviewed here, Arthur Nortje is not in translation, but he still has the mark of being a non-British writer. Although not as skillful as others mentioned here, he has at least attempted something the British poet has yet to venture near. In his book, published posthumously, the undercurrents are of greater relevance than the apparent, for it contains poems inlaid at intrinsic levels with pain and not a little despair. An attitude of negation is running through most of the book, a hidden sense of delicate (rather than absolute) nihilism, producing a poetry of shrugged shoulders and raised hands. Nortje deals with self-alienation and exile, with a seeking for personal re-identity, and it's here the pain seeps through. Yet it is the book's saving power. It is a long collection in need of pruning: a work of inner chaos disordered by, rather than arranged by, artistic skill and still in a state of flux.

Nortje's poetry was the only one of the four collections originally written in the English language. The reviewer demonstrated great insight into the content of the poetry but would it have made any difference if he knew that Nortje was a South African poet and that the "negation," "inner chaos," and "hidden sense of delicate nihilism" he so aptly captures of the poetry are directly connected to Apartheid? Can it be said that the national origin of literature does not really matter, even in a cosmopolitan era? The second question is whether the artistic skill or lack thereof is a function of Nortje's command of the English language in which he has written? The misrecognition was not a non-recognition because it located the poet within a geographical space, Europe; unfortunately, it is not the space of the poet's national origin. Nortje could escape "a racial or geographical classification:" Africa, but could not escape the misrecognition that is often associated with such detachment. Brutus' mode of cosmopolitanism is an attempt to escape the "African" label or classification in the teleological drive to embrace the world, and become worldly. This is akin to Damrosch's threshold of world literary status that Robbins argues requires double escape: of the text from its origins and of its readers from the sense

of who they are: "Yet it is precisely this *detachment*, or *disengagement*, as much physical as it is affective, that ignites opposition"[100] to the notion of world literature from every angle and across the literary spectrum (Fig. 6.5).

In the letter above, Brutus was to find a puzzling explanation for the error. That Nortje's poetry was not immediately recognizable as African was a mark that it has entered into "the mainstream of world literature and world poetry." This is the paradigm of world literature that Apter asks us to reject in *Against World Literature*: "Designating works of literature heritage-grade properties is made possible, as Pascale Casanova has suggested, by Eurocentric gold standards of excellence and structures of legitimation endorsed by the media (publishing, criticism, prize-granting). The result is a collection of 'best-ofs' cherry-picked from national canons; crowned as 'classics.'"[101] If to be cosmopolitan is to escape one's national origin, to shed it for an abstract worldliness, even Brutus seems unable to sustain such a position. On April 19, 1973, Brutus sends a memo to Heinemann under the title: "Arthur Nortje: Dead Roots—Cover Notes." The second item of the notes reads: "A strong element, both in Arthur's life and in his poetry is his awareness of apartheid. I do not think reference to this should be omitted. (It is also something which will make him of special interest to many who would perhaps not otherwise be interested.) I suggest a simple addition to A. R.'s quote-the words, added in parenthesis: (especially in the apartheid society) at the end of the sentence ending 'from human relationships.'" Apartheid society is another way of saying South Africa is a strong element that cannot be omitted.

In the final analysis, some claims to being cosmopolitan have been revealed to be nothing other than being western, or British. C. L. R. James, wrote in *Beyond a Boundary*, one of the earliest postcolonial texts about feeling at home in the world: "I was British, I knew best the British way of life, not merely in historical facts but in the instinctive responses. I had acquired them in childhood and, without these, facts are merely figures," James was British because he "knew best the British way of life" since childhood.[102] Cosmopolitanism seems to be the product of postcolonial privilege. The reason Achebe attacked Ngugi for being a politician of language is that Ngugi held up the African child and his education, in many ways similar to James' childhood, as entailing the destruction of the not-so-privileged child's mind, uprooted, yet unable to advance beyond his background into the "mainstream."

SAN-ROC

South African Non-Racial Open Committee for Olympic Sports

February 5th 1974

Dear James,

Thank you for the clip today on Mortjie.

The headline may simply be a sub-editor's mistake - subs don't always read a text very carefully.

But there is a deeper truth: Mortjie is in fact more than an African or even a non-British poet. He had moved into the mainstream of world literature and world poetry - for which we sometimes use the short hand "European".

I do not know if Martin Booth has a copy of A Simple Lust. If not you might send him a copy: I believe he would be willing to review it.

You may care to send my son, Julian some of the AWS publication - he has been interested in literature and has done reviews.
Best wishes,

Dennis
DENNIS.

P.S. Be sure to send xeroxes of the Mortjie review to contacts in South Africa; it would be a shock for them to see a South African black treated as a European.!

D.

Olympic Games Participation for All Without Racial Discrimination

Scan3018, June 16, 2004.max

Fig. 6.5 Dennis Brutus letter to James Currey. February 5, 1974. Courtesy of Tony Brutus, on behalf of the Brutus family

These issues of what it means to be postcolonial have been taken up by thinkers and scholars of Africa. In the next chapter, I examine how these ideas of autonomy vs determinism flowed back into editorial and aesthetic choices because some of these same thinkers, critics, and academics served as publisher's readers. Is postcolonialism an overdetermined status in which knowledge and instincts are thoroughly shot through with the effects of the colonial apparatuses or is there still a space for autonomy of creativity and production that could allow for the transformation of colonial institutions? This would depend on how we define postcolonialism.

Notes

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, *"What Is Literature?" And Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 73.
2. Wole Soyinka and Biodun Jeyifo, *Conversations with Wole Soyinka* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), p. 128.
3. V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
4. Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism*.
5. Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*.
6. Here one thinks of James Ferguson's *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*; Charles Piot's *Remotely Global*.
7. Thiong'o Ngũgĩ wa, *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).
8. Wole Soyinka, *Of Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).
9. This is the title of Wole Soyinka's keynote address at the 2009 ALA conference in Vermont. Wole Soyinka, *The Creative Pursuit in Global Time*, 2009.
10. Said, *Orientalism*.
11. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994).
12. Emphasis mine, Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 66.
13. Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 13.
14. Emily S. Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 66.
15. Soyinka, *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years: A Memoir, 1946–1965*, p. 27.
16. Achebe, *Home and Exile*, p. 98.

17. See *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (1980) by Onsucheka J. Chinweizu and Ihechukwu Madubuike.
18. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Center: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*, 1993.
19. This question invokes Derrida's "What is a "Relevant" Translation?".
20. Ngũgĩ wa, *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*, p. 39.
21. Ibid., p. 60.
22. John 1:48.
23. Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (Routledge, 2002).
24. Ibid., p. 176.
25. Henry Staten, *Tracking the 'Native Informant': Cultural Translation as the Horizon of Literary Translation* (2005), p. 114.
26. October 12, 1964, James Ngugi to Keith Sambrook.
27. Analogies to Pierre Marcherey's notion of the implicit and the explicit and to Mudimbe's notion of gnosis are appropriate here.
28. Sartre, *"What Is Literature?" And Other Essays*, pp. 133, 260.
29. Ibid., p. 132.
30. Ibid., p. 133.
31. Ibid., p. 109.
32. Ibid., p. 132.
33. Ibid., p. 71.
34. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 60.
35. Wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Center: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*, p. 23.
36. Much of the first section of Paul Bandia's *Translation as Reparation* fall in this category.
37. Ngũgĩ wa, *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*, p. 17. Ngugi's turn to Gikuyu has been assessed within the context of Kenya and Africa, where critics claim it excludes as much as it includes. The argument goes: Non-Gikuyu speaking Kenyans, and the rest of Africa, are excluded more than they would be if he wrote in English. Ngugi rejects this position by refusing to abdicate his responsibility as a writer to language, and especially as he sees it, to the Kikuyu audience, in search of the non-Gikuyu speaking Africans who he claims are already well served by their own writers. The second related point of course is that his position on language is not in real fact exclusionary because it is predicated on the necessity of translation. His hope is that the texts would be translated for a much wider readership, regardless of whether he writes in English or Gikuyu. The political stance of turning to Gikuyu is also philosophical. With language as with existentialism, subjectivity is the starting point.

38. My emphasis, JN for James Ngugi. Interview by Alan Marcuson, Mike Gonzalez, Sue Drake, Dave Williams, *Union News*, Friday November 18, 1966).
39. Sartre, *"What Is Literature?" And Other Essays*, p. 73.
40. While it may be true that Sartre is addressing the question of writing and audience for a nation whose national language is spoken by all citizens; his conclusions are nevertheless instructive as the help to underscore as he would later argue what it means to write for a split audience that is not homogeneous. The diversity of Africa has been cited as the greatest obstacle for the adoption of African languages. It is self-evident that it would be meaningless for Sartre to write in German for a French audience. But that sense of incongruity is never carried over to an African context when a writer writes in English for an African audience that comprises equally of a variety of non-English speaking Africans. In other words, the problem of heterogeneity is not resolved by the adoption of English.
41. Sartre, *"What Is Literature?" And Other Essays*, p. 73.
42. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 114.
43. Ngũgĩ wa, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, p. 42.
44. My emphasis, ibid., pp. 43–45.
45. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 96.
46. See the chapter "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel" in Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*.
47. Ngũgĩ wa, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, pp. 58–59.
48. This is a term that Walkowitz uses to describe contemporary Anglophone novels in Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).
49. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 97.
50. Sartre, *"What Is Literature?" And Other Essays*, p. 76.
51. Here I am rephrasing George Bush's soft bigotry of low expectations.
52. Ngũgĩ wa, *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*, p. 56.
53. Ibid., pp. 56–57.
54. Henry Chakava, *Publishing in Africa: One Man's Perspective* (Bellagio Pub. Network Research and Information Center, 1996).
55. Emphasis mine, Ngũgĩ wa, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, pp. 56–57.
56. My emphasis, ibid., p. 85.

57. Peoria is a small town outside Chicago. There was the saying in Chicago in the 1930s before a musical performance is considered worthy of the interest of big city patrons: "How does it play in Peoria?".
58. Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, p. 328.
59. Richard Rand, *Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. 198.
60. Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London; New York: Verso, 2013), p. 205.
61. Rand, *Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties*, p. 199.
62. Chakava, *Publishing in Africa: One Man's Perspective*, p. 63.
63. Bubakar Bóris Jóob, *Doomi Golo: Nettali* (Dakar, Sénégal: Editions Papyrus Afrique, 2003).
64. Boubacar Boris Diop, Vera Wülfing-Leckie and Caroline Fache, *Africa Beyond the Mirror* (Banbury: Ayebia Clarke, 2014), p. 117.
65. Ibid.
66. Nuruddin Farah, *In Praise of Exile* (1990), p. 183.
67. E.W. Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012), p. 294. The intellectual constellation of this position could be found in Abiola Irele's "In Praise of Alienation."
68. Ngugi to Keith, April 7, 1964.
69. Soyinka, *The Creative Pursuit in Global Time*, p. 19.
70. Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work*, p. 15.
71. Soyinka, *The Creative Pursuit in Global Time*, p. 15.
72. Ibid., p. 22.
73. A more relevant critique of Damrosch is the absence of an analysis informed by an understanding of the distinction between formal and informal networks of distribution; or even high culture and popular culture, and the impact that has on other channels of distribution and modes of circulation.
74. Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, p. 329.
75. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 269.
76. Achebe addressed the issue of what the elite or intellectuals were reading in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* and concluded that they do not read much beyond what they read in school, which makes the primary market for African literature the captive market of school children. The question of language is thus not simply that of speaking, but reading as well. And if much of the book culture is in the schools and universities, then it implies both the literature and the language are tied to formal structures of education, which is even more limiting.

77. S.D. Moore and M. Rivera, *Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology* (Fordham University Press, 2011), p. 138.
78. Sartre, *"What Is Literature?" And Other Essays*, p. 30.
79. http://billmoyers.com/content/chinua-achebe/
80. James English's *The Economy of Prestige* explored how literary prizes have aggregated greater power to confer value from the background of cultural field. Similar arguments could be make regarding the relationship between cultural value and patronage.
81. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/25/toni-morrison-books-interview-god-help-the-child
82. Sartre, *"What Is Literature?" And Other Essays*, p. 80.
83. Eileen Julien, *African Novels and the Question of Orality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).
84. His exact words are: "As a result of the divergence between the real public and the ideal public, there arose the idea of abstract universality." Sartre, *"What Is Literature?" And Other Essays*, p. 136.
85. For discussions of possessive cultural attachments to native languages, see Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012); Michael Brown, *Who Owns Native Culture?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).
86. Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work*, p. 15.
87. This is the central argument of Talal Asad' piece, "The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology" and Spivak's response to Derrida's *Monolingualism of the Other*.
88. Soyinka, *The Creative Pursuit in Global Time*, p. 15.
89. Ngũgĩ wa, *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*, p. 57.
90. Karin Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
91. Ibid., p. 161.
92. Ibid., The chapter on "Audiences and Publics" is especially useful in thinking about the local context of Ngugi's engagement at the Cultural Center.
93. Sartre writes of the defining moment in bourgeois literature when the "rising class" became literate and as such was able to provide financial sustenance to the writer: "Thus, for the first time an oppressed class was presenting itself to the writer as a real public." This moment is equivalent to Ngugi's moment of epiphany, in his recognition of the necessary requirement for representing the peasantry.

94. Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, p. 325.
95. Nuruddin Farah, "WHEN DID YOU START TO THINK OF YOURSELF AS AFRICAN?" Ivan Vladislavic in conversation with Nuruddin Farah and Robert Kelly. http://lithub.com/when-did-you-start-to-think-of-yourself-as-african/
96. Taiye Selasi invented this phrase in Bye-Bye Babar, http://thelip.robert-sharp.co.uk/?p=76, March 3, 2005. For a discussion of the reception of the term, see: "Afropolitanism": Africa without Africans (II) Okwunodu Ogbechi http://aachronym.blogspot.com/2008/04/afropolitanism-more-africa-without.html; "Afropolitanism" Achille Mbembe in *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*, by Njami Simon; The Afropolitan Must Go, November 28, 2013 by Marta Tveit.
97. Very few are aware that Dennis Brutus was Zimbabwean. He migrated to South Africa, and then fled to the USA. He positioned himself as South African, but was really Zimbabwean. That matters for various reasons.
98. Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, p. 334.
99. Ibid., p 320.
100. Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, p. 326.
101. Ibid., p. 326.
102. C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary: 50th Anniversary Edition* (Duke University Press, 2013), p. 154.

CHAPTER 7

Postcolonialism: Dialectic of Autonomy and Determinism

As we have seen, thought or philosophical discourse has as much determinate effect on the literary as does the materiality of production. In this chapter, I track the contours of the discourse on autonomy in African literature and culture in order to lay the groundwork for establishing the connections between literary criticism and editorial criticism as a relation of autonomy and determinism. It is worth pointing out that academics such as Abiola Irele and Simon Gikandi are the empirical connections between the practice of literary criticism and editorial criticism precisely because of their role as publishers' readers. This shows how wrong we would be to pretend that literary scholarship is happening entirely outside the field of literary production rather than from certain determinate positions to, or within, it. Any engagement with an editor or publisher is an indirect engagement with a critic or scholar, whose specialist opinion the editor mostly takes into consideration before accepting or rejecting a manuscript or recommending a revision.

In fact, the scholarly debate over determinacy and autonomy in African literature, I argue, is directly relevant and crucial for our understanding and interpretation of the African Writers Series (AWS) material. To initiate the discussion of how the underlining philosophy of publishers' readers could be crucial for our understanding of the development of African literature, I consider it important first to examine Mudimbe's philosophy on autonomy, which I argue cleared the space for Simon Gikandi, who was to

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become a veteran reader for Heinemann with a direct influence on what got published.

In his important book, *The Invention of Africa*,[1] Mudimbe argues that the quest for an autonomous foundation in literature and philosophy is ideological because African knowledge has been built upon a colonial foundation; Irele disputes this point without providing an approach but reverts to the imagination, as does Soyinka, to argue for the distinctiveness of African literature. Gikandi for the most part argues in a poststructuralist fashion that literary and cultural distinction is belated, reinforcing Mudimbe's argument that African and colonial cultures are mutually constituted but also making the claim that they are simultaneously articulated within modernity. Gikandi attempts to reactivate and revitalize that space of subalternity, but not in relation to itself nor to the freedom of thinking of himself or herself as a starting point that Mudimbe celebrates: "Postcolonial theory is most useful in its self-reflexivity, especially its recognition that the colonized space was instrumental in the invention of Europe just as the idea of Europe was the condition for the possibility of the production of modern colonial and postcolonial societies."[2] In reality, when read on its own terms, *Maps of Englishness* represents a nuanced and unvarnished engagement with the theories of postcoloniality, but when read in distillation, that is, when the essential arguments have been extracted and placed in the context of other works such as Said's *Culture and Imperialism*[3] and Ngugi's *Decolonizing the Mind*,[4] a certain starkness is revealed. To unpack Gikandi's statement above: postcolonial theory at its best is aware of the postcolony and postcolonial critique as agents in metropolitan actualization, and for that reason postcolonial theory cannot extricate itself from the entanglement with Europe, and from a backward-looking that also brings the inextricability of Europe into its dialectic. This causes me to raise the question: how then is decolonization possible? Remarkable as this insight may once have seemed, it is no longer satisfactory for the reasons with which I will soon conclude this book.

The genealogies of the invention of modern African culture and literature, especially the deterministic constraints against which the quest for autonomy was to be asserted by writers such as Ekwensi and Soyinka, cannot be thoroughly delineated without deploying V. Y. Mudimbe's profoundly influential work on the foundations of modern African culture and thought, *The Invention of Africa*. Of specific interest is Mudimbe's argument on the influence of Senghor on contemporary African thought, most especially in Francophone Africa. Mudimbe appears hesitant on

whether Negritude represents a genuine, decolonized African self-expression, the kind Soyinka and Ekwensi advocate. Contrary to his overarching argument as widely understood, I want to suggest that a more careful reading of Mudimbe would reveal that he leaves open the possibility that Negritude was a triumph of an autonomous African voice, which for me, proves the possibility of Soyinka, and most especially, Ngugi's project of decolonizing African literature.

The problem with thinking of the Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*[5] as constituting the moment of the invention of African literature, according to Mudimbe, was that it is Sartre's introduction titled "Black Orpheus" that "transformed negritude into a major political event and a philosophical criticism of colonialism."[6] It should be noted that both Irele and Mudimbe begin with Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*, even though Cesaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* had already appeared, perhaps because their focus is on Africa. Apart from the constraints of an unexpected entanglement with Sartre that diminished the force of any claim of Negritude to being exclusively an "imaginative expression that is African in origin and nature,"[7] Sartre's introduction could be argued to have in fact subverted it as a philosophical project of blackness while at the same time effecting the internationalization and consecration of Negritude, a similar argument that could apply to the canon of African literature in general.

Mudimbe is clearly less sympathetic to Negritude than Irele, who presently champions its course, and he seems to suggest that Negritude was born as a moment and a movement with a whimper and not a bang. However, if we were to consider that André Breton had written the introduction to the *Cahier*, we might begin to wonder whether these founding introductions are being overblown in importance. This surely remains an open debate, especially if we consider the prevalence of similar introductions to slave narratives at the time of the Abolition or in the works of important black authors such as Hon. Samuel Lewis' introduction to Edward Blyden's *Christianity, Islam and The Negro Race*.[8] Perhaps they mattered for a brief time, considering that there was a proliferation of texts and publications, especially those of Damas, and many others, that were highly critical, politically, of western racism and domination. This should cause us to construe Mudimbe's assertion as limited to the *Anthology*, allowing us to uphold Negritude as a Movement, if not Senghor's *Anthology*, as being part of a bang, of the period: the bang of surrealism, of antifascism, of antiracism. Mudimbe's concern that Sartre's introduction dominated the

work or its impact is comparable to Soyinka's concern that the institutions of literature pulverized the poem. But Irele's recent work, *The Negritude Moment*,[9] suggests such impact may have been overstated, because Mudimbe acknowledges that Senghor was able to redeem Negritude and extend its life and influence considerably after that: "It was to the credit of Senghor that he was not stifled by the peremptory arguments and the vision of this first theoretician of negritude whom he had aroused: he had asked Sartre for a cloak to celebrate negritude; he was given a shroud."[10] It may appear to anyone familiar with the enormous success of works of Negritude writers that Mudimbe and others may have overstated the importance and impact of Sartre's introduction, or any of the founding introductions of that period. That impact was very much of the moment; negritude continued to rise, unabated; there was no shroud over works like those of Birago Diop, or the first Congresses of Negro Arts.

The operative phrase in Mudimbe's analysis of Negritude that I hope to highlight in the context of the AWS is this: "it was to the credit of Senghor that he was not stifled." This is the remarkable insight that we ought to carry forward into our understanding of how African writers who published in the 1960s with Heinemann prevailed despite the effects of the format, which may in fact have been overstated in the scholarship on postcolonial print culture in Africa. Material institutions of production do not necessarily stifle literary expressions, because writers such as Ekwensi are alert to such effects and sometimes, if not always, navigate them with much success.

What we find in the example of Senghor above, as with Heinemann's AWS map, could well be an illustration of the contextual template that structures how the foreign relations of Africa as a political economy, as a cultural space, as a creative and philosophical subject have evolved. The appearance of international publishers in Africa in the moments leading to political independence, while it helped in some instances to boost the presence of African writers and writing on the international stage, could also be said to carry with it the possibility of having rendered local literary production less viable as an economic enterprise and less attractive or necessary as an intellectual platform. This might explain how certain writers could be visible internationally and invisible in their own immediate locality. It is for this and other reasons that Mudimbe suggests "the promotion of African literature and languages was basically a dubious enterprise."[11] Even though it could be argued that there wasn't a world and local stage,

so much in the 1960s, the divisions of the world into separate europhone political spheres nevertheless constituted global-local divisions writ small.

It might be worthwhile to refresh our memory of Mudimbe's classic argument, at least the form of his argument that has gained the most popularity: first, there is the colonial library; and second, there is the African intelligentsia whose aim is to supplant the colonial library by translating its methods from within a local system of knowledge. In Mudimbe's view, the critique of the colonial library cannot change historical reality, rather, the reality of history and historically constricted methods of knowledge continue to function as normative paradigms. According to Mudimbe:

> On the one hand, we have the body of legends constituted by the colonial library and exemplified by primitivist anthropology. It is a constellation in which one accounts for differences with theories using functional paradigms and external causes. They depict deviations from the normativeness of a history or of a rationality. On the other hand, there is the new corpus accepted by the African intelligentsia, such as A. Cesaire, J. B. Danquah, M. Deren, Cheikh A. Diop, A. Kagame, E. Mphahlele, J. H. Nketia, L. S. Senghor, etc. Although incomplete and probably a legend itself, the new corpus should reflect the authority of local systems of rules signification, and order. Can we not understand this chronological succession, particularly when we pay attention to its complexity (from Durkheim to Cheikh Anta Diop, from Levy-Bruhl to Tempels and Griaule, from Frobenius to Nkurumah and Senghor), as a simple modification in strategies of manipulating concepts and metaphors? In effect, orders and grids of interpretation do not and cannot change the reality they claim to translate.[12]

When Mudimbe begins his enquiry by mapping the history of the development of the unified discourse of Africa by stating that "Travelers in the eighteenth century, as well as those of the nineteenth and their successors in the twentieth (colonial proconsuls, anthropologists, and colonizers), spoke using the same type of signs and symbols and acted upon them,"[13] he appears set, in fact, compelled from that premise, to conclude that the order of knowledge, the political organization constituted by African intelligentsia and politicians in the postcolonial dispensation, rests upon these foundations of colonial orders of knowledge and power. This position suggests not only the improbability but also the impossibility of Irele's project of an "imaginative expression that is African in origin and nature." This conclusion does not surprise us, for deep within the text we

already have Mudimbe's core position explicitly stated that Africans should not "endeavor to create from their otherness a radically new social science. It would be insanity to reproach Western tradition for its Oriental heritage. For example, no one would question Heidegger's right to philosophize within the categories of ancient Greek language. It is his right to exploit any part of this heritage."[14] For Mudimbe, therefore, it would equally be insanity to reproach modern African literary and intellectual tradition for its western heritage. In leaning heavily on what, from his view, is an indubitable right to philosophy and the right to exploit an all-encompassing heritage, Mudimbe dismisses as merely ideological, demands for autonomous initiatives that break radically from global, dominant, and historical traditions as a precondition for African authority in the sciences and humanities, and in political economy. This exposes his location in relation to postcolonial discourse. What appears missing in Mudimbe's formidable argument is how the desire for authenticity, or fidelity, to use Mudimbe's term, is not simply relieved or resolved by the right of appropriation. Claims of ownership correspond directly to the legitimacy and preservation of control over both means of production and methods of appropriation. It is not Mudimbe's lack of reservations in his insistent characterization of African discourse that is bothersome to many scholars but the attitude that questions the philosophical legitimacy of Afrocentrism by displaying all its paradoxes and contradictions. According to Mudimbe, "These paradoxes reveal that we are dealing with ideology. Modern African thought seems somehow to be basically a product of the West. What is more, since most African leaders and thinkers have received a Western education, their thought is at the crossroads of Western epistemological filiation and African ethnocentrism."[15] So frustrated was Irele with Mudimbe's project that he wrote:

> The Zairian writer Valentin Mudimbe has argued that the development of African discourse has been essentially a function of what he calls, in Foucaultian terms, the depositions of the western archive (Mudimbe, 1988). What he means by this amounts to saying that this discourse is merely derivative. However, it is possible to propose a more positive estimation. From a consideration of what I have called its dimensions, it is indeed perfectly legitimate to postulate a close connection between African intellectual efforts and Western discourses and, specifically today, critical activity in the West. The immediate conclusion one can draw from this connection is that African discourse is not by any means marginal but, on the contrary, is central to contemporary concerns.[16]

It is interesting to observe the changes that can take place within the intellectual lifecycle of postcolonial scholars, some of whose thoughts, ideas, and filiations swing 180 degrees over the course of their career. Is Irele here restituting positions he had taken concerning African scholarship in writings such as "In Praise of Alienation"[17] and "The African Scholar"[18] that were more adverse than Mudimbe's estimation? Perhaps, it is a good thing to be able to come around in the end to a more mature and positive view, but this phenomenon should be a cautionary tale to upcoming scholars who, taken by western formulations, tend to say too soon in dismissal of African scholarship what they would later find embarrassing enough to reverse. Clearly, Irele's glowing confidence that "African discourse is not by any means marginal but, on the contrary, is central to contemporary concerns" appears to be a direct reversal of his earlier claim in "The African Scholar," although we must also allow for changes that do occur in response to changing conditions of scholarship and knowledge:

> The implications of the present crisis for the future of Africa oblige us to reassess the situation of the African scholar in the contemporary world. What is clear is that, despite individual achievements and reputations, African scholarship is at best marginal, and at worst nonexistent, in the total economy of intellectual and scientific endeavor in the world today. Furthermore, it is characterized by a state of dependence in relation to the Western frame of reference, which is the dominant factor within that economy.[19]

As stated in the preface to this book, few individuals bestride the world of African knowledge production as Irele does, having pursued concurrent careers for over fifty years in publishing and teaching the literatures of Anglophone and Francophone Africa. It was through his network that Heinemann received the steady flow of novels from Francophone Africa, which it published in English translations. One of the memorable encounters between Heinemann and their African partners that I uncovered in my research, and that serves as a metaphor for the general relations that the series engendered in Africa, was between Irele and James Currey, the series publisher. The encounter also helps to situate Irele's pronouncements on African knowledge production as flowing directly from his experiences. In a 1981 letter, Irele, as director of New Horn, a Nigerian publishing firm, expressed his disappointment with what he perceived to be Heinemann's breach of contract for circulating the translation of Beti's *Remember Ruben* that they copublished, in a territory to which rights has been ceded to New Horn by Heinemann (Fig. 7.1).

NEW HORN PRESS LTD
P.O. Box 4138
IBADAN

29 September, 1981

James Currey Esq.,
Heinemann Educational Books,
22 Bedford Square,
London WC1B 3HH,
U. K.

Dear James,

I have just seen copies of the Heinemann AWS edition of Remember Ruben on sale at the University Bookshop here in Ibadan. I understand that this title is generally on sale elsewhere in this country. As you know, the sub-contract made between New Horn Press and Heinemann Educational Books excludes the Nigerian market specifically, so that your introduction of this book into Nigeria constitutes a violation of the agreement between us.

Furthermore, it is now about a year since the publication of your edition, but the films which were to be supplied by you for our edition have not been sent, despite reminders. The cost of these films was to be set against the advance of £550 payable by your company. As things stand, neither was this advance paid, nor the films it was meant to pay for supplied.

The immediate effect of your delay in sending us these films meant for our edition and provided for in the agreement between us has been to deprive as of the possibility of producing our edition in good time. This has meant that New Horn Press, which originally secured the rights and commissioned the translation, has not yet put out the original edition on which yours is supposed to be based. We could not produce a decent copy for printing from your edition as the paper on which the AWS edition is printed does not permit a sufficiently clear reproduction, so that we have had to wait for the films. In the interval, production costs have gone up, and this combined with other factors have now seriously disrupted our plans. The situation is further worsened by your introducing this title into our market in violation of the agreement between us.

When I reflect now upon the way our collaboration on this title has gone since the beginning, I cannot but feel that you have all along manifested what can only be called an imperialistic instinct in dealing with us. This is unfortunately not the only instance of your style of dealing with Nigerian companies, for I recall that the Ethiope collection of Okara's poems, a project for which I was initially responsible when I was with that company and which involved considerable editorial work at the local level, has practically been annexed by Heinemann. It is indeed ironical that we should have invited you in the first place to join with us in producing the Beti book, and that my confidence has even gone as far as negotiating again with the Nouvelles Editions Africaines to bring you in on our translation of Mariama Ba's Une si longue lettre, which you have now been able to publish ahead of us. It is surely not being paranoid on my part to fear that the pattern will be repeated. The facts of the case as regards the Beti title are such that I have come to the conclusion

Fig. 7.1 Abiola Irele letter to James Currey, September 29, 1981. Courtesy of Mrs. Bassey Irele

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that you are deliberately taking advantage of your stronger position to shove us out of the market even for titles for which we've taken the initiative, and on which we've invested out of our meagre resources.

I think I ought to make it clear to you that my confidence has been shattered. Worse still, I am pained and disappointed by the fact that the personal relationship that existed between us has not prevented you from dealing with me as if I did not have sufficient intelligence to understand what is going on. It is true that business does not admit of sentimentality, but surely it ought not to admit of disloyalty either.

I have gone to this extent in expressing my feelings on this matter so as to make you understand that New Horn will no longer go into any arrangement with Heinemann on the previous terms. This means specifically that with regard to the publication of WANGRIN, the only condition on which we will sub contract to you is that you will take sheets from our printing. For your information, the production of this book is now at an advanced stage at Caxton Press and we will require confirmation of your acceptance of this condition as well as of your order by 15th October 1981 at the latest, after which I shall offer secondary rights to another publisher.

As regards So long a letter, we will proceed to shoot from the copy of your edition to produce ours unless we receive the films here before the end of October. Naturally, we will ask for a refund of the fee we paid for the films if this happens.

As regards Remember Ruben, we are asking by this letter that all copies sent out for sale in this country be withdrawn immediately, and a full statement of sales already made in Nigeria be given to us. Furthermore, you will either send us the films for this title as provided for in the contract, or pay the advance of £550 against which the costs are supposed to be set.

I am sorry to say that I have had to seek legal advice on this matter. Our next line of action will depend on whether you are willing to act in good faith. I want to think that you will now be able to have enough consideration for our interests as well as yours to so act that it will not be necessary for us to take this matter further than it has gone.

Yours sincerely,

Abiola Irele.

CC: Keith Sambrook Esq.,
Heinemann Educational Books, London

Aigboje Higo,
H. E. B. (Nigeria) Ltd., Ibadan

M. Christian Bourgois,
Editions 10 - 18, Paris.

M. Mongo Beti,
6 rue d'Harcourt, 67000 Rouen, France.

Professor Gerald Moore,
Department of English, University of Jos. Jos.

Fig. 7.1 (continued)

This letter articulates the constraints and travails of local publishers from a scholar's perspective: the anxiety that their initiatives might soon be annexed, if they themselves are not altogether outmaneuvered and shut out of the marketplace. Irele laments the "imperialistic instinct" associated with global conglomerates and international publishers: "I have come to the conclusion that you are deliberately taking advantage of your stronger position to shove us out of the market even for titles for which we've taken the initiative, and on which we've invested out of our meagre resources."[20] In response to this letter, James Currey would travel to Ibadan to personally deliver the production film for *Remember Reben* to Irele. He followed this up with a note in his subsequent letter reiterating his explanation for the incident: "I repeat my apologies to this crazy, maddening and incompetent supply of 250 copies to HEB (Nigeria) by our warehouse despite specific information given in 1979 that all orders were to be referred to New Horn. This has been stopped."[21] To which Irele responds in his own letter: "In the event we shall consider our little misunderstanding over."[22] Irele marks the intersection of literary scholarship and literary production by highlighting the practical, and epistemic dimensions, as well as the political economy of local production in a competitive world, which invariably informs his changing perspectives on the marginality or centrality of African literary and scholarly productions.

To put all of this back in book history perspective, my argument dovetails with that of Mudimbe in some areas and extends his paradigm in others. I argue that international publishers spoke using the same type of signs and symbols of colonial proconsuls, anthropologists, and colonizers that Mudimbe describes. I have demonstrated in Chap. 3 that the Heinemann map served as a sign or an ancestry to the colonial episteme. Where my interest and those of Mudimbe ultimately diverge is that like Irele, I do not embrace the theory of derivation. The premise that international publishers and colonial culture laid the unbreachable foundations of postcolonial knowledge must now carry an emphatic question mark.

If there were ever an impact that publishing has had on texts, it may well have been at the level of the feedback and suggestions for revisions that are contained in readers' reports. It is to their credit that Heinemann employed the services of some of the prominent scholars and writers of the time, including Chinua Achebe, who was for the first ten years, the editorial adviser to the AWS. This is why the thinking of Simon Gikandi on the question of autonomy is doubly relevant, especially since he not only completes

the basic outlines of Mudimbe's thoughts and extends the logic of his work, but also because as a young graduate student in Kenya he became a respected and influential AWS' reader, whose reports informed the decisions of the editors of the publication. As a result, he may have swayed or bent some of the writers who agreed, or even disagreed, with his criticism, from their original course. We can perhaps begin to unpack the complex of ideas that may have invented the series—if, by invention, we mean shaping—by also examining the works of one of its key judges, particularly in relation to his thought on autonomous subjectivity and decolonization. The real consequence of international publishing in Africa may not, after all, even be the impact of the location of the publishers or the paths of circulation on literary expression. The more consequential practice in the publication of African texts may well be the selection of publisher's readers, who ultimately served as the gatekeepers for what constituted African literature, and good writing. These readers' philosophical orientation mattered significantly especially on the crucial subject of the philosophical problem of autonomy or originality of culture that underlies the distaste for unrestricted European influences in African cultural production, which agitates Soyinka.

Gikandi recognizes that the colonial episteme is inherent in the modern moment despite the colonized subject's presence and dimension within that moment and its discourse. This is not all: there is the decolonized moment as well, with its determinations and possibilities. Gikandi further relies on Mudimbe to make the claim that "although the history of the colonial experience in Africa was brief 'it signified a new historical form and the possibility of radically new types of discourses on African traditions and cultures.'"[23] The resonances of Mudimbe's epistemic fatalism are all too apparent in *Maps*:

> The claim that underscores my work here is simple: since we cannot operate outside the colonial episteme and its institutions, our challenge is not to transcend it but to inhabit its central categories, to come to terms with their effects, and to deconstruct their authority .... In other words, even when the culture of colonialism appears to be absolute and its totality unquestionable, its narratives have to contend with the colonized locality as not simply a space of transgression and resistance but one in which metropolitan identities are made and remade.[24]

While it might appear breathtakingly ironic that the theories of postcolonialism by Mudimbe and Gikandi proceed from the premise that there is

no outside to colonial culture and episteme to gambol in, they nonetheless illuminate the trajectory of postcolonialism that can only function to interrogate the hegemonic discourse of colonial culture. Drawing on Bhabha's notion of belatedness, Gikandi echoes the poststructuralist mantra of deautonomization of the unified subject. If postcolonial theory can no longer be grounded on the utopia of autonomy, it is only because the colonial and colonizing subjects were already mutually constituted as fatally permeable entities that could never be constituted as pure, unified, and autonomous subjects, either in the actual or possible realm of ideas. In response to a question that he poses at the beginning of *Maps* on the usefulness of rereading the English canon, or the canon of Englishness, as he puts it, by an ex-colonial subject, Gikandi channels Mudimbe to argue that "an African invention of Europe is both a mastery of its techniques and an 'ambiguous strategy for implementing alterity.'"[25] The argument of an African invention of Europe that Gikandi draws out and elaborates upon is an inversion of Mudimbe's argument, an already silent enthymeme in *The Invention of Africa*. However, Gikandi's idea of the colonized locality as a central space in which metropolitan identities are being made and remade, it should be noted, invites the critique of Robert Young's *White Mythologies*[26] by Lata Mani and Ruth Frankenberg that Stuart Hall references in his essay "When was 'the Post-Colonial'? Thinking at the Limit":[27] "It would, as they say, be a turn-up for the books if the 'key object and achievement of the Algerian War of Independence was the overthrow of the Hegelian dialectic.'"[28]

For Mudimbe, the colonized space as a form of subalternity could leverage the right to philosophy and shed the shroud of exclusion that once delimited it. In the last paragraph of the book Mudimbe fails to give this right a bold articulation and renders it undefined. He announces its transformation with passivity, thus bringing back the specter of the continent as *terra incognita*. He states,

> Foucault once said that he deprived 'the sovereignty of the subject of the exclusive and instant right to discourse.' That is good news. I believe that the geography of African *gnosis* also points out the passion of a subject-object who refuses to vanish. He or she has gone from the situation in which he or she was perceived as a simple functional object to the freedom of thinking of himself or herself as the starting point of an absolute discourse. It has also become obvious, even for this subject, that the space interrogated by the series of explorations in African indigenous systems of thought is not a void.[29]

To end such a *tour de force* of African philosophy by claiming that the space occupied by African indigenous systems of thought is not a void, amounts to an inexplicable deflation, a flatness that is equivalent to saying nothing at all about the space of African knowledge, as if nothing could be said about it except that *it is*, its existential form yet to be determined or indeterminable. This is paradoxically to endow that space with metaphysical negativity as merely the negation of nothingness. While this view is close to Said's position in *Orientalism*,[30] whereby the invention of the orient means it is an empty space onto which the orientalists wrote their own texts of themselves, yet Arabs exist in that space, speak, and have a lived culture. After all, Mudimbe was at that time actually writing a novel set in the Congo, with Congolese speakers. In the end, he could only attest to what Africa is not: a void, but in the horizon of that statement appears the niggardly question: "What is Africa?" However, if we are to take his comments in the same mode as Houston Baker's definition of blackness as a negation of a negation, a negation of the Hegelian dialectical negative, which for him is not "merely" a subordinate position, that still does not give us an affirmative or positive philosophy of subjecthood, of being-unto-itself, that is, of being whose value is relatively self-assured.

In the epilogue, Gikandi reiterates the query of the "post" in postcolonial with which he started *Maps*: "we are still caught within the orbit of colonial culture itself,"[31] colonial culture being that nebulous concept for colonialism and its aftermath: "For both the colonizer and the colonized, the culture of colonialism came to provide the terms in which the idea of a modern culture took shape, both in the metropolis and in the colonies. Colonialism was the foundation on which modern (and hence also postcolonial) thoughts, action, and debates were built."[32] Gikandi finds the common denominator of both colonial and postcolonial societies and subjectivities in the culture of colonialism. Although not much of what Gikandi argues could be outright refuted, at best, it could be an attempt to describe the preconditions for decolonization, what must be superseded, and at worst, it could be a foreclosure on the philosophical and political possibility of decolonization.

Indeed, part of the key assumptions in *Maps of Englishness* is the idea of an arrested decolonization, an idea first floated by Biodun Jeyifo in "The Nature of Things: Arrested Decolonization and Critical Theory,"[33] as an analysis of the failure of nationalism. The truly grim import of *Maps* concerns its definitive statement on the status of decolonization. In a quintessential Gikandian move, he formulates the reality alongside its limits, "Yes: colonial subjects will resist imperialism because it is a system of domination

and conquest propelled by brute force and naked self-interest; but imperial structures will survive colonialism because, within the context of modernity, they have a universal appeal."[34] If we are now operating within a global context in which decolonization is no longer philosophically and politically viable, we are left it seems, with only a contradiction, "the dialectical relation between collaboration and opposition."[35] If modernity is in this phase a Hegelian moment, it is a moment in the process of change—the negative moment that reflects the changing of the face of imperialism by the enmeshing of the colonized in its face and its own oppositionality. Perhaps not the end moment, but ultimately the only viable postcolonialism that Gikandi permits in *Maps*: "I invoke the *post* to describe a condition in which colonial culture dominates the scene of cultural production but one in which its face has been changed by both its appropriation by the colonized and by the theoretical oppositionality it faces in the decolonized polis."[36] Are we to laud this more modest vision of postcolonialism, a postcolonialism that is no more than appropriation and consolation?

The reduction of the cultural and epistemological methods of postcolonialism to appropriation and modification, while sometimes creative and subversive, if represented as the predominant tools, cannot be adequate for any system of production that hopes to be competitive within an expansive arena of globalization. It would instead be a mark of, or be marked by, what Achebe has termed "the trauma of a diminished existence."[37] When Gikandi argues that imperial structures have survived colonialism within the context of modernity, what he is referring to as imperial structures, as we later come to see, is Britishness. "In an uncanny way, Britishness seems to have become a cultural value that transcends the British Isles, a value that is encapsulated by the logic of the colonial and postcolonial experience, Britishness is the sum total of the culture created in the colonial encounter, and it seems to have survived empire in the name of modernity."[38] Here, we hear the echoes of Appiah's notion of the postcolonial status of the British Museum as a repository of world heritage. Whereas the metropolis has got away with the gold, the postcolony receives an honorable mention for assisting in that effort to constitute Europe and its modern identity. Whereas imperialism is domination, domination by modernity comes with its own consolation. And when this paradigm is put to an analytical test, the outcome, it is important to note, produces the following explication: "Equiano is born a slave and writes in

the name of the abolitionist cause; his narrative must, out of rhetorical necessity, underscore enslavement as a moment of radical loss and the inherent freedom of Englishness as a consolation prize."[39] In *Maps*, the work of decolonization now seems to take the form of that "self-willed entry into the imperial realm."[40] Perhaps it is, as he put it in the last sentence of the book, "claiming a space in the culture that colonialism built and acknowledging our alienation in this cartography."[41] Gikandi might be right if we are to consider the preponderance and variations of the theme of alienation in African literature. But despite the sobering reality of the mutations of neocolonialism and its alienating effects, major African writers seem to adopt a different posture than the one described in his explication of Equiano, the aptness of which some might dispute. The notion of "the inherent freedom of Englishness," contrasts radically with Mudimbe's notion of the postcolonial subject's freedom of thinking of himself or herself as a starting point of discourse. And while Mudimbe and Gikandi proceed from a similar premise of colonial foundations, they could not have arrived at a more differing outcome. The discourse of modernity itself remains to be settled, not to mention its acceptability as a consolation. One of the examples that Gikandi uses in his analysis of the colonial subject is Mary Seacole for whom, like others, Gikandi posits: "Englishness is an identity they *must* claim through gestures of writing and reinvention."[42] We can estimate what a writer like Chinua Achebe's reaction to this characterization of the colonial subject would be from his reaction to Buchi Emecheta, who like Seacole considered England as a place of fulfillment and heritage:

> Here is what a much advertised author living in London said in 1986 about her fellow writers toiling away in Nigeria:
>
> Writing coming from Nigeria, from Africa (I know this because my son does the criticism) sounds quite stilted. After reading the first page you tell yourself you are plodding. But when you are reading the same thing written by an English person or somebody who lives here you find you are enjoying it because the language is so academic, so perfect. Even if you remove the cover you can always say who is an African writer. But with some of my books you can't tell that easily any more because, I think, using the language every day and staying in the culture my Africanness is, in a way, being diluted. My paperback publisher, Collins, has now stopped putting my books in the African section.

> That does it for all those beleaguered African writers struggling at home to tell the story of their land. They should one and all emigrate to London or Paris to dilute their Africanness and become, oh, "so academic, so perfect." The psychology of the dispossessed can be truly frightening.[43]

The notion of the heroic "self-willed entry into the imperial realm" does not quite seem to work for Achebe even if, ironically, he was the earliest to sound a strong defense of the English language as a legitimate medium of creative expression in African literature, the semantics of which some might argue was to convey Africanness, not to dilute it. If as a champion of the English language himself Achebe was in the end frightened by a writer's express desire for Englishness, and labels it a demonstration of the psychology of the dispossessed, one would have to wonder if he would not simply consider "claiming a space in the culture that colonialism built" a bridge too far. But then, is Gikandi extending and reformulating the concept of the home and the world—of Bhabha's unhomely lives that render not so absolute the line between being Nigerian in England, or in Nigeria? If this is the case, how does this notion of universal unhomeliness escape the presupposition of homogeneity of global time and space? Are we saying that the metropolis and postcolony are at equal pressure points within globalization?

A similar reaction we find in Ngugi toward Okara, which puts him in a more direct head-on collision with the project of the *Maps of Englishness* even though the changing dynamics of globalization and the metastasis of imperialism that Gikandi noted very early on seem to have caught up with Ngugi in *Globalectics*.[44] For Ngugi, the very idea of staking a claim in the culture of imperialism or the culture that colonialism built is problematic. His quotation of Okara while in relation to language is worth citing here along his response in *Decolonizing the Mind*[45] as it concerns Englishness in language, culture and politics:

> Gabriel Okara's position on this was representative of our generation:
>
> Some may regard this way of writing English as a desecration of the language. This is of course not true. Living languages grow like living things, and English is far from a dead language. There are American, West Indian, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand versions of English. All of them add life and vigour to the language while reflecting their own respective cultures. Why shouldn't there be a Nigerian or West African English which we can use to express our own ideas, thinking and philosophy in our own way?

> How did we arrive at this acceptance of "the fatalistic logic of the unassailable position of English in our literature", in our culture and in our politics? What was the route from the Berlin of 1884 via the Makerere of 1962 to what is still the prevailing and dominant logic a hundred years later? How did we, as African writers, come to be so feeble towards the claims of our languages on us and so aggressive in our claims on other languages, particularly the languages of our colonization?[46]

Ngugi's sharp attack in this piece is in part reserved for the more moderate and pragmatic Chinua Achebe whose statement: "the fatalistic logic of the unassailable position of English in our literature" serves as the real focal point of his criticism. Simon Gikandi is no Gabriel Okara; in fact, Okara and Emecheta prove Gikandi's point about the power and attraction of Englishness and how postcolonial writers negotiate their identities within a colonial and neocolonial infrastructure. However, left to Ngugi, Achebe himself belongs in the company of the Okaras; after all, Okara was the consummate Achebe imitator. It is an interesting choice to select as Gikandi does the Seacoles, the Emechetas, the Okaras, or the Rushdies who seem to display an apparent enthusiasm for modernity as standard bearers of postcolonial subjectivity. The strong reactions elicited by the Okaras do not seem to have factored very much into Gikandi's analysis. In considering these reactions, one can only wonder why the same strain of this argument that is to be found in Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*,[47] and especially in Toni Morison's *Playing in the Dark*[48] about how whiteness in this case was constituted by imagining blackness, is far more tolerable and less controversial than when transported into a postcolonial analytical situation.

The bigger problem is not how the figures of postcolonial subjectivity in *Maps* exhibit the psychology of the dispossessed, but its very theory of postcolonialism that insists on the immanence, and dominance of colonial culture, seemingly in perpetuity because it "*will* survive."[49] As Stuart Hall has convincingly argued, the problem of temporality in postcolonial theory or

> The tension between the epistemological and the chronological is not disabling but productive. "After" means in the moment which follows that moment (the colonial) in which the colonial relation was dominant. It does not mean, as we tried to show earlier, that what we have called "after-effects" of colonial rule have somehow been suspended. It certainly does *not* mean that we have passed from a regime of power-knowledge into some powerless

> and conflict-free time zone. Nevertheless, it does also stake its claim in terms of the fact that some other, related but as yet "emergent" new configurations of power-knowledge relations are beginning to exert their distinctive and specific effects.[50]

Mudimbe's gnosis is the form that he believes this old yet new configuration of power–knowledge relations takes. For even while overwhelmed by the constraints and methodologies of philosophical realism, Mudimbe still found a way out of the colonial morass to enunciate African uniqueness by pointing toward autonomy through gnosis, which to him carries freedom and the potential of "the starting point of an absolute discourse."[51] Gnosis, we might remind ourselves, is a method of dewesternizing knowledge. It was in the name of gnosis that Mudimbe recognized Senghor as a supersession of colonial culture in the production of his Negritude anthology. I am suggesting here that Soyinka's anthology, the AWS, and African literature could be argued to have followed a similar trajectory to that first anthology of the Negritude movement and should therefore be accorded the same approbation.

The possibility of these new configurations and cartographies of power-knowledge is not sufficiently highlighted in *Maps*, even if Gikandi's earlier works have been eminently cutting-edge within the field of African literary criticism. Given that the imperial apparatus, and Britishness, have survived in modernity, the question then becomes: what else has survived alongside it? Could we entertain Soyinka's notion of the indestructible imagination as having precedence in Nietzsche's ineradicable Dionysian existential forces, knowing the influence *The Birth of Tragedy* has on his artistic vision, or in Marx's notion of residual forms in capitalist production? Problematic as these concepts may sound—that is if a dialectical view of history is problematic—they nonetheless could help us to reexamine and contemplate a preliminary proposition of residual modernity as a way of probing those subaltern formations that do not conform to the overdetermined cartography and canons of modernity. This cannot be a backdoor to discredited nativist notions of pure, untouched, and essentialized identities, but a recognition and theoretical accounting for the insurrections of what Raymond Williams calls "all lived, practical and unevenly formed and formative experience."[52]

The generic critique of Gikandi's strand of postcolonialism that it is too preoccupied with the Enlightenment and with Europe[53] is not worth repeating here. Edward Said's *Orientalism* suffered the most from that

critique, and it caused him to correct course in *Culture and Imperialism*. He was to admit: "What I left out of *Orientalism* was that response to western dominance which culminated in the great movement of decolonization all across the third world."[54] But just as Mudimbe is skeptical about grids of interpretation being able to translate reality and history, it must be noted that a certain form of structuralism is implicit in the theory of postcolonial realism that insists primarily upon the transcendence and survival of colonial culture or imperial structures. Structural colonialism or colonial structuralism presupposes inbuilt limits within the world order that seriously diminish the prospects of substantive change. It is useful to remember how in making a distinction between abstract determinism and determination, Raymond Williams offers a clarification that is pertinent when he cautions that structural limits or "any categorical objectification of determined or over-determined structures"[55] must be offset by "the exertion of pressures;"[56] otherwise we risk the dangers of transposing and repeating the error of economism, that is, of setting limits beyond the control of human will. In line with this logic, I share Said's conclusion that intellectual work in our time can no longer proceed as if the great body of works in the tradition of decolonization do not exist or are ultimately ineffectual. It is in an attempt to explore this tradition of writing as an exertion against the limits of the apparatuses of publishing and the institutions of literature that I have analyzed the works of African writers that are, in my judgment, most committed to political, cultural, and epistemic decolonization, to the reinventing of the literatures of Africa.

Notes

1. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*.
2. Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism*, p. 6.
3. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*.
4. Ngũgĩ wa, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*.
5. Léopold Sédar Senghor and Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anthologie De La Nouvelle PoéSie NèGre Et Malgache De Langue FrançAise* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948).
6. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, p. 83.

7. Irele, *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa & the Black Diaspora*, p. 4.
8. E. W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1994).
9. Abiola Irele, *The Negritude Moment Explorations in Francophone African and Caribbean Literature and Thought* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2011).
10. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, p. 85.
11. Ibid., p. 77.
12. Ibid., p. 193.
13. Ibid., p. 22.
14. Ibid., p. 79.
15. Ibid., p. 185.
16. Abiola Irele, *Dimensions of African Discourse* (1992), p. 55.
17. Abiola Irele, *In Praise of Alienation: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered on the 22nd of November 1982 at the University of Ibadan* (Nigeria: The University, 1987).
18. Abiola Irele, *The African Scholar*, 1991.
19. Ibid., p. 63.
20. Irele to Currey, September 29, 1981.
21. James Currey to Irele, November 24, 1981.
22. Irele to James Currey, January 12, 1982.
23. Mudimbe, cited in Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism*, p. 239.
24. Ibid., p. 46.
25. Ibid., p. 5.
26. Robert Young and dawsonera, *White Mythologies Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 2004).
27. Stuart Hall, *When Was 'the Post-Colonial'? Thinking at the Limit*, 1996.
28. Ibid., p. 249.
29. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, pp. 199–200.
30. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism 5* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978b).
31. Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism*, p. 226.
32. Ibid.
33. Biodun Jeyifo, *The Nature of Things: Arrested Decolonization and Critical Theory* (1990b); Padmini Mongia, *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Arnold, 1996).
34. Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism*, p. 18.

35. Ibid., p. 47.
36. Ibid., p. 14.
37. Chinua Achebe, *Home and Exile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000a), p. 70.
38. Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism*, p. 203.
39. Ibid., p. 130.
40. Ibid., p. 20.
41. Ibid., p. 231.
42. My emphasis, ibid., p. 128.
43. Chinua Achebe, *Home and Exile* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000b), pp. 71–72.
44. Ngũgĩ wa, *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*.
45. Ngũgĩ wa, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*.
46. Ibid., p. 9.
47. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
48. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (London: Picador, 1993).
49. My emphasis, Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism*, p. 18.
50. Hall, *When Was 'the Post-Colonial'? Thinking at the Limit*, p. 254.
51. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, p. 200.
52. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, pp. 88–89.
53. Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).
54. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. xii.
55. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 88.
56. Ibid.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion: The Auto-Heteronomy of African Literature

Accounts on the question of whether intellectual autonomy from colonial culture is desirable or even possible have tended to a pessimism, which we need not accept if we consider, as *Remapping African Literature* has demonstrated, the material agency of writers in exerting genuinely decolonizing counter-pressures to the forces of an apparatus that seeks to confine them. Because the discourse of African literary criticism has focused on colonial and structural determinism, it misses what I term *auto-heteronomy* and especially how that is more so defined by a universal regime of production.

In bringing the arguments of this book to a conclusion, I would like to end with a proposition on the dialectical relation of autonomy and heteronomy, auto-heteronomy, as I see it operate in the discourse and production of African literature. The decolonization of aesthetic practice is a function of aesthetic reorientation at the level of form, which is analogous, in my view, to the process of abstraction. The possibility of abstraction demonstrates on a parallel level that contrary to Gikandi's claims, extrication from enlightenment and colonial culture, and from constitutive conditions in general, is possible. As a measure of ironic justice, the claims of postcolonial enlightenment could be countered by enlightenment philosophy itself. Immanuel Kant's opening sentence in the essay "What is Orientation in Thinking?"[1] (1786) is such a powerful statement from which I deduce the operative terms of auto-heteronomy. It is the key

O. Ibironke, *Remapping African Literature*, African Histories and Modernities, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69296-8_8

formulation of the essay, the application of which transcends the immediate realities of his philosophy precisely as a function of its depth: "However exalted we may wish our concepts to be, and however abstract we may make them in relation to the realm of the senses, they will continue to be associated with *figurative* notions."[2] Although Kant would go on to filter and detach pure concepts of understanding from specific or concrete objective references, that association with figurative notions has nonetheless transformed them so thoroughly as to become the "happy fault" through which concepts ultimately acquire "a complete rule of thought" that is fully cognizant of the world as we experience it. This takes us back to the central dispute with which the Introduction to this book began between Macherey and Badiou on whether to locate the autonomy of the aesthetic process in the transformed contents or in the operators of transformation. In my view, to separate transformed contents from subjectivity, from the realm of experience and the experiential being, is to attempt a separation of the "complete rule of thought" from the "figurative notions" that map and signpost thought. The Kant of the "Orientation" essay is not exactly the orthodox Kant of disembodied reason.[3] Concepts do not transcend figuration; they are continuously bound in an association with it. At the same time, the process by which pure concept of understanding is abstracted is not a synthesis or hybrid of concept and figuration. Figuration or objective reference serves as the necessary catalyst and cure for abstraction, which without proper orientation degenerates into abstract dogmatism. This statement captures what could be characterized as Kant's major achievement in breaking through the pathway for connecting imagination and reason, relations of ideas and matters of fact. The third way that he clears in the realm of philosophical idealism is the foundation for the resolution of the central problem of *Critique of Judgment*, especially in the third *Critique*,[4] between the subjective autonomy of aesthetic judgment and the objective validation of that judgment by the rules of reason. In the third critique, Kant upholds the autonomy of aesthetic judgment while at the same time accounting for the interactions and interventions of cognitive judgment. He avoids equating the contingencies of judgment with determinative judgment and by so doing arrives at the associative idea that I am deploying here to formulate my theory of auto-heteronomy, which is the attempt to capture the perpetual adaptation of authorial intuition to (the cultivation of) public taste and vice versa. Kant is able to accomplish this maneuver in that opening statement by the deployment of the operative term "associated with" as opposed to "determined by." The phrase "associated with" is the

predicate upon which I want to propose a rethinking of postcolonialism and the dynamism of postcolonial subjectivity and creativity.

Postcolonial theory has suffered under the weight of the logic of determinism to the extent that it is predicated upon conditions of emergence as conditions of being. It is now critical to change the orientation of our thinking and aesthetic practice from determinism to association. Auto-heteronomy provides the framework for thinking that association. It is yet another way of contemplating the relationship between internal and external conditions of literary production in Africa: how the self-generative laws of aesthetic practices are themselves sharpened by exogenous factors through the process of positive dialectics. The concept of auto-heteronomy sums up the efforts of this book in its careful consideration of the resolution of the binary of determinacy and autonomy in the production and practice of African literature in a way that the classic accounts of postcolonial literature in Africa, from Mudimbe to Gikandi, have been unable to settle.

The specific inflection of auto-heteronomy that marks the field of African literature is what I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this book. Because the integrity of art is perceived to derive from an autonomous subjectivity, which is why its claim as a work of art is in its originality, the effects of production and institutional practices that permeate text always constitute a problem for autonomy. As Kant aptly put it: "Taste lays claim merely to autonomy; but to make other people's judgments the basis determining one's own would be heteronomy."[5] The example Kant gives is that of a young poet who would never be persuaded by the "delusion" of his friends and audience that his poem is not beautiful but would, as his judgment is sharpened by practice on his own, voluntarily change his mind concerning the beauty or otherwise of his poem. This is the process of the autonomy of aesthetic judgment, a kind of *Bildung*, what he calls the "a priori source" of taste. Kant further states that the idea of classical authors whose works we view as "models and precedent points to a posteriori sources of taste."[6] However, the a priori source of taste is not compromised or refuted simply by the judgment of audiences or the examples of predecessors. Indeed, as Mudimbe has argued in the closing pages of *The Invention of Africa*, this young poet has the right to look forward to the laws of his art becoming the precedent for a new future and starting point of an "absolute discourse."[7] This is presumably because he has absorbed the energies and wisdom of precedent and the present. But, perhaps, the young poet is not so young, after all. The judgment of culture

is always colonial, it infantilizes, just as colonialism reduces the age of its subject. The dynamic relations by which the young poet regains his proper age and his or her judgment matures, along with those of his audiences, are also how precedents change and proceed on the final journey of archaic economies. Mudimbe's "absolute discourse" is the same as, or equivalent to, Kant's "pure concept" in the sense that both embody "a complete rule of thought," and remain operative without and outside any immediate reference to their constitutive world. It is not only by practice or solely on his own that a poet comes to a better sense of his abilities and artistry; according to Kant, the a posteriori sources of taste "by their procedure, put others on a track whereby they could search for the principles within themselves and so adopt their own and often better course."[8] It is clear from all this that Kant does not oppose heteronomy to autonomy in the absolute sense. Rather, what Kant is reaching for in this formulation, which we have shown in the discussion of the relation of literary production in Africa, is the idea of dialectics by which one's judgment and practice are sharpened rather than sublated by the judgment of others or the mechanisms of institutions and structures. In fact, he is more explicit when he argues that the examples of virtue in religion "set for us in history, does not make dispensable the autonomy of virtue that arises from our own and original (a priori) idea of morality, nor does it transform this idea into a mechanism of imitation."[9] It is interesting that the question of auto-heteronomy is more cogently epitomized by a religious example.[10] For Kant, the subject of judgment and therefore of taste is primarily a subject for ethics given that with the exercise of judgment comes maturity, which translates to responsibility for the self. The realm of aesthetics is only one of such realms in which the question of self-responsibility arises as a fundamental principle of personhood. Of course, hidden within that moral philosophy is a deist conception of metaphysics that is, and can only be, grounded in ethics. However, in this example, ethics then becomes the link between religious and aesthetic practices, and why the example of one could be illustrative of the other.

Thus, as we have seen, auto-heteronomy is not the determination of autonomy by the judgments and preferences of others; it is not relative autonomy either: it is the access to the common and combined sources, the same a priori and a posteriori sources of taste on one's terms but in reference to the experience of others in order to orient oneself and art, and enhance one's skills. In posing the question of the relationship between the institutions of production and literary practice in postcolonial Africa as

defined by the dialectics between determinacy and artistic autonomy, I have shown that the contradiction between the determinacy of material effects and the autonomy of literary expression and form is what is constantly being resolved through the texts. What this dialectics produces ultimately is an auto-heteronomy, which is not by any means "a mechanism of imitation,"[11] but exactly the reverse.

However pure and exalted we may wish our art to be, it will always be associated with—not determined or colonized by—the history of its production. This association of autonomy and heteronomy is an instance of positive dialectics by which it becomes possible to conceive an expansive notion of postcolonial literature that, although it has its orientation in much older and broader histories, is itself not dominated or overdetermined by the institutional and referential associations to those histories. This is a different formulation from theories of postcolonialism informed by structural determinism. Kant's association of abstraction and figuration, and figuration and the concrete, also allows us to make the connection between representation, which is itself a form of abstraction or abstract thought, and experience, between the sublimity of form and the banality of content. The surplus-expression of experience, which is also an overexpression, is the cause of the banality of life; this is why for experience to become meaningful and significant, it must be contained, refracted, in maxims and images of the individual artist who sets the precise limits of its form. Such form, that the author puts forward or that the reader is able to refer himself to, to evoke within himself/herself the constitutive context or materiality, is not a transcendental signifier but a properly oriented form that is infused with the dialectical association of concept and the concrete world, abstraction and figuration, reason and the public. I take this positive dialectic as a logical import of Kant's thought about a certain modality, or dialectics of postcoloniality. As H. S. Reiss put it in his summation of Kant's position "Without the public use of reason we cannot orientate our thinking properly."[12] This is what Kant means by "figurative notions," the acts of referentiality in the world of experience, of connecting ideas to things because in the very next sentence he not only italicizes "use in the experiential world" as he did "figurative" in the opening sentence, he more clearly relates concepts to experience when he states: "The proper function of these is to make such concepts, which are not in other respects derived from experience, suitable for *use in the experiential world*."[13] Indeed, it is not self-contradictory that for postcolonial literature to be properly decolonized, it must orient itself in colonial history, as a

point of departure, until such a time when colonialism no longer serves as an immediate objective reference; that although it is not directly derived from the world of colonial experience, it must nonetheless speak to the legacies, and be "suitable for use" in the context of the ongoing mutations, of that world, which is a different understanding of postcoloniality than has hitherto been marked by temporal and ideological distinctions.

Auto-heteronomy does not dispense with autonomy. According to Kant in a highly instructive and cumulative passage in *Critique of Judgment*, autonomy "stands most in need of," and not apart from, heteronomy: "Among all our abilities and talents, taste is precisely what stands most in need of examples regarding what has enjoyed the longest-lasting approval in the course of cultural progress, in order that it will not become uncouth again and relapse into the crudeness of its first attempts; and taste needs this because its judgment cannot be determined by concepts and precepts."[14] In Kant's particular essay, he suggests that thinking or pure reason necessarily interacts and associates with "sense-perception" and "sensuous intuition"—the very things it has to purge and separate from itself, in Kant's view, in order to be the "exalted" faculty of enlightenment. The use and critique of Kant as the Euro-enlightenment and transcendental philosopher miss this critical moment when he introduces the perpetual dialectical association of reason and the public. Public use serves both as check on reason and as cure for abstract dogmatism. This move toward the public for the proper orientation of reason is similar to the one made by Marx toward the masses for the proper orientation of history. They are both dialectical moves, albeit with varying emphases and goals, toward the material as orienting reason and history, respectively. This is the moment that allows me to use Kant subversively, perhaps in an unusual way, within a Marxist critique of postcolonial literary production. These dialectical associations are necessary insofar as they orient thought in the real or possible world and endow rationality itself with an enlarged scope through which "a complete rule of thought" is constituted. Philosophy as such, according to Kant, is thus ultimately refined and enriched only after it has carefully extracted itself from this necessary but seemingly debasing association with the phenomenological realm of the senses and the public. As an anthropological principle, Kant's notion could be as catastrophic as Hegelian evolution of Spirit. This is why it is worth emphasizing that the goal of Kantian philosophy is not to achieve a telos outside the realm of experience, or that is freed from it. Their epistemological association is an eternal reality and matrices. Kant surmises in that first and most important

paragraph of the essay: "[t]his is the way in which even universal logic came into being."[15] It is in the perpetually cyclical motions of immersion and extraction, of the association of autonomy and heteronomy that a universal logic of authorial and artistic autonomy is established. We have come full circle from the Introduction to this book, where I argued for a cosmopolitan view of African literary production citing the example of Derrida's theory of the cosmopolitan right to philosophy based on the UNESCO as an exemplary philosophical archive. The cosmopolitan view of production is a cardinal idea of Marxism articulated very early on in "The Communist Manifesto."[16] Derrida's assertion of the cosmopolitan right to philosophy is itself dependent upon Kant's "Idea of a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View" (1784). Universalism and cosmopolitanism are not the same concepts. Kant's universalism is clearly circumscribed by his cosmopolitanism. Universal logic is not the Universalism that critical, cultural, and postcolonial theories love to hate. It is the principle of cosmopolitanism. Universal logic, universal without uniformity, we might add, is the only true logic of decolonization. While Marx may have left open the possibility that cosmopolitan production will have a positive effect on national consciousness, Ngugi renews that optimism in *Globalectics*,[17] but this time by seeking to make the postcolonial space, just like Mudimbe, the starting point of a universal logic that will hopefully negate the resilience of colonial or parochial consciousness.

It may already be clear what the current conclusion with Kantian philosophy hopes to achieve in the context of African postcolonial writing: it is an attempt to resuscitate decolonization in relation to aesthetic reorientation by asserting that these indeed are texts endowed with genuinely decolonized thought, with "a complete rule of thought." Complete precisely by virtue of their ability to imbibe, transcend, and supersede determinative precedents and procedures, and as such, forge a "better course." If however, the text is a world to itself, an indifferent universe or objective referent with its own horizons and the task of criticism is what it has always been, to orientate readers in this subjective world, then publication and publicity, the strategies of marketing do not and cannot on their own orient or reorient the text since they would in that case merely constitute a posteriori effects of mechanical and institutional mediation. We might then recalibrate the function of criticism accordingly, or more precisely, the general apparatus of sociocultural pedagogy that helps readers find their way to and through the world of the mind. Increasingly, we find, the options are not either the reading public as seeker finds its way to and through a relevant text via the

uncertain work and mediations of publishers, teachers, critics and commentators, or the text through the clairvoyant genius and technical mediation of the author relates itself in advance and give direction to the public. What Kant allows us to do is to think through the interesting dynamics and dynamism of textual production, of the constant interpositional reconfiguration of the relations between writers, texts, and publics, which (whatever their original positions and orientations) are always already in the process of an unassured search for and toward each other, always in need of each other: autonomy in need of its dialectical destiny, auto-heteronomy.

Notes

1. Immanuel Kant, *What Is Orientation in Thinking?*, 1991.
2. Immanuel Kant and Hans Siegbert Reiss, *Kant: Political Writings* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 237. Emphasis in original.
3. It is not my objective to rescue Kant from the critics of the Enlightenment such as Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Enlightenment: A De-Colonial Reading of Kant's Geography*, and Paul Gilroy Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic Modernity and Double Consciousness*. I wanted to highlight here the critical project of the essay "Orientation" that has for too long been ignored. Indeed, the idea of abstraction, of the concept purifying itself could be rightly construed as a class dominated concept of a white bourgeois class simply universalizing its own values; however, I hope that my reading of "Orientation" and Kant's move toward the material and concrete world will serve as the basis for a new far-flung but credible alignment of Kant with Marx, in a way that Kant's critics may have forgotten or missed.
4. Immanuel Kant and Werner S. Pluhar, *Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub. Co., 1987a).
5. Kant and Pluhar, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 146.
6. Ibid.
7. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, p. 200.
8. Kant and Pluhar, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 146.
9. Ibid.
10. Another equivalent of this example is Kant's notion of a purely rational belief as "signpost or compass by means of which the speculative thinker can orientate himself on his rational wandering in the field of supra-sensory objects, while the man of ordinary but (morally) healthy reason can use it to plan his course, for both theoretical and practical purposes, in complete conformity with the whole end of his destiny …." Kant, *What Is Orientation in Thinking?*, p. 245.

11. Kant and Pluhar, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 146.
12. Kant, *What Is Orientation in Thinking?*, p. 236.
13. Ibid., p. 239.
14. Kant and Pluhar, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 147.
15. Kant, *What Is Orientation in Thinking?*, p. 237.
16. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Karl Marx, 1848).
17. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Globalectics Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

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