NIGERIAN WRITERS AND POLITICAL COMMITMENT

by

KOLAWOLE OGUNGBESAN

Political commitment did not become a controversial issue in Nigerian writing until the middle of the sixties. In 1960 when Nigeria achieved political independence virtually all the Nigerian writers believed that they could work successfully without revealing any political attitude at all -- or even having one. This was largely because each believed that an artist worked within the context of a self-made world, that a writer *as* a writer had no business involving himself in public affairs, and that in fact he had to be disengaged if he wanted to maintain the purity of his art. Ten years later almost all of them had come to believe that a writer worked within the context of contemporary human affairs and should be personally concerned in their quality; that objectivity was less important than truth; and that the writer who was not committed to socio-political programs lacked an important human dimension. Why this turnabout?

The answer lies in the series of political crises which Nigeria experienced in the sixties, beginning almost immediately after independence: the Western Nigerian crisis in 1962, the controversy over the census figures in 1963, the inconclusive Federal elections of 1964, the rigged elections followed by mass violence in Western Nigeria in 1965, the two military coups and mass killings in 1966, followed, in 1967, by the outbreak of the Civil war which lasted until 1970. The watershed was really the first military coup in January 1966. Not only did the pace of crisis quicken visibly thereafter but the logic of events forced virtually all our writers not only to identify with one of the warring factions, but to take overt political actions. As a result most of the writers suffered directly, and wrote with deeper anguish. This paper aims to trace the attitudes of the four leading Nigerian writers -- Christopher Okigbo, John Pepper Clark, Chinua Achebe, and Wole Soyinka -- in this crisis-ridden decade, the roles they played, and how their art was influenced thereby. Is it possible to draw a conclusion from the examples of these writers on the question of the writer's commitment to socio-political programs?

"I'm not interested in politics, I'm interested in style", James Joyce reputedly remarked to his brother Stanilas who had just fled from Italy and was recounting to the novelist the horrors of Mussolini and fascism in Italy before the Second World War. Joyce'

obsession with craftmanship, especially his quest for total impersonality, was duplicated on the Nigerian literary scene by the late Christopher Okigbo. In an interview in 1962, Okigbo denied ever attempting to put any message into his poems and scorned the ambition of ever becoming a very popular poet. How could he, he scoffed, write for a society whose majority would neither take delight in reading poetry nor read poetry that appears difficult?

> *Somehow, I believe I am writing for other poets all over the world to read and see whether they can share in my experience. I believe that the best in poetry has been said, at least for the chamber. Nowadays everything is done for the study and on the few occasions it steals out, I think it is to please, but not a large public. Applause itself is no longer in a necessary personal experience. I think poetry is at best a mere gesture to stay within a close, closed society or to be liked by the other fellow, one's fellow - so that I don't know how many people would really like to read what I write, but I don't care for applause. I believe that poets anywhere would get hold of my poetry when and if it is published, and it may be possible for them to get something out of the original experience.*[1]

Okigbo matched his words with action, theory and performance. At the Kampala Conference of African writers he refused to read his poetry on the grounds that he never read poetry to non-poets. Logically, poetry written for a coterie of poets could hardly preoccupy itself with the larger concerns of society. Even in 1965, against the background of violence in Nigeria, Okigbo poured fresh scorn on committed literature:

> *... the writer in Africa doesn't have any function. That is, personally I can only say what I conceive as my own function. I have no function as a writer; I think I merely express myself, and the public can use these things for anything they like... I don't, in fact, think that it is necessary for the writer to assume a particular function as the Messiah or anything like that, as an individual he could assume this sort of role, but I don't think that the fact that he's a writer should entitle him to assume a particular role as an educator. If he wants to educate people he should write text books. If he wants to preach a gospel he should write religious tracts. If he wants to propound a certain ideology he should write political tracts.*

Okigbo's poetry up to this point evinced his aloofness. It was devoted to exploring the poet's own internal crises and was marked by a strong element of navel-gazing. Okigbo in fact celebrated his dissociation from his society:

> *Then we must sing*
> *Tongue-tied without name or audience,*
> *Making harmony among the branches.*[3]

Okigbo's preoccupation with rhythm at the expense of a robust identification with social problems and scaffolding at the expense of content, places his poetry up to 1965 outside the reach of any but the most painstaking reader. His apologists would say that in spite of his words he was moved by and responded to collective tragedies. The sequence of poems entitled "Silences", for instance was inspired by the Western Nigerian crisis of 1962, the death of Patrice Lumumba, the imprisonment of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, and the tragic death of his eldest son, Segun Awolowo. Yet, so successfully had Okigbo achieved impersonality in this poem that we would have had practically no means of detecting this social awareness if he hadn't told us. So detached was he from the events that the poem lacks pith, and fails to convey any deep anguish. In the same poem, Okigbo tried to explain and justify his artistic creed:

> *And how does one say NO in thunder?*
>
> *One dips one's tongue in the ocean;*
> *Camps with the choir of inconstant*
> *Dolphins, by shallow sand banks*
> *Sprinkled with memories;*
> *Extends one's branches of coral,*
> *The branches extend in the senses'*
> *Silence; this silence distills*
> *In yellow melodies.*[4]

This attempt to define poetry as a distillation of experience into music is merely begging the issue, for no one has ever seriously disputed that Okigbo had a great gift for music in poetry. The point really is that his refusal to employ his gift on behalf of anything but the self emasculated his poetry and robbed it of a vital relevance to the reader. Okigbo should have taken to heart the admonitory words of the British critic, Lancelles Abercrombie: "It is not the magic of language which accounts for greatness, but that which comes to us through and by means of magical language".[5] This is the premise on which Okigbo's last poems, which form the sequence "Path of Thunder: Poems Prophesying War", stand vindicated as great poetry. For the first time Okigbo spoke in his own voice, instead of using a mask, and he spoke in unmitigated anguish:

If I don't learn to shut my mouth I'll soon go to hell
I, Okigbo, town-crier, together with my iron bell[6]

He bemusedly criticized the deliberate cultivation of obscurity which had made his earlier poetry inaccessible to any but the most ardent scholar:

Bring them out we say, bring them out
Face and hands and feet,
The stories behind the myth, the plot
Which the ritual enacts[7]

Okigbo, like the vast majority of his countrymen, was caught unawares by the crisis of 1965-66, and was horrified by the general violence and bloodshed, the enormity of which reached behind the mask in which Okigbo had earlier insulated himself from his society, forcing him to discard the cloak of mythology in which his earlier poetry had been suffocating. Okigbo discovered that there was both enterprise and truth in walking naked. Instead of the narcissistic preoccupation with his own personal crisis evident in the earlier poems, he stepped boldly on the national stage, acting at once as both a sage and a prophet. Months before it came he prophesied war:

The smell of blood already floats in the lavender-mist
of the afternoon
The death sentence lies in ambush along the corridors
of power;
And a great fearful thing already tugs at the cables
of the open air
A nebula immense and immeasurable, a night of deep water
An iron dream unnamed and unprintable, a path of stone...
The arrows of God tremble at the gates of light,
The drums of curfew pander to a dance of death...[8]

The simplicity, energy and assurance of "Path of Thunder" come from a complete identification with the communal experience. Because national events had such a direct impact on his sensibility, Okigbo authentically assumed the collective role of "town crier" and moaned of the impending tragedy of a society that had failed to heed the warning of the gods. Okigbo's empathy with his society was complete, for he equated its fate to his:

So let the horn paw the air howling goodbye...

O mother mother Earth, unbind me; let this be my
last testament; let this be
The ram's hidden wish to the sword the sword's secret
prayer to the scabbard --[9]

Okigbo did not survive the crisis. After a narrow escape in an air crash on a gun-running expedition (the circumstances surrounding this escapade have not been clearly established), he perished on the war front. There was nothing in his earlier life to suggest this combativeness, just as his earlier poetry provided almost no clue to the communal stance of the last poems. We should not, of course, judge his poetry by his romantic end, but it is truly a tragedy that the commitment which produced such energetic poetry should, when translated into action, prove fatal. Okigbo's death was a tragedy, for so much promise was blighted so early. Nigerian literature, as a result of the political crisis which cost Okigbo his life, could never be the same again. Okigbo was perhaps the first to recognize this, certainly he was the first to state it, in words which will remain the final tribute to his memory:

> *AN OLD STAR departs, leaves us here on the shore*
> *Gazing heavenward for a new star approaching;*
> *The new star appears, foreshadows its going*
> *Before a going and coming that goes on forever...*[10]

John Pepper Clark, alone among Nigerian major writers, gloried in his non-involvement in the Nigerian civil war. Perhaps unsurprisingly, not only did he survive the war, but his artistic creed remained essentially unchanged. If Clark had any aesthetic theorie before the civil war they were unstated. In so far as any could be gleaned from his creative works, *Three Plays* and *A Reed in the Tide*, he was, like Okigbo, more interested in the exploration of his interior crisis than in social criticism. Clark has always taken great pains to deny that his play *The Raft* was an allegory of the Nigerian situation. He wasn't writing a political thesis, he derided on one occasion, adding: "essentially I was trying to create a human condition which I knew existed not only in Nigeria but elsewhere".[11] He built a reputation on the technical "finish" of his poetry and on his ability to capture settings memorably. An example is the much anthologized "Ibadan":

> *Ibadan,*
> *running splash of rust*
> *and gold-flung and scattered*
> *among seven hills like broken*
> *china in the sun.*[12]

The technical beauty of this poem and Clark's other anthology pieces "Night Rain" and "Agbor Dancer", dazzled the reader almost to the point of blindness, and succeeded for some time to hide the truth of their lack of vital relevance to the communal experience. As late as September 1964, Clark was defining "the precise position

of the poet in Nigerian society", in terms of the search for the most apposite images:

> *I think before the poet begins playing any role in Nigerian society, I think he has to recognise himself. He has to find himself really, within this society first, before he knows what role it is really he is playing; because in the search for images, in the search for the most apposite expression you often find that you are going back to your people, which means you are going back to your roots, and that means you are going back to the so-called vernacular, you see, and although your writing may be for a very learned audience when you're using English, the mere fact that you are going back to your own people for your images, for your expressions and all that, means that you find yourself between the so-called educated and the so-called illiterate. So I think it's a role of reconciliation really, and interpretation.*[13]

But with the advent of the civil war Clark too was forced to define more closely the writer's responsibility to his society:

> *I don't think any one role ... is so special that it should subsume the others. This is where I find it personally disturbing that some of my friends - some of my own kind - do not seem to be satisfied with their own role of writing and would rather become soldiers and politicians, prefering to play roles other than that they are good at and recognized for. If you are a poet and write songs for soldiers to march to, to fight to, I suppose you would be well within your field of militancy. If you write a play like any of Brecht's to propound and push an ideology, a way of life, you would be well within your field. But to be an artist while doing all this, you must at the same time create a work of art, carve a figure which, when all capital has been made of it in the interest of whatever ideology that is attached to it, retains its hold upon us principally as an object of beauty.*[14]

Clark's position is both reasonable and deceptive -- reasonable because an artist should only be judged on the "beauty" (a Johnsonian term, notoriously imprecise and woolly) of his art and deceptive because by separating the artist and the citizen he is

making a separation which falsifies life. For the same man must function as artist and citizen. Not only did he uphold a commitment to art above all other considerations, but Clark denied the writer any such inspired role as the teacher or vision of his society:

> *... it seems to me that people are creating for the writer an almost superstitious role which I find unbearable, as if he were a special kind of human being who has certain duties, functions, privileges mystically set apart from other human beings. I don't at all assume that kind of romantic position. I'm not impressed with the social or political life a poet leads outside of his profession if he doesn't produce poems. He is a poet because he composes poetry; he is a playwright because he writes plays, not because he is out killing people or getting himself killed. That is a different role entirely, one for another type of citizen, I mean a soldier.*[15]

Clark condemned committed literature because it inevitably becomes dated quickly, and attempted to point out the superiority of the intellectual over the man of action: "How many great poems, he asks, "have come out of men going to fight? How many plays? Do you think you have to see how people are killed before you can go and write about them?"[16] The writer is protean in his imagination; he can enter into a part without ever having lived the part. "I don't believe a writer has to be actively engaged in battles for his vision of them to be valid."[17] But soon we come to suspect that the real reason Clark was so eager to separate the role of a writer from that of a fighter (or man of action) is because he was afraid of the repercussions for the poet. In his creative record of the events leading to and including the civil war, Clark appeared too eager (sometimes, indecently so) to point out that he was merely an observer of the trauma his country was passing through. In his notes to *Casualties*, he wrote:

> *It is well to add that all the factual information about the first of the traumatic changes of government my country has experienced came into my hands after the act. Reacting to all the events as I have done in those poems, I want it therefore understood that I have no previous or prior knowledge of the facts or plans, nor am I altogether convinced I have all of them correct and complete. But I got so close to a number of the actors after the curtain rose, actors some of whom still evoke such mixed response, that I came to be identified by some as playing in the show -- to the extent of being interrogated by the security people. The pity is that*

I have had no part at any time in the drama still unfolding. The most I have done is rush the stage at one point, moved by the simple impulse to help a friend in a bad state of nerves after taking on the lead in a play he could not finish.[18]

Clark's involvement was limited to taking a trip with Christopher Okigbo, a close friend, to Accra to persuade Emmanuel Ifeajuna, another close friend, to return to Nigeria. But even here Clark was anxious to draw a distinction between his own "personal" role and Okigbo's role as the government's "emissary". His poetry too, in its self-dramatization, evinced this excessive concern with preserving the self.

THE RAIN OF events pours down...
Like a million other parakeets, cunning
In their havens out on the lee,
I don my coat of running
Colours, the finest silver and
Song can acquire. Not enough,
I unfurl my umbrella, resplendent as any
That covers a chief...[19]

Such narcissistic indulgence in the midst of a national disaster vitiated Clark's ability to become an authentic voice of the collective experience. With such strenuous effort devoted to showing his own non-commitment, so much attention to preserving his own skin, Clark could hardly show genuine grief at the loss of his friends, all of them partisans in the conflict. Here, in tepid poetry, is Clark singing (one can hardly say lamenting) the death of his most intimate friends:

"LOOK, JP,
How do you tell a skull
From another?" asked Obi.
"That this, could you find where he fell,
Was Chris, that Sam, and
This there is the sand
Of course Emman. Oh yes,
How does one tell a cup on the floor
From another, when the spirit is emptied?"
And the goblets are legion,
Broken upon the fields after Nsukka.[20]

Clark was in fact too afraid to pass judgement, on events and personalities. His position during the conflict brings out the validity of Soyinka's contention that

When the writer in his own country can no longer

function as conscience, he must recognise that his choice lies between denying himself totally or withdrawing to the position of chronicler and postmortem surgeon.[21]

Instead of Okigbo's hortatory role as "town-crier", Clark adopted the more subdued voice of a chronicler, as a sure way of controllin his emotions. The chronicler's is also a valid communal voice and if Clark had steadfastly maintained this position *Casualties* would have been the closest we have to emotions recollected in tranquilli But he went further to distance himself from the collective experience and attempted to further subdue this communal voice by writing in fables. Had he confronted the crisis, Clark would have been abl to give his poems a wide social significance, but instead, he place a restraint on his emotions and succeeded only in emasculating his poetry. Here is his account of the events of January 15, 1966:

At club closure
Antelopes slept, for lions snored
Then struck the five hunters...

And so one morning
The people woke up to a great smoke.
There was fire all night,
But who lighted it, where
The lighter of the fire?

Fallen in the grass was the lion,
Fallen in the forest was the jackal
Missing by the sea was the shepherd-sheep,
His castrate ram in tow,
And all around was the blood of hounds.[22]

A writer in a homogeneous society would have no problem in usin fables, for they are common property of the society and are generall understood by all, or at least the elders of the society. Writing for a heterogenous society whose centrifugal forces had just led to a war, Clark had to construct his own world of fables, and supply copious notes without which the poems fail to present a comprehensiv picture. For instance the poem above becomes much clearer once we read Clark's notes about the persons whom the animals represent. Ye Clark's efforts only buttress Chinua Achebe's assertion that a "writ in the African revolution who steps aside can only write footnotes o a glossary when the event is over."[23] The most successful poems in *Casualties* are those in which Clark found his world of fable too constraining and opted for a direct voice, as in this evocative rendering of the general violence.

In the streets the jungle-geared jeeps roar,
Glint of SMF, flare of mortar, tremor
Of grenades occupying ministry
And market, and like hens, men go
To bed with the setting sun, the sun
Setting over the land, afraid
It will set on their individual days.[24]

For the most part Clark's technique precludes such empathy with his society, and robs his poetry of genuine anguish and sympathy. Having denied himself the crises of commitment, his poetry is, for the most part, an affair of the head rather than of the heart, as Clark himself unwittingly confesses at one point: "... the sowing is of hearts I knew/ And hold closest still in my head." Clark needs to be reminded of Matthew Arnold's dictum: "Genuine poetry is conceived and composed in the soul."[25] Clark also approached the whole question of the artist's social commitment as an intellectual exercise, and, not surprisingly, missed its full implications. True, as a result of the war he has grudgingly admitted that there is bound to be a relationship between the artist's work and the kind of life he leads as an individual, and that no writer can completely turn his back on what is happening in his society in order to keep his art clear. Yet Clark would not recognize a dynamic relationship between the artist and his society, and between art and revolution.

... When you say a writer should be socially committed, it all depends on what you are talking about. There are many kinds of functions he can perform in society. The very business of giving pleasure is a social function. The point is that in producing art you are ordering material and creating something new which you hope will not just show life, not just help to interpret life, but also probably help to direct life. This is where the commitment is. I am saying that it is the quality of the work, it is what you do with your talent, that matters. It is what you create that matters, not any extra duties you take on as a politician, priest, prophet, or bomber-pilot.[26]

Chinua Achebe has always had a social conscience. Unlike poetry which often deals with the most private emotions, the novel has to be rooted in society. Yet, if Achebe faced the problem of social commitment very early, he opted for a gradual approach, until he was confronted by the crisis of 1966. In 1962 Achebe did not see much chance of the Nigerian writer influencing his society immediately, mainly because the writing was so new:

If one writes good novels or writes good poetry, he's bound to have an influence but I don't see much of it at present, only the beginnings, you see, in the schools and that sort of thing, which shows that perhaps the next generation will be influenced by what we write today.[27]

Achebe's first direct statement on the social responsibility of the African writer was made in a lecture in 1964 in which he set out to examine the role of the writer in what he called "the new Nigeria". But instead of dealing with a peculiarly Nigerian problem, Achebe dealt with what he considered the major problem all over the world, the debate between white and black over black humanity:

It is inconceivable to me that a serious writer could stand aside from this debate, or be indifferent to this argument which calls his full humanity in question. For me, at any rate, there is a clear duty to make a statement. This is my answer to those who say that a writer should be writing about contemporary issues -- about politics in 1964, about city life, about the last coup d'etat. Of course, these are legitimate themes for the writer but as far as I am concerned the fundamental theme must first be disposed of. This theme -- put quite simply -- is that African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African peoples all but lost in the colonial period, and it is this dignity that they must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost. There is a saying in Ibo that a man who can't tell where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he dried his body. The writer can tell the people where the rain began to beat them. After all the novelist's duty is not to beat this morning's headline in topicality, it is to explore in depth the human condition. In Africa he cannot perform this task unless he has a proper sense of history.[28]

Thus Achebe saw the African writer as a cultural nationalist,

explaining the traditions of his people to a largely hostile world, and a teacher, instilling dignity into his own people. He restated this position later the same year at the Conference on Commonwealth Literature held in Leeds, in a paper entitled "The Novelist as Teacher". He refused to believe that an African writer could be alienated from his society. In Africa, Achebe said, society expected the writer to be its leader. This did not mean that a self-respecting writer would take direction from his audience; indeed he must remain free to disagree with his society if it became necessary. However, the writer's duty was more fundamental than that of the journalist. The period of subjection to alien races had brought disaster upon the African psyche. In fact, all over the continent people still suffered from the traumatic effects of their confrontation with Europe:

> *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 denigration and self-denigration. And it is essentially a question of education in the best sense of that word. Here, I think, my aims and the deepest aspirations of my society meet. For no thinking African can escape the pain of the wound in our soul... The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. In fact he should march right in front. ... I for one would not wish to be excused. I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past -- with all its imperfections -- was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them. Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct from pure. But who cares? Art is important but so is education of the kind I have in mind. And I don't see that the two need be mutually exclusive.*[29]

This is commitment with a difference, for it enabled Achebe both to eat his cake and have it. A cultural nationalist was most unlikely to run into trouble with his own society. Indeed, in an independent Nigeria it meant that the writer was averting his gaze from the must urgent problems in his society. Lewis Nkosi, in his report of the proceeding of the Kampala Conference in 1962, seemed to have Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958) in mind when he severely censured West African writing in general for its "idyllic and pastoral" stance; its refusal to engage energetically in social criticism and its strictures equally applicable to Achebe's third novel, *Arrow of God* (1964):

> *... this literature has declined to come to grips with corruption, slum life, the social flaccidity of the Nigerian bourgeois class and all the other social ills of the urban society.*[30]

Even *No Longer at Ease* (1960), Achebe's second novel, which Nkosi singled out for praise for its social criticism was most unlikely to embroil the author in partisan politics. All the political parties in Nigeria routinely condemned corruption and made vague promises at election times to wipe it out. In the series of crises which his country was experiencing in the early sixties Achebe was, in the political jargon of the time, stressing "the things that unite us" rather than those which divide us. But the problems were becoming too urgent to be so easily glossed over. In 1965, Achebe came out with another essay entitled "The Black Man's Burden", in which, as if the need for the writer to lead his people to reclaim their dignity had become even more urgent, he opened with an avowedly militant statement reaffirming his cultural commitment.

> *Without subscribing to the view that Africa gained nothing at all in her long encounters with Europe, one could still say, in all fairness, that she suffered many terrible and lasting misfortunes. In terms of human dignity and human relations the encounter was almost a complete disaster for the black races. It has warped the mental attitudes of both black and white. In giving expression to the plight of their people, black writers have shown again and again how strongly this traumatic experience can possess the sensibility. They have found themselves drawn irresistibly to writing about the fate of black people in a world progressively recreated by white men in their own image, to their glory and for their profit, in which the Negro became the poor motherless child of the spirituals and of so many Nigerian folk tales.*[31]

Achebe went further, however, by saying that now the greatest task confronting the African writer was that he should "expose and attack injustice" all over the world, but particularly within his own society in Africa. African writers should be free to criticize their societies without being accused of supplying ammunition to the enemies of Africa. "We must seek the freedom to express our thought and feeling, even against ourselves, without the anxiety that what we say might be taken in evidence against our race". Africans had for too long behaved as criminals in a law court. "We have stood in the deck too long pleading and protesting before

ruffians and frauds masquerading as disinterested judges".[32] In the charged atmosphere of 1965 to be a social critic was to run afoul with the government. Too much attention had been focused on the denouncement of his novel of social criticism, *A Man of People*, in which a military coup put an end to a particularly corrupt political regime, a literary *tour de force* which became reality the same month the novel was published. Achebe had disavowed any foreknowledge of the coup, thus denying himself a romantic place as a writer who helped stage a coup. Yet his courage ought not to be lightly dismissed, for he was at that time holding a Federal government job as Director of External Service of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation and it is difficult to see how he could have expected to keep his job in view of his withering attack on the then ruling political class. It is difficult not to credit the narrator's anger to Achebe himself:

> *As I stood in one corner of that vast tumult waiting for the arrival of the Minister I felt intense bitterness welling up in my mouth. Here were silly ignorant villagers dancing themselves lame and waiting to blow off their gunpowder in honour of one of those who had started the country off down the slopes of inflation. I wished for a miracle, for a voice of thunder, to hush this ridiculous festival and tell the poor contemptible people one or two truths. But of course it would be quite useless. They were not only ignorant but cynical. Tell them that this man had used his position to enrich himself and they would ask you... if you thought that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth.*[33]

Achebe could have foreseen the military coup of January 1966, but there is very little doubt that subsequent events caught him, like everyone else in the country, unawares. The murder of several hundred Ibo in parts of the Northern Region in May was followed two months later by a counter-coup in which most of the military officers who were killed were Ibo, including Achebe's brother. In September, there was another massacre of Ibo in the North, and Colonel Ojukwu asked all Ibo people to return to their homes in the East. As events moved inexorably towards war, Achebe became an Ibo nationalist. When war actually broke out, he became a diplomat and acted as one of the roving ambassadors for the Republic of Biafra.

Achebe carried his new combative mood into his definition of the role of the African writer, which he now said should be that

of a social transformer and revolutionary. In a paper presented at a political science seminar in Makerere in 1968, entitled "The Duty and Involvement of the African Writer", he said that a writer is only "a human being with heightened sensitivities" and, therefore, "must be aware of the faintest nuances of injustice in human relations. The African writer cannot therefore be unaware of or indifferent to the monumental injustice which his people suffer". African writers are committed to a new society which will affirm their validity and accord them identity as Africans, as people;

> *they are all working actively in this cause for which Christopher Okigbo died. I believe that our cause is right and just. And this is what literature in Africa should be about today -- right and just causes.*[34]

Achebe now was almost too willing to label himself a protest writer. Indeed, all African literature, he said, was protest writing:

> *I believe it's impossible to write anything in Africa without some kind of commitment, some kind of message, some kind of protest. In fact I should say all our writers, whether they are aware of it or not, are committed writers. The whole pattern of life demands that you should protest, that you should put in a word for your history, your traditions, your religion, and so on.*[35]

Achebe's new commitment went beyond admonishing his society. He directly sought to remould it. It was no longer sufficient to record the past and the current revolutions and changes that were going on, the African writer must seek to determine Africa's future. "This is important because at this stage it seems to me that the writer's role is more in determining than merely reporting. In other words, his role is to act rather than to react".[36] Perhaps because of his involvement in the fate of his society, Achebe readily reversed his view of that society. Whereas in *A Man of the People* he had called the common people "the real culprits" of the social malaise in Nigeria, two years later he saw them as the vanguard of the revolution. If anything, it is now the turn of the artist to learn one or two things from his society:

> *This has been the problem of the African artist: he has been left far behind by the people who make culture, and he must now hurry and catch up with them -- to borrow the beautiful expression of Fanon -- in that zone of occult instability where the people dwell. It is there that customs die and cultures are born. It is there that the regenerative powers of the people*

are most potent. These powers are manifest today in the African revolution, a revolution that aims towards true independence, that moves towards the creation of modern states in place of the new colonial enclaves we have today, a revolution that is informed with African ideologies. What is the place of the writer in this movement? I suggest that his place is right in the thick of it -- if possible, at the head of it. Some of my friends say: "No, it's too rough there. A writer has no business being where it is so rough. He should be on the sidelines with his notepaper and pencil, he can observe with objectivity". I say that a writer in the African revolution who steps aside can only write footnotes or a glossary when the event is over. He will become like the contemporary intellectual of futility in many other places, asking questions like: "Who am I? What's the meaning of my existence? Does this place belong to me or to somebody else? Does my life belong to me or to some other person?" -- questions that no one can answer.[37]

Yet Achebe was wrong to have labelled as "creative" any activity engaged in by a creative writer, for this is nothing short of denigrating art itself. Achebe dismissed as a half-truth the belief that creativity is something that has to come from a kind of contemplation, quiet, or repose, and that it is difficult to keep the artistic integrity of one's writing while being totally involved in the political situation:

I think there is a myth about creativity being something apart from life, but this is only a half truth. I can create, but of course not the kind of thing I created when I was at ease. I can't write a novel now; I wouldn't want to. And even if I wanted to, I couldn't. So that particular artistic form is out for me at the moment. I can write poetry -- something short, intense, more in keeping with my mood. I can write essays. I can even lecture. All this is creating in the context of our struggle. At home I do a lot of writing, but not fiction, something more concrete, more directly related to what is going on. What I am saying is that there are forms of creativity which suit different moments. I wouldn't consider writing a poem on daffodils particularly creative in my situation now. It would be foolish; I couldn't do it.

What Achebe could do during the war -- the pieces he wrote for Radio Biafra, the lectures he gave all over the world, and the poems he composed -- could not be labelled art just because Achebe was an artist. Commitment is not an alchemy which automatically transmutes base metal to gold. Achebe's war poems show a closeness of observation and an intense emotional involvement in the situation. They are therefore more authentic than Clark's poems as a record of the communal anguish in spite of the glaring fact that Achebe lacks Clark's gift of rhythm. But neither a photographic attention to details nor an emotional involvement in people's suffering is sufficient, in itself, to make a good work of art. Here is a typical example, from the volume indiscreetly labelled *Beware Soul Brother:*

No Madonna and Child could touch
that picture of a mother's tenderness
for a son she soon would have to forget.
The air was heavy with odours
of diarrhoea of unwashed children
with washed-out ribs and dried-up
bottoms struggling in laboured
steps behind blown empty bellies. Most
mothers there had long ceased
to care but not this one; she held
a ghost smile between her teeth
and in her eyes the ghost of a mother's
pride as she combed the rust-coloured
hair left on his skull and then --
singing in her eyes -- began carefully
to part it... In another life this
must have been a little daily
act of no consequence before his
breakfast and school; now she
did it like putting flowers
on a tiny grave.[39]

Achebe's attempt to bare the horrible face of war by using the unusually delicate fingers of tenderness is defeated by his lack of artistic tact. The opening and closing statements of the poem represent Achebe's comment on the situation but surprise us only by their overt sentimentality. Achebe's determination to pack in all the details sink the body of his poem in banality. The careful inventory of horrid details soon dull our feelings. Achebe's simple technique of presenting a situation and then reflecting on it is appropriate for the world of his novels, where we are enchanted by the voice of the narrator-as-village-elder, wise, disciplined and resigned. In those poems, such as "Beware Soul Brother" (too long to be quoted here) and "Something and Something" where he attempts to be at his most profound, Achebe never got beyond

his village outlook on life.

My old man had a saying
which he said more and
more as he neared his
end. Whenever Something stands
he would say, Something Else
stands by it. At first I
did not give it too much
thought until one day it
hit my face that never, not
even once, did I hear my old mother
breathe another word in their
little disputes after he said
that. I began then to worry
about its meaning. What was
Something and what the
Something Else? Neither
my old man mor my old
mother was much help... Later
by itself it slowly crystallized
for me long after they died, the old man
and my mother too. I knew then
it was so true it just could not
be explained. And so one day
in a minor quarrel I told
my wife: "You see, my darling,
whenever Something stands Something
Else must stand beside it."
"I knew," she said, taking it
at once to mean there was
another woman in my life and
I don't think I have yet
heard the last of it.[40]

I we call this poetry it is because we are using the same rule which forces us to apply the generic word mankind to all men, irrespective of their quality. Let us hope that we have heard the last of Achebe as poet. It is for the type of jig-saw puzzle above -- prose parading as poetry -- that Achebe won the Commonwealth poetry prize in 1972, a sad comment on the state of poetry in the Commonwealth. One hopes Achebe will recognize this prize for the will-o-wisp that it is, and not allow himself to get bogged down in the quagmire in an attempt to follow its fickle beckoning.

Achebe made his debut as a short story writer and his two stories of the war mark an intensification of the powers demonstrated in his first volume of short stories, *Sacrificial Eggs*. The very title of

the latest volume, *Girls at War*, reflects the change that had taken place, for *machismo* was the guiding principle in the world of Achebe's earlier fiction. The female protagonist of the titular story was meant to be a "mirror reflecting a society that had gone completely rotten and magotty at the centre,"[41] a picture of the corruption of idealism at a time of stress. "Civil Peace", the other story, records Achebe's own joy at being alive, even if beaten and deprived. The protagonist, Jonathan Iwegbu, considered it a miracle to be alive where so many had died:

> *... he made the journey to Enugu and found another miracle waiting for him. It was unbelievable. He rubbed his eyes and looked again and it was still standing before him. But, needless to say, even that monumental blessing must be accounted also totally inferior to the five heads in the family. This newest miracle was his little house in Ogui Overside. Indeed nothing puzzles God! Only two houses away a huge concrete edifice some wealthy contractor had put up just before the war was a mountain of rubble. And here was Jonathan's little zinc house of no regrets built with mud blocks quite intact! Of course the door and windows were missing and five sheets off the roof. But what was that?*[42]

Even after armed robbers had taken his money in a midnight raid, Iwegbu refused to sink into despair. He woke up the following morning and thanked God:

> *"I count it (the robbery) as nothing," he told his sympathizers, his eyes on the rope he was tying. "What is egg-rasher? Did I depend on it last week? Or is it greater than other things that went with the war? I say let egg-rasher perish in the flames. Let it go where everything else has gone. Nothing puzzles God."*[43]

Confirmation of the new direction in Achebe's writing would have to wait until the publication of his much-promised novel. "I have come to the belief", he said immediately after the war,

> *that you cannot separate the creativity from the revolution that is inevitable in Africa. Not just the war, but the post-independence period in Africa is bound to create in the writer a new approach. This, maybe, was sharpened by the war, but in my case it was already there.*[44]

African literature in its present form, he said, is really not sufficiently relevant to the issues of the day. "I think what is

meaningful is what takes into account the past and the present". African writers cannot forget the past because the present comes out of it; but they should not be mesmerized or immobilized by their contemplation of the past to the exclusion of the contemporary scene.

> *The most meaningful work that African writers can do today will be to take into account our whole history: how we got here, and what it is today; and this will help us to map out our plans for the future.*[45]

Achebe could now understand the plight of South Africans who used to say that they could not afford to write novels -- only poetry or short stories. During the war he had found, like them, that there was no time. Everything was too pressing, novel writing was a luxury, and poetry seemed to meet the demands of the time. Even two years after the end of the war, Achebe had not felt the urge to write a novel. On the relationship between politics and the writer, he said that some measure of politics is bound to intrude into writing, especially in Africa. He himself could not abstain, although he would not deny the right of any writer to do so. For him, however, "one can only avoid commitment by pretending or by being insensitive".[46]

Wole Soyinka's name has become synonymous with the African writer's social and political commitment. His writings, actions and fate poignantly illustrate the crisis of commitment in African literature. Right from the beginning Soyinka's work had been influenced by social awareness. His first major play, *A Dance of the Forests*, was written to commemorate Nigerian independence. But instead of using the opportunity to rejoice complacently with his society, Soyinka professed to have detected a dark cloud on the national horizon, based on his belief in the cyclical pattern of history, and he seized the occasion to issue a stern warning to his countrymen. His was the first prophetic voice we had in Nigerian writing. It was based on a vision of the future which was securely rooted in contemporary social awareness and naturally grew out of it. A character in *A Dance*, speaking from eight centuries back, warned Nigerians:

> *War is the only consistency that the past affords us. It is the legacy which new nations seek to perpetuate. Patriots are grateful for wars. Soldiers have never questioned bloodshed. The cause is always the accident and war is the Destiny.*[47]

This, we need to remind ourselves, was written in 1959. To Soyinka at this stage the duty of the artist was primarily to anticipate

events and warn his society, and thereby achieve a change in social ethos. This was his position in his other plays and in his poetry until the cataclysmic events of 1966. Living at Ibadan in Western Nigeria and himself a Yoruba, Soyinka was very close to the center of the series of crises which bedevilled his society immediately after independence. This, added to a natural disposition for taking sides, prevented Soyinka from being merely a spectator of the events. As one crisis succeeded another Soyinka was moved to warn his society through his play *The Road* and his poem "Idanre" that the nation was firmly launched on the road to disaster. In another play, *Kongi's Harvest*, written also in 1965, Soyinka attempted to show through the subjugation of a traditional ruler by a new-style dictator that more was involved than just the old giving way to the new:

> *This is the last*
> *Our feet shall touch together*
> *We thought the tune*
> *Obeyed us to the soul*
> *But the drums are newly shaped*
> *And stiff arms strain*
> *On stubborn crooks, so*
> *Delve with the left foot*
> *For ill-luck; with the left*
> *Again for ill-luck; once more*
> *With the left alone, for disaster*
> *Is the only certainty we know.*[48]

To warn of impending disaster was one thing, to devise the best way of coping with the disaster once it had materialized was another thing. Confronted with the reality of contemporary Africa and the pattern of violence which was stalking his society Soyinka was forced to examine anew the duty of the writer to his society. The new position he reached was manifested in what was his first overtly political action -- he was arrested for having held up a radio station, but was later freed for want of evidence. Soyinka's new position was hammered out in a series of essays he published in 1966. In one, he took up issues with Senghor who had attempted to separate poetry from action, the politician from the intellectual The poet, Soyinka said, had to be a man of action if he wanted to discharge his contemporary responsibility. In the crisis of contemporary Africa there could be no separation of the writer from the citizen.[49] In another essay, later read before a gathering of African writers in Sweden, he attempted to rally his fellow writers to action:

> *It seems to me that the time has now come when the African writer must have the courage to determine what alone can be salvaged from the recurrent cycle of human stupidity.*[50]

If the writer "feels committed or involved or if he feels a compulsion within himself to write the truth, then he surely has the right to try and build the kind of society in which he can write this beautiful literature, these beautiful words".[51] Soyinka had extended his definition of social commitment to the point that the artist had to seek expression outside a work of art, in action.

Yet Soyinka was at a loss what to do. Faced with the horror or the massacre of the Ibo in 1966, he temporarily fled the country.

I
I borrow seasons of an alien land
In brotherhood of ill, pride of race around me
Strewn in sunlit strands. I borrow alien lands
To stay the season of a mind.[52]

The agony of the mind could not be assuaged in Germany whose pogrom against the Jews was too close to what had happened in Nigeria. So, Soyinka returned home to confront the problem exquisitely posed in that poem, "Civilian and Soldier", in which Soyinka had to confess that "in that hour of impartial death" the poet had no adequate answer to the threat posed by the soldier.

I hope some day
Intent upon my trade of living, to be checked
In stride by your apparition in a trench,
Signalling, I am a soldier. No hesitation then
But I shall shoot you clean and fair
With meat and bread, a gourd of wind
A bunch of breasts from either arm, and that
Lone question -- do you friend, even now, know
What it is all about?[53]

Soyinka ran into trouble in his attempt to unravel the tragic web of the crisis in which his society was enmeshed. The civil war broke out the same year *Idanre* was published. Soyinka wrote in the Nigerian newspapers condemning the war and pointed out its futility. He went to the East to see the Biafran leader, allegedly to drive the same lesson home. On his arrival back in Federal territory he was arrested and detained. Soyinka spent over two years in detention, much of it in solitary confinement. He has not explicitly stated that he developed a new artistic creed while in prison but considering the direction in which his subsequent works have moved, one may cite the example of the South African writer Dennis Brutus now living, like Soyinka, in exile. Brutus, in solitary confinement, did a lot of rethinking about technique and expression which persuaded him to seek a simpler idiom:

The first thing I decided about my future poetry
was that there must be no ornament, absolutely none.

> *And the second thing I decided was you oughtn't to write for poets; you oughtn't even to write for people who read poetry, not even students. You ought to write for the ordinary person: for the man who drives a bus, or the man who carries the baggage at the airport, and the woman who cleans the ashtrays in the restaurant. If you can write poetry which makes sense to those people, then there is some justification for writing poetry.*
>
> *And therefore, there should be no ornament because ornament gets in the way. It becomes to fancy-schmancy; it becomes overelaborate. It is, in a way, a kind of pride, a self-display, a glorying in the intellect for its own sake, which is contemptible.*[54]

An extreme position, perhaps impossible to maintain for long, but probably the best example of the desire to subjugate the individual to the collective voice. The closest Soyinka came to this recognition was in his statement:

> *Among so many other things the anguish of being in prison is also a deep need to communicate with one's fellow human beings. It is a need that suffocates one at times.*[55]

This need is manifested in *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, the volume of poems which he wrote in prison. It is indeed an irony of fate that Soyinka's reputation for "obscurity" and "difficulty" will drive many potential readers away from even attempting to read the book. Here, Soyinka abandoned the world of private mythology which made his earlier works so difficult and achieved a new poetic idiom, direct and simple. In attempting to define a situation involving direct ethical conflicts, Soyinka did not even try to demonstrate neutrality or fulfil some arbitrary concept of objectivity. Unlike Clark who disguised his feelings in fables, Soyinka moved to confront issues and personalities directly, often barely succeeded in restraining his anger and bitterness in the process. In extravagant terms he lauded Christopher Okigbo, Victor Banjo and President Nyerere of Tanzania, all considered enemies of Nigeria. In contrast he condemned the Nigerian leader, General Gowon, and his followers for lacking social conscience. Soyinka did not see Christopher Okigbo and Victor Banjo as traitors to their country. Instead, each suffered because he was a man of vision, and each was a superman, like the poet himself:

He wondered in a treasure-house
Of inward prizes, strove to bring
Fleeting messages of time
To tall expressions, to granite arches
Spanned across landslides of the past

Even in the blind spoliation, amidst
Even the harrying of flames, he wished
To regulate the turn of hours
He lit the torch to a summons
Of the great procession[56]

Yet Soyinka reached beyond his private grief and empathized with the collective tragedy of a whole country trafficking in death. Imprisonment did not provide a safeguard against the anguish of death, as civil war raged in Nigeria. The pain of war and the death of thousands are conveyed in such a poem as "Flowers for My Land", published while Soyinka was still in jail, in which he made use of a protest song of the late 1960's against American involvement in Vietnam. In condemning human wastage all over the world, Soyinka's familiar tone of despair in the face of communal tragedy plumbs the lowest depths:

From a distant
Shore they cry, Where
Are all the flowers gone?
I cannot tell
The gardens here are furrowed still and bare.
Death alike
We sow. Each novel horror
Whets inhuman appetites
I do not
Dare to think these bones will bloom tomorrow.[57]

Soyinka, alone in prison, could yet register the anguish of his society more authentically than Clark who was free in the society. Soyinka, already drenched by the rain of events, was naturally more attuned to those who were still in the rain and had little time for Clark's self-fascination. Indeed, he accepted that his sufferings enabled him to establish the deepest rapport with his society in particular and mankind in general.

We embrace
The world and I in great infinitudes.
I grow into that portion of the world
Lapping my feet, yet bear the rain of nails
That drill within to the archetypal heart
Of all lone wanderers.[58]

This empathy strengthened Soyinka in prison and enabled him to survive the worst rigours of isolation. Confinement could have shrivelled up his mind, but it only opened it the more to the still sad music of humanity.

Soyinka came out of prison in a combative mood, bitter and angry. The hysterical tone of *The Man Died* (1971), the prose account of his prison experience, works against the book when it is compared with the more disciplined *Shuttle*. Indeed it is unfair to compare the two books, for Soyinka was much aware of the distinction between art and propaganda. *The Man Died* was conceived as both a personal account and a political manifesto, Soyinka's open challenge to the men who had incarcerated him. It was a call to arms in defense of justice, an expose of the wide-flung operations of the secret police in Nigeria who were far more insidious, Soyinka believed, than many Nigerians had ever dreamt. It was not only a program for action, it was the only type of political action left for the writer given the political circumstances in his country:

> *... If the "road to silence" is ever taken by me it will only be because I see the continuation of struggle through only one path and that path is closed. I do not believe in futile, token twitches nor in that fabricated lather of sweat in which so many of our "radicals" are lavishly coated. Much, to move away from generalities, depends on whatever results from the publication of my book The Man Died, the account both of my prison experience and an indictment of the criminals who tried to silence me. In a very crucial way the book is a test of the people themselves, it is a test of those who claim to think on behalf of the people and a gauge of the potential for the only kind of political action which I foresee -- with no alternatives. I have no time for the reformist role currently played by the Nigerian intelligentsia, to the great delight of the established power who have become practised in the deception of tokenism.*[59]

The fate of *The Man Died* illustrates both the dangers of political commitment, even on such a limited scale, in a totalitarian regime, and the limitations of art as an instrument for revolutionary change. The Nigerian government which readily allowed *A Shuttle* to be sold freely in the country promptly put an embargo on the sale of *The Man Died*. Government hostility as a result of the book has forced Soyinka to go into exile, a Nigerian example of a familiar world-wide pattern in which the logic of the

artist's commitment leads to his physical exile from his society. On the other hand, *The Man Died* has almost made Soyinka's name a household word in Nigeria. The title is familiarly cited, although the fact that the book is not openly sold in the country means that only a few Nigerians have been able to read it, certainly many fewer than those who have read his plays and poetry. The greater attention which *The Man Died* has received may have forced Soyinka himself to recognize the limitations of art not only as an instrument for revolutionary change, but even in restoring moral values to the world:

> *It goes beyond limitations. A much better word would be impotence. I reached this point some time ago -- I shall not say exactly when -- a point which others have reached before me, and many more will, the point that is, when I recognized art and literature for what they are -- manifestations of the human spirit in much the same way as engineering works, town planning, or aerospace designs. Their capacity to implant or restore eternal values are a mere bonus at best. This is not however, a negative view of artistic or creative pursuits. On the contrary, it is their safeguard and self-validation. Where works of literature deal with eternal values, ideals etc. or the lack of them, they provide merely a testament of the author's own vision -- what is, what is possible, what could or should be, etc. etc. In one form or another it would be a eulogy to the existing conditions or an indictment. The exercise of the literary function may serve the writer -- and perhaps a few followers -- to keep in view what the ends of humanity are. They may be eventually spurred to action in defense of those ends. In our own society especially it is essential to recognize this. At the moment literature and art can only function as a KEEP IN VIEW tray on a bureaucrat's desk. Once this is accepted, the writer does not fool himself into thinking that all is said and all is done that need be said and done. He holds himself in readiness -- accelerating the process where he can -- when the minutes in that file can be made a live project. No other attitude seems possible to me. The only other choice is to accept the patronizing tolerance of those who offend against those ends, to be a jester in the court of overweening and besotted power.*[60]

The awareness that a writer in a totalitarian regime who sensitively responds to the political moment of his society must appear

to be deliberately courting disaster is not confined to Nigeria. The title of Alexander Solshenitsyn's new book, *When the Calf Horns the Oak*, which is an attack on the Soviet "totalitarian" regime as he experienced it personally as a writer, is derived from an old Russian proverb. Its meaning is that all efforts by powerless individuals against an established regime only lead to the individuals getting hurt without the regime being dismantled. Although the book was written in 1967, when Solshenitsyn was still living in the Soviet Union, he has added new chapters in exile. Because his commitment accepts its own hopelessness from the beginning and every committed writer must guard against this danger, the logic of his awareness is to push him deeper into self-insulation and withdrawal. Soyinka saw this danger, which is why while recognizing that disillusionment and even despair are perhaps inevitable for the committed writer, he allowed no alternative to commitment:

> *It is not possible to look at the events which surround one's life without constantly seeing in the background the mocking grin of history. There is something depressing about the repetitiousness of history. Action is exercise of will. Revolutionary action is the ultimate expression of will, an assertion of the human intellect as an instrument of choice, change, self-destination. But isn't that very resolution contradicted by awareness of familiar, wearisomely familiar patterns in history? It is because I believe the forces of history may be confronted that I believe in social and political action... Expressions of pessimism where they crop up are simply a statement of truth which grows from a particular situation, but they do not mean acceptance of that situation. They do not preclude challenge.*[61]

It must be frustrating in the short run for a writer to know that his lonely opposition to the policies of the government of his country has no political effect, but is part of his mission as an intellectual to continue to uphold moral principles. Indeed this is indispensable to the moral and political health of the society. For some time to come the political situation in Nigeria and indeed all over Africa, will tax to the utmost the writer's emotional involvement in the fate of his society. Because the writer, as an intellectual, is a part of the political elite, not only must he continue to be influenced by politics, he must not shy away from influencing the political direction of his society. As the most sensitive point within his society, the writer should

not define his duty as merely to register the mood of his society. He must attempt to influence it. As a result of the civil war Nigerian literature has gained in depth, because, in contrast to their earlier innocence, our writers now confront the world with an inburnt knowledge of human limitations and a deep sense of the mystery of human life. "Good poetry", William Empson has observed, "is usually written from a background of conflict."[62] Our writers must accept conflict, personal and social, as an indispensable ingredient of life and not attempt to withdraw from it. As Albert Camus said in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech:

> *Today, everything is changed, and even silence is dangerous. Every artist today is embarked upon the contemporary slave galley... the artist, like everyone else, must bend to his oar without dying if possible.*[63]

Footnotes

1. Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse (eds.), *African Writers Talking* (London, 1972), p. 135.
2. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 9, (July 1970), p. 33.
3. *Labyrinths* (London, 1971), p. 25.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-4.
5. Lancelles Abercrombie, *The Idea of Great Poetry* (London, 1925), p. 13.
6. *Labyrinths*, p. 67.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
11. *Palaver*, Interviews with Five African Writers in Austin, Texas (Austin, 1972), p. 17.

12. *A Reed in the Tide* (London, 1965), p. 12.
13. *African Writers Talking*, p. 72.
14. *Palaver*, p. 19.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 20
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, p. 72
18. *Casualties* (London, 1970), p. 54.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
21. Per Wastberg (ed.) *The Writer in Modern Africa* (Uppsala, 1968), p. 21.
22. *Casualties*, p. 12.
23. *Palaver*, p. 6.
24. *Casualties*, p. 23
25. Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism* (London, 1964), p. 279.
26. *Palaver*, p. 21
27. *African Writers Talking*, p. 6.
28. *Nigeria Magazine*, 81 (June 1964), p. 157.
29. John Press (ed.) *Commonwealth Literature* (Leeds, 1965), pp. 204-5.
30. Lewis Nkosi, *Home and Exile* (London, 1965), pp. 117-8.
31. *Presence Africaine*, XXXI: 59 (1966), p. 135.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
33. *A Man of the People* (London, 1966), p. 2.
34. Wilfred Cartey, (ed.) *The African Reader: Independent Africa* (New York, 1970), p. 163.

35. *Palaver*, p. 7.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
39. *Beware Soul Brother, and other Poems* (Enugu, 1971), p. 8.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
41. *Girls at War and Other Stories* (London, 1972), p. 41.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
44. *African Report*, XVII: 5 (May 1972), p. 25.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *West Africa*, 3rd March 1972, p. 249.
47. *A Dance of the Forests* (London, 1963), p. 57.
48. *Kongi's Harvest* (London, 1967), p. 10.
49. *African Forum* I:4 (Spring, 1966), pp. 54-64.
50. *The Writer in Modern Africa*, p. 20.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
52. *Idanre and Other Poems* (London, 1967), p. 52.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
54. *Palaver*, p. 29.
55. *The Man Died* (London, 1973), p. 12.
56. *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (London, 1972), p. 88.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-8.

59. *Transition*, VIII:42 (1973), p. 63.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

62. William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York, 1955), p. XV.

63. Quoted by Peter Jemmison in "The Action Writer: Social Commitment in Literature", *The Writer's World* (ed.) Elizabet Janeway (New York, 1969), p. 176.

PROFESSOR KOLAWOLE OGUNGBESAN lectures in the Department of Engli and Modern Languages, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.