

LANDSCAPE AS SYMBOL IN THE POETRY OF CHRISTOPHER  
OKIGBO, JOHN PEPPER CLARK, WOLE SOYINKA, AND  
LENRIE PETERS: AS RELATED TO THE  
POETRY OF W. B. YEATS

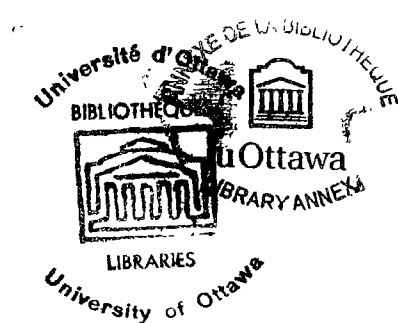
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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
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## CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

Hezzy Obiajuru Maduakor was born at Isulo, Nigeria, on July<sup>5</sup>, 1940. He attended the University of Ibadan from 1962 to 1965, and obtained an Honours Degree in English Literature. He went to the University of Leeds in 1971 and received an M.A. in English Literature in 1972. He studied English at the University of Ottawa from 1972 to 1977. He has taught English Literature in colleges in Nigeria, and in universities in Gabon and Canada. His article "Conquering the Abyss of the Crypt: Survival Imperative in Soyinka's Shuttle" has appeared in the Fall (1977) issue of the literary periodical World Literature Written in English.

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Ottawa. Last but not the least, I thank my wife, Chiji, whose moral support was often a source of inspiration.

## PREFACE

Yeats's prestige as a major poet needs no justification. What has not been generally acknowledged is the persistent echo of his literary image in the literature of emerging nations. In the work of certain poets from Nigeria and Gambia, for example, to name but two countries in the former Anglo-Saxon West Africa, Yeats's presence can be sensed. Yet it has been the tendency of most commentators on Nigerian poetry to view Eliot as the single major influence that affected the imagination of modern Nigerian poets. In his essay "African Literature IV: Ritual and Ceremony in Okigbo's Poetry" (1968), for example, the Guyanese critic O. R. Dathorne is convinced that there are echoes of Eliot's "East Coker" in Okigbo's "Heavensgate."<sup>1</sup> The second half of Dathorne's title is sufficient indication of the role that Yeats, too, might have played in Okigbo's development as a poet; poetry is for Yeats as it is for Okigbo a "ritual" performance. "How but in custom and ceremony/Are innocence and beauty born?"<sup>2</sup> Yeats wrote in "A Prayer for My Daughter."

In The Chosen Tongue (1969), Gerald Moore, the British expert on African and Caribbean literature, confronts the reader also with a seemingly indisputable presence of Eliot in Okigbo's poetry. Moore writes:

Okigbo rehandles such words as laughter, dream, light, presence, voice, blood, exactly as Eliot teases out all the possible meanings of beginning, middle and end in "East Coker." Both poets use fragments of Catholic liturgy mixed with others from the classical world, paganism and magic.<sup>3</sup>

But "paganism" and "magic" in the above quotation are fraught with Yeatsian reminiscences. In the essay "Magic" (1901), Yeats declared his belief in magic, thereby foreshadowing the role that magical incantation, and magical evocation of images were bound to play in his own poetry; and in several essays and articles he indicated that pagan rituals and pagan traditions of Ireland formed an enormous reservoir of literary resources for a prospective Irish poet. Moore hesitated, however, to press Eliot's case too far towards the end of his passage on Eliot and Okigbo:

Finally, nothing could be less like Eliot's dry world-weary tone than the lyrical, passionate voice of Okigbo with his rich darting imagery and abundant youth.<sup>4</sup>

Yeats had criticized Eliot's poetry in terms similar to Moore's language in the above quote. Eliot's "rhythmical flatness" bored Yeats, just as his "world-weary tone" might have bored the Yeats who believed strongly in the unlimited possibilities of life in the here and now. He rejected the suspended compensation in a transcendental world for the bruises suffered by the body in the present material existence. Moore is steering uneasily towards Yeats when he notices in Okigbo, in the passage just cited, the qualities that Yeats had laboured to bestow on his own poetry--"the lyrical, passionate voice."

If Okigbo did not inherit this quality from Eliot, he might have owed it to Yeats without his knowing it. "Because I need a passionate syntax for passionate subject-matter," Yeats affirmed, "I compel myself to accept those traditional metres that have developed with the language."<sup>5</sup>

Another important champion of Eliot's cause in the development of Nigerian poetry is the Nigerian critic Sunday Anozie. Okigbo, he said, imitated Eliot's technique in "Debtors' Lane,"<sup>6</sup> but Anozie noted that Okigbo's poetry betrays signs of a "break" with Eliot from "Silences" and the poems written after 1962 and 1964 when "Silences" was composed.<sup>7</sup> The French Symbolists, Anozie suggested, displaced Eliot in Okigbo's esteem;<sup>8</sup> but this revelation is not all the story, as Anozie himself was aware. Poetry, he wrote, was beginning to appeal to Okigbo from "Silences" onwards as "a means of simply describing popular feelings and aspirations in the idiom of the people."<sup>9</sup> Yeats claimed that in matters relating to the use of common speech in lyric poetry, English poets followed his lead: "Then, and in this English poetry has followed my lead, I tried to make the language of poetry coincide with that of passionate, normal speech."<sup>10</sup>

This thesis argues that, while Eliot's influence may be apparent, Yeats's impact is equally substantial in the critical assessment of the work of the first generation of modern poets in Nigeria, notably Christopher Okigbo, John Pepper Clark, and Wole Soyinka. Indeed, the movement

known as the Irish Literary Revival was an important stimulus in the effort of these poets to express themselves, their nation, their country, and their land and life. Lenrie Peters of Gambia can be included among them for he was their literary colleague; and he benefited from the patronage enjoyed by these Nigerian writers from the Mbari Publishing Company.

By the late fifties, the literary journal Black Orpheus, founded at Ibadan in 1957 by Ulli Beier, began to publish the work of the first generation of modern poets in Nigeria, particularly that of Christopher Okigbo, John Pepper Clark, and Wole Soyinka. The journal benefited from Ibadan's privileged position as a centre of cultural awareness in the Nigeria of the early fifties; Nigeria's first university was founded there in 1948. Okigbo, Clark, and Soyinka were educated at this university and they tended, during their student days, and after the completion of their education there, to cling together as members of an informal cultural organization known as the "Mbari Writers Club." A close link existed between the Club and the journal; indeed, the Club took its name from a publishing arm of the journal, the Mbari Publishing Company. Although Lenrie Peters of Gambia was educated in England, he maintained contact with both the journal and its publishing ally, the Mbari. Peters's poems first appeared in the eleventh number of Black Orpheus,<sup>11</sup> and the first edition of his poetry was published by Mbari in 1964.

Christopher Okigbo was born in Ojoto in the former Eastern Nigeria in 1932. Between 1951 and 1956 he read Classics at the University of Ibadan (then known as University College). Shortly after his graduation from Ibadan in 1956, he was appointed Latin instructor at the Fiditi Grammar School, near Ibadan. In 1960, he became Assistant Librarian at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he met the British poet, Peter Thomas, with whom he maintained an intimate relationship until the end of his own life in 1967. In 1962, Okigbo returned to Ibadan in his capacity as the Nigerian representative for the Cambridge University Press.

When the Nigerian Civil War broke out in 1967, Okigbo joined the Biafran military command as a major, and died in action a few months later while defending the Nsukka campus of the university which he had served earlier as Librarian. His early verse publications including "Heavensgate" (1962), "Limits" (1964), and "Silences" (1965) were brought together by Heinemann in 1971 under the title Labyrinths.

John Pepper Clark, whom Okigbo met at Ibadan during his university days there, was born in 1935. A native of Ijaw in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, Clark studied English at Ibadan under Professor Molly Mahood between 1955 and 1960. His interest in poetry showed up early: he was the founder and the editor of the undergraduate poetry magazine, The Horn, which published some of his early

experiments in verse as well as those of Okigbo and Soyinka. On leaving Ibadan in 1960, Clark joined the Nigerian Civil Service for a brief period as Information Officer, and then became Features Editor for an influential national newspaper in Lagos, the Daily Express. Clark won the Parvin Fellowship in 1963 to study at Princeton University.

He is presently Professor of English Literature at the University of Lagos, Nigeria, and Co-editor (with the Nigerian Scholar, Abiola Irele) of the literary journal Black Orpheus. His publications include the verse plays, Song of a Goat, The Masquerade, and The Raft, published collectively as Three Plays (1964); Ozidi (1966); the travelogue, America, Their America (1964); two books of verse, A Reed in the Tide (1965), and Casualties (1970); and a book of critical essays, The Example of Shakespeare (1972).

Wole Soyinka, considered sometimes the most versatile genius among the Ibadan poets, was born in 1934 at Abeokuta in the former Western Nigeria. He read English at the University of Ibadan from 1952 to 1954, and at the University of Leeds between 1954 and 1957. On leaving Leeds in 1957, Soyinka worked in London for two years as play reader for the Royal Court Theatre; he then returned to Nigeria in 1960, where his verse drama, A Dance of the Forests, produced in October 1960 to commemorate Nigeria's independence from Britain, won for Soyinka a national recognition as

a dramatist.

Soyinka held the Rockefeller Research Fellowship at the University of Ibadan between 1961 and 1962, and lectured in English literature at the University of Ife (1962-1964) and at the University of Lagos (1965-1967). In August 1967, he was detained by the Federal Military Government of Nigeria on charges of treason. He remained in prison until October 1969.

He is presently living in Ghana where he is the editor of the literary magazine, Transition. Soyinka is the author of several plays including A Dance of the Forests, The Lion and the Jewel, The Swamp-Dwellers, The Trials of Brother Jero, and The Strong Breed (published collectively under the title Five Plays in 1964); two novels, The Interpreters (1965) and Season of Anomy (1973); a prison memoir, The Man Died (1972); and two books of poetry Idanre and Other Poems (1967) and A Shuttle in the Crypt (1972).

Lenrie Peters was born in Bathurst, Gambia, in 1932. He moved to the West African city of Sierra Leone in 1949, and travelled to England in 1952 to study medicine at Trinity College, Cambridge. He qualified as a doctor in 1959, and specialized in surgery at a hospital in Guildford, England, before returning to Gambia in 1969, where he is presently practising medicine. He has written a novel, The Second Round (1965), and two books of verse, Satellites (1967) and Katchikali (1971).

The particular aspect of the work of these poets which responded readily to the influence of Yeats and his colleagues of the Irish Literary Revival is their treatment of landscape, using the term in the broad sense in which it connotes setting, or using it more specifically, land and life.

Gerald Moore's essay, "The Negro Poet and His Landscape,"<sup>12</sup> published in 1967, drew my attention to the subject of landscape in modern African poetry. But Moore's essay is panoramic in scope, and his application of landscape narrow: it is restricted to the physical accessories of setting only, and it ignores the interrelationship between landscape and the human life and culture that animate it. Moore, however, did establish an important hypothesis: the Negro poet, he says, has an intimate contact with nature. "What seems to be involved," he writes, "is a complete identification of the poet with the constituent features of the landscape around him."<sup>13</sup> Such assertions recall what Yeats called the "Celtic passion for Nature."<sup>14</sup>

In The Chosen Tongue, Moore returns casually to the persistence of landscape in the work of Negro poets. About Okigbo he writes:

Okigbo is able to draw upon a living knowledge of pagan ritual and symbolism, set in the familiar landscape of his forest village. It is above all the constant presence of this landscape which makes it such nonsense to dismiss Okigbo as 'non-African.'<sup>15</sup>

The key concept in this passage is the fact that Okigbo utilizes the familiar landscape of his forest village. The familiar landscape of their own land has served Clark, Soyinka, and Peters as settings for their own individual creative expressions. Yeats, too, had realized much earlier that his own poetry was to be inscribed in a setting that was familiar. "I cannot believe," he wrote, "in the reality of imaginations that are not inset with minute life of long familiar things and symbols and places."<sup>16</sup>

Apart from Okigbo's lyrical intensity and the ritual tonality of his verse, both of which evoke echoes of Yeats, it is in their attitude to landscape, in their sense of locality, that the impact of Yeats on the Nigerian poets is most likely to be felt. This point has not generally been noticed. The British critic A. G. Stock, and the Cameroonian scholar Thomas Melone have written one short article each on Yeats and the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe. Stock's essay is entitled "Yeats and Achebe" (1968),<sup>17</sup> and Melone's "Architecture du Monde ou Chinua Achebe et W. B. Yeats" (1970).<sup>18</sup> The orientation of both essays is historical and philosophical; it is not fundamentally related to landscape. Nevertheless, the discussion in both works of Yeats's theory of history and his concept of eternal repetition in the evolution of human destiny as they are related to Achebe's novel, Things Fall Apart (1958), is informative.

Yeats is not a nature poet in the conventional sense of the term; nor does he indulge in the description of

nature for the sake of description. Images derived from his own environment function in his poetry as symbols. Shakespeare, whom he admired--in later life Yeats cultivated the heroic pose of tragic joy in *Lear*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*--seems to have set an enviable example in this direction:

Shakespeare's people make all things serve their passion, and that passion is for the moment the whole energy of their being--birds, beasts, men, women, landscape, society are but symbols and metaphors, nothing is studied in itself.<sup>19</sup>

Using Synge as an instance of a writer whose technique most approximated his own, Yeats wrote:

He [Synge] tells us of realities, but he knows that art has never taken more than its symbols from anything that eye can see or the hand measure.<sup>20</sup>

The following testimony from Explorations is equally illuminating:

A writer will indeed take what is most creative out of himself, not from observation, but experience, yet he must master a definite language, a definite symbolism of incident and scene.<sup>21</sup>

More recently, the American poet Richard Wilbur has commented aptly on the function of landscape in modern poetry. In "Poetry and the Landscape" (1956) Wilbur says that the modern poet writes through nature but not about it. "Among genuine poets today," he writes, "nature-imagery is frequently used to concretize ideas or moods, but in a hit-and-run fashion, and without any of the extension and geographic thoroughness of, say, Shelley."<sup>22</sup> Yeats admired Shelley, but Shelley's towers and caves operate in his own

poetry as symbols. Shelley's caves evoke intimations of the cave in Yeats's own mind. Similarly, Shelley's towers become significant for Yeats only when they are seen in relation to the Norman tower in Ireland or to Yeats's own personal tower in Ballylee. Like his mythology, Yeats's symbols are rooted in the Irish soil. In the same way, images are localized in large measure in Okigbo, Clark, Soyinka, and Peters; and they operate in their poetry as symbols.

In developing this thesis, I have tried to establish in the initial chapter, "The Example of Yeats," the parallels between the growth of national consciousness in Ireland during Yeats's era and the development of a similar national awareness in Nigeria during the time of Okigbo, Clark, and Soyinka. Yeats's image of himself as poet of the Celtic twilight recalls the African poets' consciousness of their role as poets of the African twilight. Their knowledge of Yeats and their awareness of his sense of literary responsibility to his native land are also established. Yeats's understanding of the term "landscape" is further clarified.

In Chapter II, "Landscape of Identity," it is argued that the most important indication of Yeats's imaginative sympathy with Irish landscape is his decision from The Rose onwards to use this landscape as setting for his poetry. A similar tendency in Okigbo, Clark, Soyinka, and Peters may have been owed to Yeats's initiative in this direction.

Chapter III, "Intimations of Apocalypse," discusses the national disasters which are of a historical or political kind in both Ireland and Nigeria, and how these disasters are reflected in the poetry they inspire. Significant is the fact that the Nigerian Civil War reminded the Nigerian poets of Yeats and the Irish Civil War. In both the war poems of Yeats and the Nigerians, including Peters, apocalyptic images feature as intimations of the disaster that threaten their respective land and life.

Yeats's epic on the Irish mythological character, Oisín, may have encouraged Soyinka to write an epic on Ogun, a leading figure in the mythological history of his own people, the Yorubas of Western Nigeria. Ogun moves through a landscape of war, while Oisín operates in a landscape of "repose." Thus, Chapter IV is entitled "Ogun and Oisín: Contrasting Faces of Mythological Landscape."

In Chapter V, "locus amoenus" (pleasant place) is properly visualized as an antidote to a poet locked up in a landscape of war. Yeats has written that images call up their opposites. Reality, for example, is bound to call up unreality. "Locus amoenus," discussed in Chapter V, appears as the logical complement of the epic engagements of Chapter IV.

In Chapter VI, my perspective shifts from the poet's concern with the world of his own environment to his pre-occupation with the reality within. Art, Yeats has written, mirrors "the reality that is within our own minds, and

the reality that our eyes look on."<sup>23</sup> Yeats, Okigbo, Soyinka, and Peters are intensely subjective, while Clark is pre-eminently objective. The subjective artist reckons with the reality within. Okigbo calls those of his lyrics dealing with this area of experience poetry of "inward exploration."<sup>24</sup> Its landscape is the interior world of the soul.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>O. R. Dathorne, "African Literature IV: Ritual and Ceremony in Okigbo's Poetry," Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 5 (July 1968), 81.

<sup>2</sup>W. B. Yeats, The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 187.

<sup>3</sup>Gerald Moore, The Chosen Tongue (London: Longmans, 1969), p. 176. Hereafter cited as The Chosen Tongue.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>W. B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 522. Hereafter cited as Essays.

<sup>6</sup>Sunday Anozie, Christopher Okigbo: Creative Rhetoric (London: Evans, 1972), pp. 33-34.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 102-4.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>10</sup>Essays, p. 521.

<sup>11</sup>See the poems "Wider Excursions," and "Clawed Green Eyed," Black Orpheus 11 (1963), 61-64.

<sup>12</sup>Black Orpheus, 22 (August 1967), 33-44.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>14</sup>Essays, p. 173.

<sup>15</sup>The Chosen Tongue, p. 176.

<sup>16</sup>Essays, p. 296.

<sup>17</sup>A. G. Stock, "Yeats and Achebe," Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 5 (July 1968), 105-11.

<sup>18</sup>Thomas Melone, "Architecture du Monde ou Chinua Achebe et W. B. Yeats," Conch, 2 (March 1970), 44-52.

<sup>19</sup>W. B. Yeats, Autobiographies (London: Macmillan, 1955), pp. 291-92.

<sup>20</sup>Essays, p. 304.

<sup>21</sup>W. B. Yeats, Explorations (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 160. Hereafter cited as Explorations.

<sup>22</sup>Richard Wilbur, "Poetry and the Landscape," in The New Landscape in Art and Science, ed., Gyorgy Kepes (Chicago: Paul Theobald and Co., 1956), p. 88.

<sup>23</sup>Explorations, p. 184.

<sup>24</sup>Marjory Whitelaw, "Interview with Christopher Okigbo, 1965," Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 9 (July 1970), 33.

## CHAPTER I

### THE EXAMPLE OF YEATS

"For the emerging nations of today the case of Ireland is of considerable significance," observed Richard Kain in a brief but illuminating essay on Yeats and his contribution to Irish nationalism. This significance, Kain said, is both political and cultural. Ireland, he points out, echoing the late President Kennedy, who had made a similar observation, was the first country to achieve independence in the twentieth century. "As a nation achieves independence," Kain continues, "it faces the question of its own identity. It must re-evaluate its cultural heritage, and accept, modify, or reject elements which it cannot assimilate in its new condition."<sup>1</sup>

In the case of Ireland, the question of giving its cultural heritage a sympathetic and yet an objective appraisal was a task undertaken by the Irish Literary Movement of the late nineties; but the need for such a re-evaluation was felt many years before Ireland attained an autonomous political status in 1922. Yeats's role in this movement for literary revival was crucial. In 1892 he founded in London "The Irish Literary Society," and in Dublin "The National Literary Society," whose immediate objective was to reform Ireland's literary image, to educate the

masses, acquaint them with the literature of their own people, and, thereby, to develop in them a sense of pride for the work of their own writers. Such a move, Yeats felt, was a necessary preliminary in the task for cultural revival. Also Yeats intended to foster through these societies "a more imaginative tradition in Irish literature, by a criticism at once remorseless and enthusiastic."<sup>2</sup> Ernest Boyd says of these two societies that they were of "a non-political, intellectual, and yet national kind." This co-operation of nationalism and literature, outside of politics, he continues, "resulted in the renaissance known as the Irish Literary Revival."<sup>3</sup> There had indeed been organizations in Ireland with similar aims, but such aims were not infrequently frustrated by the incompatible qualities of the co-operating parties. Thus, the result of the uneasy alliance between nationalism, literature, and politics in the Young Ireland Movement of the 1840's was bad art. Yeats's achievement lay in his effort to give the Irish Literary Revival a meaningful leadership, to channel its energies into a fruitful exploration of the truly Celtic element in art. True art, Yeats believed, must be founded, not on the sentiments of patriotism, but, rather, on the folk tradition, the folk imagination of the people. In Ireland he found this imagination still vital. Ireland, he wrote, is a nation which is still very much alive with fairy tales and "country spiritism."<sup>4</sup>

For a nation in search of its identity this return to the traditional lore is a common enough phenomenon, and so, too, as Kain is aware, is the inescapable conflict between aesthetics and propaganda. Yeats took issue with the "Young Ireland" poets of the forties. Thomas Davis, Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, Edward Walsh, and their colleagues of The Nation (the official organ of the Young Ireland Movement) had, in the opinion of Yeats, imbued their poetry with a high sense of moral instruction, or "rhetoric," which alienated Yeats from the poetry of the English Victorians. Yeats said of these "Young Ireland" poets that they "turned poetry . . . into a principal means of spreading ideas of nationality and patriotism."<sup>5</sup>

It was not, however, their didactic imagination alone that alienated Yeats from the Young Irelanders. He was equally dissatisfied with their incompetence in matters of technique. Of the three versifiers named above (for the application of the word "poet" to them would have been unthinkable to Yeats), Yeats seemed to be hardest on Thomas Davis, whom he called "an orator influencing men's acts, and not a poet shaping their emotions."<sup>6</sup> The excerpt from Davis's poetry which Yeats inserted in the Introduction to his Irish anthology, A Book of Irish Verse, may not be emphatically representative of the weaknesses he castigated.<sup>7</sup> But for an unparalleled example of the thematic and technical inadequacies of "Young Ireland" poetry, one may refer to the work of a less well-known member of the

movement, Dennis Florence MacCarthy. His poem, "Come, Liberty, Come," appeared in The Spirit of the Nation, a volume dedicated to Irish nationalism through the influence of Gavan Duffy, and edited by Martin McDermoth. In his review of this book which was published in 1894 Yeats singled out MacCarthy's poem for special scrutiny. "Come, Liberty, Come" epitomizes for Yeats, he said, the technical irresponsibility of "Young Ireland" poetry. It begins:

'Come, Liberty, come! we are ripe for thy coming;  
Come freshen the hearts where thy rival has trod;  
Come, richest and rarest! come, purest and fairest,  
Come, daughter of science! come, gift of the god!'<sup>8</sup>

Yeats called this poem a "jigging doggrel [sic]."<sup>9</sup> It savours, for him, of sentimental lamentation, and has neither in its theme nor style the essential material on which a truly national literature could be founded. For a writer to be genuinely national, he must draw his themes and inspiration from the legends and folk traditions of his people; and in order for him to be a true artist he must be conscious of style.

In the light of Yeats's criticism of "Young Ireland" poetry, whose unofficial laureate was Thomas Davis, it is rather paradoxical that he should include him among that true brotherhood (which also includes Mangan and Ferguson) with whom he wished to be identified:

Nor may I less be counted one  
With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,  
Because, to him who ponders well,  
My rhymes more than their rhyming tell  
Of things discovered in the deep.<sup>10</sup>

If he was indeed a true brother of this company who sang to

"sweeten Ireland's wrong," he did excel in his own art the performance of this brotherhood by escaping, in his own words, "the chief temptation of the artist, creation without toil."<sup>11</sup> Yeats did acknowledge the achievement of the "Young Ireland" poets in spite of his adverse criticism of their work. The movement helped, he said, "to build up an audience for four important poets--Mr. Aubrey De Vere, William Allingham, Clarence Mangan and Sir Samuel Ferguson,"<sup>12</sup> and one may add, for Yeats himself.

The twentieth century is, as it has been in Ireland, an important milestone in the cultural and political history of Africa. It witnesses the transition, for so many African states, from colonial to independent status; and it is an era that marks the emergence of cultural awakening in the continent. As in Ireland, such an awakening preceded political independence by several years, but it did not begin, ironically, on the African continent itself. In 1932 a group of West Indian students in Paris, namely Etienne Léro, René Menil, and Jules Monuerot, founded a journal Légitime Défense, in which they rebelled against a colonial assimilationist policy which was intended to fashion out of enlightened minds in France's overseas territories a new species of Frenchmen in dark skin. By 1934 this strident cry of revolt was well received by other Negro students in Paris. Aimé Césaire from Martinique, Leon Damas from Guiana, Leopold Senghor and Birago Diop-- both from Senegal, and each a candidate for assimilationist

transformation, responded to the call for self-determination on a personal, if not yet a national, level, and for reassertion of the personality and human dignity of the Negro.

Césaire, Damas, and Senghor founded another journal, L'Etudiant Noir (1934), as an organ for the hopes and aspirations of this cultural pressure group. Thus was born the movement later known as Negritude which, in its simple definition, means the owning up, on the part of the Negro, of the fact of his Negroness, his celebration of this fact, and his cultivation of all facets of experience that vindicate the validity of his Negro-culture. A more formal definition is provided by Leopold Senghor: he sees Negritude as "the cultural heritage, the values, and above all the spirit of Negro-African civilization."<sup>13</sup> The term "Negritude" was not applied to the movement until Aimé Césaire made the plangent declaration in his surrealist epic Return to my Native Land (1938) that

my negritude is not a stone,  
nor deafness flung out against the clamour of the day  
my negritude is not a white speck of dead water  
on the dead eye of the earth  
my negritude is neither tower nor cathedral.<sup>14</sup>

There is here the same motivation that inspired the Celtic Revival, although the difference remains one of mood. The Negritude students' assertion of their national consciousness in Paris was more militant, more blatant than the effort of the Irish writers of the Young Ireland school to express this consciousness in Ireland.

Negritude reached West Africa through its exponents from Senegal and the Ivory Coast, such as Leopold Senghor, Birago and David Diop, and Bernard Dadie. But by the thirties, when the ideas that nurtured it were taking root in Paris, a group of young intellectuals from Nigeria and Ghana had already returned home from the United States of America after completing their education there. These included Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. They imported from America, or, to be specific, from Marcus Garvey, a fiery brand of nationalism which eventually crystallized itself into the shibboleth of "African Personality" (considered usually in Anglo-Saxon West Africa the equivalent of Negritude). Zik, like Thomas Davis and Gavan Duffy, was the founder and editor of an influential nationalist newspaper, The West African Pilot, which spread nationalistic sentiment among its readers and encouraged, like its Irish counterpart, The Nation, patriotic verse from all those who could sing the pride and sorrows of Mother Africa.

Prominent among these "Young Africa" poets was Dennis Osadebay of Nigeria. Osadebay's volume of poems, significantly entitled Africa Sings, was published in 1952. In one poem, which he calls "Who Buys my Thoughts," Osadebay affirms that his purpose is to express

the throb,  
Of Young Africa's soul,  
The soul of teeming millions,  
Hungry, naked, sick,  
Yearning, pleading, waiting.<sup>15</sup>

One other poem in the collection is representative of Osadebay's inspiration. It pays tribute to all the women of Africa who were engaged in revolutionary struggle:

Proud mothers of the coming age,  
'Tis good to find you now engage  
Your minds and time your lives to raise  
Above the level of byegone days.

'Tis good to see you play your part  
With spirit and undaunted hearts;  
It gives Young Afric's throbbing soul  
A glimpse of a bright and glorious goal.<sup>16</sup>

It is significant that these effusions of the "Young Africa" poets have many things in common with the Negritude poets who were writing at about the same time. From Senegal came David Diop, whose poem "Africa" is typical in its title of the nationalistic tag that was in vogue in those days. In this poem Diop, who was born in Paris of Senegalese parents, rhapsodizes on the Africa he had never seen:

Africa my Africa,  
Africa of proud warriors in the ancestral savannahs,  
Africa my grandmother sings of  
Beside her distant river  
I have never seen you  
But my gaze is full of your blood.<sup>17</sup>

It is intriguing to consider how Yeats would have reacted to this kind of poetry. And one can surmise his response from his criticism of the work of the "Young Ireland" poets which has much in common with Osadebay and the poets of the Negritude school. Interesting, too, is the fact that the period dominated by the "Young Ireland" poets in the Irish Literary Revival recalls the literary chauvinism of the poets of "Young Africa," while the phase

dominated by Yeats corresponds with the era in modern African literature dominated by such writers in West Africa as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, J. P. Clark, Lenrie Peters, and George Awoonor Williams. Consider, for example, this poem "Freetown" by Gladys Casely-Hayford of Ghana, who belongs to the pioneer phase in the evolution of modern poetry in West Africa:

Freetown, when God made thee, He made thy soil alone  
 Then threw the rich remainder in the sea.  
 Small inlets cradled He, in jet black stone.  
 Small bays of transient blue He lulled to sleep  
 Within jet rocks, filled from the Atlantic deep.  
 Then God let loose wee harbingers of song.  
 He scattered palms profusely, o'er the ground  
 Then grew tall grasses, who in happy mirth  
 Reached up to kiss each palm tree that they found.  
 'This is my gem!' God whispered, 'this shall be  
 To me a jewel in blue turquoise set.'<sup>18</sup>

Casely-Hayford's point is that Freetown, the capital city of the West African state of Sierra Leone, is God's own city; and a similar idea, about his country, Eire, is the theme of the poem "Eire" written by the "Young Ireland" poet Dr. Drennan. Notice too the similarity in tone, feeling, imagery, and diction between it and the poem "Freetown." Both lean heavily on the biblical myth of creation:

When Eire first rose from the dark-swelling flood,  
 God blessed the green island, and saw it was good;  
 The emerald of Europe, it sparkled and shone,  
 In the ring of the world, the most precious stone.  
 In her sun, in her soil, in her station thrice blest,  
 With her back towards Britain, her face to the west,  
 Eire stands proudly insular, on her steep shore,  
 And strikes her high harp 'mid the ocean's deep roar.<sup>19</sup>

In Nigeria especially, the moderns are critical, like Yeats, of the literary endeavour of their forebears. Osadebay and Senghor occupy the rank of novices to the

poetic craft in the opinion of such writer-critics as J. P. Clark and Wole Soyinka. These have not accorded to the art of the pioneer poets even the critical sympathy that the juvenilia of most writers enjoy at the hands of those already established in the craft. For J. P. Clark, the major weakness of Osadebay's poetry is his penchant for propaganda and his failure to give language a fresh exploration.<sup>20</sup> Soyinka considers the writings of Senghor and his fellow Negritude poets an exercise in "narcissistic inflation."<sup>21</sup> The relative merits of such charges will be examined presently.

Meanwhile, one may observe that Yeats was objective in his appraisal of the "Young Ireland" poets. He appreciated what was good in Clarence Mangan and even in Thomas Davis. Mangan's poem "Dark Rosalen" and Davis's "A Plea for Love" and "Mary Bhan Astor" he gave unqualified praise. He included these selections from Davis in his anthology of Irish poetry. There has not, on the other hand, been a corresponding display of this objective insight in the modern African poets' evaluation of the work of their predecessors. Michael Dei-Amang of Ghana, who is usually included among the "Young Africa" poets, has at least one poem, "Let's Live in Peace," which is comparable to the best that J. P. Clark has written:

Where the rivers of time  
 Are fouled by native stress and strife,  
 And man becomes his own enemy,  
 Life is distraught  
 And its colourful scenes  
 Are marred and stained  
 By dark-brown blots of violent blood.<sup>22</sup>

The dominant mode of communication here is image and symbol. Time is imaged as a river susceptible to contamination by the germs of human strife. In the second half of the poem, river embraces life in its symbolic connotation. Life is a river whose natural beauty may be marred by the stains of bloodshed. The poem's rhythm allows itself to be controlled by emotion, rather than by message. Technically, the poem is superior to some of Clark's early poems. Dei-Anang's poem is an appeal for peaceful co-existence among nations. It is emotionally more sincere and technically more satisfying than J. P. Clark's "Cuba Confrontation," which is inspired by a threat to peaceful co-existence among men on the international level:

With my hammer head  
 I'll smash up the earth,  
 Said  
 The lizard  
 And up reared  
 The aroused crown,  
 And then down  
 The blow  
 Came--like a courtesan's head,  
 Deep in her pillow.<sup>23</sup>

Clark's poem is a comment on what he calls "that terrible shadow-boxing game"<sup>24</sup> between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cuban Crisis of the early sixties, but whether he is poking fun at that mock tournament or not his style here is rather trivial.

The parallel so far cited between the development of the Literary Revival in Ireland and the growth of a similar literary awareness in English-speaking countries of West Africa is not merely accidental. The modern African writer has cause to see himself and his country in very much the same light that Yeats saw himself and his Ireland, known to many as "history's cruel country."<sup>25</sup> Ireland's sorrows recalled Africa and her burden. As the only country in Western Europe which had suffered from colonial oppression, Ireland resembled Africa, a continent that is still suffering from one form of foreign domination or the other. Ireland with her poverty and her technological deficiencies recalled the poverty and the technological primitivism of all the countries of the Third World in general. Ireland with her priests and the deep religious consciousness of her people recalled the fanatical fury of colonial Christianity in many Christian countries of West Africa, if not indeed in all the non-Islamic states of Africa as a whole. As England's oldest colony, Ireland was also the oldest victim of British imperialism. Writing of Edmund Spenser's colonial policy in the Ireland of the sixteenth century, Yeats said:

there was no right, no law, but that of Elizabeth, and all that opposed her opposed themselves to God, to civilization, and to all inherited wisdom and courtesy, and should be put to death.<sup>26</sup>

The confusion of justice with the public interest of the mother country which Yeats pointed out here is but part of the injustice which a nation under colonial

tutelage must suffer. Of comparable significance is the devastating consequence of cultural colonialism--the suppression of the language, literature, and folk beliefs of the colonized race. In Ireland especially the damage done to the Irish mind by a colonially-oriented system of education is of so permanent a nature that Daniel Corkery, himself a victim of this system, has vehemently analysed its effects on the mind of an Irish-born child in his book on Synge. The education of such a child, he says,

instead of sharpening his gaze upon his own neighbourhood . . . distracts it, for he cannot find in these surroundings what his reading has taught him is the matter worth coming upon. . . . His education, instead of buttressing and refining his emotional nature, teaches him rather to despise it.<sup>27</sup>

Yeats was concerned about the fact that the educated class, especially the intellectual circle at Trinity College, had nothing but contempt for the literature of their own people. Professor Dowden, who encouraged this attitude towards Irish literature, was often the target of Yeats's criticism.<sup>28</sup>

The Irish colonial experience seems to have set the pattern to be followed by all other nations of the British Empire. In Africa, too, where the British were in power for nearly two centuries, there was a colonially-inspired suppression of the cultural heritage of the people. "We were not encouraged," says the Gambian poet Lenrie Peters, in a letter to me dated June 3, 1975, writing of his childhood education, "to learn about or be proud of our African heritage. Not only was it thought of as barbarous

and unworthy, but one sensed a supreme indifference to local culture." The reaction of the Irish intellectuals to the political and cultural servitude of their nation to England would appear to be a worthy example to be emulated by the younger nations of the Empire eager to aspire to a similar status of cultural independence. A common necessity, therefore, seems to have inspired both the Celtic movement and the literary renaissance that is taking place in so many newly independent nations of Africa today. The analogy between this upsurge of literary awakening in Nigeria and the Celtic Renaissance especially has been noticed by some critics of African literature. "Clearly, Nigerian literature now has a history," observed Patrick Holland in a review article on an anthology of public statements by Nigerian writers, "a period of ferment similar to Ireland's earlier Literary Renaissance, behind it."<sup>29</sup> Thus, one may infer that just as Yeats saw himself even up to the end of his life as a poet of the Celtic twilight, one could consider such African writers as Okigbo, Clark, Soyinka, and Peters, poets of the African twilight. The wonder, however, is that Yeats did not anywhere in his writings include Africa as one of the richest repositories of folk wisdom. He knew of the story of Mungo Park and his travels into the heartland of Africa;<sup>30</sup> was familiar with the myths surrounding the legendary traveller of Sudanese extraction, Leo Africanus, with whom he identified himself in later life;<sup>31</sup> but the apparent neglect of

Africa's folk resources is important, considering the tribute he constantly paid to India, Greece, Scandinavia, and other countries which once cherished or still do cherish the folk traditions of their own people. In the garden of the world's imagination, Yeats wrote in the vivid style of his early prose

there are seven great fountains. The seven great cycles of legends--the Indian; the Homeric; the Charlemagnic; the Spanish . . . the Arthurian; the Scandinavian; and the Irish--all differing one from the other, as the peoples differed who created them. Every one of these cycles is the voice of some race celebrating itself, embalming for ever what it hated and loved. Back to their old legends go, year after year, the poets of the earth, seeking the truth about nature and man, that they may not be lost in a world of mere shadow and dream.<sup>32</sup>

What distinguishes Yeats's art from the work of those he considered to be his literary ancestors is a difference in style. He was--like Davis, Mangan, and Ferguson--a national poet, for Ireland, as he says, had furnished him with the symbols of his creative expression;<sup>33</sup> but in using Ireland he has not ignored the aesthetic obligation his use of this material demanded of him. While recognizing his debts to his immediate and distant predecessors, Yeats emphasized the technical differences between their art and his. The school of imaginative tradition which he founded laid emphasis on style:

We sought to make a more subtle rhythm, a more organic form, than that of the older Irish poets who wrote in English, but always to remember certain ardent ideas and high attitudes which were the nation itself.<sup>34</sup>

National consciousness, which does not necessarily mean the consciousness of a nation's politics, is not in itself an unworthy subject-matter for art, as the example of Yeats and Joyce shows. What distinguishes art from propaganda is style. And style, Yeats says, quoting Sainte-Beuve, is "the only thing that is immortal in literature."<sup>35</sup> With this view in mind one may not take seriously Soyinka's or Okigbo's dismissal of Negritude, or even J. P. Clark's deprecatory remarks on Osadebay's "Young Africa" effusions. These poets, in so far as their work retains the influence of their own environment which is specifically African in character, are Negritudist in orientation, although their Negritude, like Yeats's nationalism, is no longer aggressive nor assertive nor even too self-conscious in inspiration. Their technique, that "subtle organic style" that Yeats demanded of the artist, has elevated their art above the work of "Young Africa" poets, just as this very quality places Yeats's work above the performance of the "Young Ireland" poets. And if such a difference in technique exists between Osadebay's school and their modern counterparts, it is largely due to the latter's exposure to the modern movement in European and American literature. And, in this respect the example of Yeats is of crucial significance. From Yeats and his Anglo-Irish colleagues these recent poets learned to appreciate the literary potential of their native folk tradition, to use elements derived from their own environment and

backgrounds as material for their art, and to take aesthetic pleasure in cultural expression of sense of place.

The African writer's contact with Yeats was first established in the colleges, and later in the universities. In this regard, the role of the University of Ibadan in the popularization of Yeats and other contemporary reputations in Western literature is particularly interesting. Ibadan was until 1962 almost an overseas campus of the University of London. The curricula and the educational structure were almost a replica of the academic ideologies of the University of London. Nigeria's leading writers, Chinua Achebe (1930--), J. P. Clark (1935--), Christopher Okigbo (1932--1967), and Wole Soyinka (1938--), received their training at Ibadan. All, except Okigbo, were English majors. Okigbo studied Classics, but he was Achebe's contemporary and professional colleague. They were all foundation-members of the Mbari Writers' Club, which met frequently at Ibadan in the early sixties.

The English studies at Ibadan were directed for nine years (1954-1963) by the Irish Professor of Literature Molly M. Mahood. Her period of chairmanship of the English Department corresponded with the student days of this first generation of modern writers in Nigeria. She taught or knew in person all the Nigerian writers already mentioned. In a letter to me dated July 1, 1975, she remarked that Yeats was popular with her Ibadan students. They relished, in her own words, "Yeats's rhetoric, his nationalism, and his

satire." Possibly because of these Nigerian writers' early acquaintance with Yeats's work during their student days at Ibadan, the literature that emerges from them shows in its development a remarkable awareness of the Anglo-Irish tradition, in various ways.

In "The Influence of Yeats on Later English Poets," Stephen Spender distinguishes between two kinds of influence. One is what he calls "technical imitation," or the tendency on the part of a neophyte poet to echo or reflect the stylistic idiosyncracies of one writer in his work. Stephen Spender disapproves of this kind of influence. It is generally a bad influence and may have a pernicious effect on the imagination of a practising poet. The other kind of influence is what he calls "the felt presence of one poet in the sensibility and attitudes of other poets."<sup>36</sup> Spender argues that Yeats's reputation will rest on "the felt presence of his attitudes as a spirit working in the writing of other poets."<sup>37</sup> This influence operates first, he says, when we feel that the poet has stated "an external situation which seems to be historically true of ourselves," and, second, when we feel that

we recognize in the situation of the poet's own mind, out of which all his attitudes develop, a centre which seems very close, almost identical, perhaps, with the centre of our own being and feeling. On these levels, influence can leap across centuries. Suddenly modern poets can be influenced by John Donne because they recognize in Donne a consciousness which finds itself in a historic situation in which (however great the dissimilarities) there is an important relationship with our own.<sup>38</sup>

In conclusion, Spender observes that "Yeats again and again

stated the external historic situation which we recognize as that of our own."<sup>39</sup>

One of the poems in which Yeats stated this "external historic situation" is his "The Second Coming." Spender acknowledges the impact of this poem on the poetic sensibility of the poets of the thirties and forties, including himself and Auden. For these contemporaries, this poem represents an "epigrammatic summation"<sup>40</sup> of the decades in which they lived. Echoes of the apocalyptic intimations of the same poem were heard in Africa. Achebe's first novel, Things Fall Apart, published in 1958, is probably the first Nigerian novel, excepting, of course, Tutuola's Palm-Wine Drinkard, which appeared in 1952, to make an impact on the Western world. Achebe's novel owes its title to this poem. On the title page, Achebe inserts the following epigraph from Yeats's "The Second Coming":

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall part; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

Yeats's cyclical conception of history, which was perhaps strengthened by the political instability in his own country, must have reminded Achebe of the overthrow of the traditional civilization of the African village community of Umuofia by alien forces. The historical situation postulated by Yeats's poem "The Second Coming" does not carry the same implication for Spender as it does for Achebe. Spender recognizes in the opening lines of Yeats's poem a historical situation which was true of a Europe whose civilization was

threatened by war, while Achebe perceived in it a situation which is true of Africa's colonial past.

There is in J. P. Clark, too, an awareness of certain historical facts which are shared by Ireland and Nigeria. His latest book of verse, Casualties, was inspired by the Nigerian Civil War. The volume carries an epigraph taken from Yeats's poem "On Being Asked For a War Poem." Quoting Yeats, Clark says, "We have no gift to set a statesman right." This statement, according to John Unterecker, is "Yeats's tongue-in-cheek 'answer' to Edith Wharton's request . . . that Yeats comment on the war [World War I]."<sup>41</sup> Yeats's poem was originally entitled "A Reason for Keeping Silent." Perhaps Clark's second epigraph from Auden, which reads "No metaphors remember, can express/A real historical unhappiness"<sup>42</sup> may explain the true meaning of Yeats's ironic reply to Edith Wharton; for Yeats, like Auden, is aware, as Clark is, that "No metaphor . . . can express/A real historical unhappiness." Clark's own poetry abounds with emotions of "real historical unhappiness." The elegiac tone of the poems in Clark's Casualties derives from historical unhappiness, and it recalls the mood of several of Yeats's poems which were inspired by the unrest in Ireland. It is, therefore, appropriate that the publisher's blurb on the back cover of the Longman's edition of Casualties should emphasize the similarity between Clark's response to the tragic events of his country and Yeats's own reaction to the troubles in Ireland. Clark, says the

publisher, is "a poet who, like W. B. Yeats, saw his country's tragedy whole and transmuted it to poetry through the quality and power of his vision."

Clark's works show evidence, too, of certain traits and characteristics which are associated with the writers of the Irish Literary Revival, namely the use of national subject-matter or local colour. This kind of influence is again not a technical imitation, but a kind that critics refer to as "externalities of literary influence."<sup>43</sup> Yeats, Synge, and Lady Gregory created poetry and drama out of the folksongs, ballads, romances, and legends of Gaelic Ireland. This subject matter probably stimulated the Nigerian writers' interest in their own folklore and legends. Clark, Okigbo, and Soyinka go back to the folk traditions of their own people, and essentially for the same reasons that compelled the Irish writers of the Revival to return to their own folk tradition. Clark frequently integrates the folk beliefs of his native Ijaw into his own drama. The materials out of which his Ozidi and Song of a Goat are constructed, Clark says, are familiar to everybody "from the youngest child to the oldest wise-man, from the oldest grey grandmother to the youngest capable of participation."<sup>44</sup> He evokes Yeats as having indeed set an example in this dramatic exploitation of the folk traditions. Clark sees the affinity between Nigerian drama and the Irish literature of the Renaissance as "cultural coincidence": "I think there is here this cultural coincidence. I rather believe

that people like Yeats are right who say that at bottom all people are the same, all folklores, mythologies, spring from the same sources."<sup>45</sup>

There is also an echo of this Irish influence from a writer who is not usually associated with the Mbari group. Cyprian Ekwensi, the first Nigerian novelist of note, though not the first to be widely acclaimed, acknowledges in the Times Literary Supplement that

Irish writers had won my love through James Joyce whose collection of short stories, The Dubliners I had read and enjoyed.<sup>46</sup>

Ekwensi's first novel, People of the City (1954), is as thoroughly soaked in the atmosphere of life in Lagos, the capital city of Nigeria, as Joyce's Dubliners is saturated with Dublin life.

Wole Soyinka is generally reticent in matters relating to influences which operate in his works. In an interview with Lewis Nkosi he hedged around the question of influence: "I am not aware of any conscious influence on my work, but I can say that if I wanted to aim at any particular kind of theatre, I think, however subconsciously, I might aim at Brecht's kind of theatre, which I admire tremendously, just his complete freedom with the medium of the theatre."<sup>47</sup> Soyinka may be justified in offering this kind of response on the question of influence. Influence, indeed, may not be consciously cultivated, as he says; and a writer may not be aware of all the influences that are at work in his writings. On the other hand, Soyinka's

reaction here may be interpreted as an act of self-defence intended to establish his claim of literary originality. Still, it is possible that a writer may be amenable to an influence not cultivated consciously but which nevertheless intrudes itself into his work without his knowing it. Soyinka may not acknowledge or be aware of the "felt presence" of Joyce's technique in his novel The Interpreters (1965). But the absence of plot in this novel in the conventional sense of the word, his disregard of the linear progression of events in the evolution of the story, his direct presentation of the consciousness of his characters, together with an evocation of these characters' mental response to actions and incidents which Soyinka himself as author has not provided with the traditional narrative transitional "signatures"--these are all a reflection of his readings in Joyce. Joyce emerges also, and unconsciously possibly, in his prison poems, A Shuttle in the Crypt. In the poem "Ulysses: notes from here to my Joyce class," Soyinka sees himself as a Leopold Bloom condemned to wander aimlessly through the labyrinth of the spiritual underworld of his crypt. Soyinka may not, therefore, have said everything that one needs to know when he makes mention of Brecht only as a possible influence on him.

Molly M. Mahood, who was his one-time teacher, knows better. In an article entitled "Drama in New-born States," Mahood says that, generally speaking, "The national dramatic movement in Ireland (England's oldest

colony) has been a natural source of inspiration to African dramatists."<sup>48</sup> Of Soyinka's first play, The Swamp Dwellers, written in 1959 when the author was still a student at Leeds University, Mahood adds that "the influence of Synge and other Anglo-Irish dramatists is strong."<sup>49</sup> She leaves it to Soyinka's readers to decipher the degree and exact nature of this influence, but the establishment of the existence of influence is important in itself. This impact on Nigerian literature of the Anglo-Irish writing has been noticed by other commentators on African literature. In 1966 Soyinka's play The Trials of Brother Jero was performed in London. After witnessing this performance the drama critic of the Times of London saw Soyinka as Nigeria's John Synge. Soyinka's "contribution to English-speaking drama," he says, "could grow into something as important as Synge's opening up of the Western Isles."<sup>50</sup>

Examples from drama are relevant for, as in the literature of the Irish Literary Revival, it happens that very often the African dramatist is also a poet. Such is the case with Clark and Soyinka, who are both poets and dramatists. The influence of Synge, which Mahood detects in Soyinka's Swamp Dwellers, may be traceable, first, to setting, where the marsh landscape of the swamp dwellers recalls the setting of Synge's play, Riders to the Sea; and, second, to the nature of his dramatic material. Soyinka's characters are drawn from the peasantry, and incidents and situations are associated with events that

engage individuals in rural occupation. Dialogues derive their particularities from the natural speech rhythm of a people who earn their living in rural and agrarian communities.

Eldred Jones, the Sierra Leone critic, has noted the predominance of proverbs in Soyinka's plays. From the fact that Soyinka's plays take their inspiration, generally, from the folk traditions of his own people (the Yorubas of Western Nigeria), Eldred Jones concludes that Ireland would provide an ideal audience for Soyinka. Yoruba is not spoken in Ireland; Eldred Jones is implying that Soyinka's plays would be appreciated in another country where what Yeats calls "imaginative tradition"<sup>51</sup> is still vital. "One particular remark of Yeats," writes Eldred Jones, "suggests that outside Africa, Ireland would provide an ideal audience for Soyinka." The remark of Yeats which Eldred Jones has in mind is his observation that

One has only to listen to a recitation of Raftery's Argument with Death at some country Feis to understand this. When Death makes a good point, the audience applaud delightedly, and applaud not as a London audience would, some verbal dexterity, some piece of smartness, but the movements of a simple and fundamental comedy.<sup>52</sup>

Eldred Jones insists on this literary affinity which the dramatic use of local colour has interposed between the Nigerian playwrights and the Irish dramatists. In the same study of Soyinka from which the above extract is taken he writes:

Soyinka's dream for Nigerian theatre is similar to that of Yeats for Irish theatre. It is to produce a theatre which has its roots in the Nigerian tradition and speaks to Nigeria and the world through that tradition.<sup>53</sup>

What has been said so far about Clark and Soyinka is applicable, too, to Christopher Okigbo, even though his medium is poetry. Okigbo, as before noted, was a contemporary of Clark's and Soyinka's at Ibadan as a student and a professional colleague of theirs as well. He was a member of that informal forum for exchange of literary views among the Ibadan writers, the Mbari Writers Club. In the interview with Lewis Nkosi already mentioned, Clark says that the Mbari writers did not constitute themselves into a movement, nor did they present a common front on literary issues. Still, there was some degree of rapport and of mutual understanding among them; and much more important, there was a wave, a gentle wave of inter-personal influences oscillating among them. Clark, for example, claims to have started Okigbo off in his writing. In his interview with Lewis Nkosi, Clark said:

If there is anybody I have worked with very closely-- I have stayed with him [Okigbo] when I was at the University College at Ibadan, and he was working as a teacher--in fact, if there was any one great champion of my own poetry, it was Chris. And I can say this-- that I started him off in his writing; and we've discussed these things together, we've thought of writing manifestos several times, and we hold many beliefs which we have thrown overboard several times only to make new ones.<sup>54</sup>

Thus Okigbo's poetry, like Clark's, shows evidence of "externalities of literary influence" which may be traced to the example of the Anglo-Irish revival. In

matters of technique, however, in his occasional tendency to juxtapose without what Herbert Marshall McLuhan calls "the copula of logical enunciation,"<sup>55</sup> Okigbo may be closer to Pound and Eliot than to Yeats, but his exploitation of local subject-matter recalls the example of Yeats and Synge. In an article significantly entitled "Prodigals, Come Home!" the Nigerian critic, Chinweizu, sees Okigbo as a literary exile in the sense that both in theme and technique he has not been faithful to Mother Africa. Only in his later poems, in "Path of Thunder," to be specific, Chinweizu argues, did Okigbo accept

an African poetic landscape with its flora and fauna-- a landscape of elephants, beggars, calabashes, serpents, pumpkins, baskets, towncriers, iron bells, slit drums, iron masks, hares, snakes, squirrels; a landscape that is no longer used as an exoticism for background effects, no longer used for exotic references sprinkled among anaemic images, but a landscape which has been moved to the dramatic centre of his poetry; a landscape portrayed with native eyes to which aeroplanes naturally appear as iron birds; a landscape in which the animals behave as they might behave in African folklore, of animals presented through native African eyes.<sup>56</sup>

Chinweizu's remark here ignores the fact that Okigbo began his poetic career as a repentant prodigal. The dominant experience of the poems before "Path of Thunder" is one of home-coming, a retreat, as Romanus Egudu says, "from Christ to Idoto."<sup>57</sup> His imagination is fundamentally rooted in the characteristic features of an African setting symbolised for him by Idoto's landscape. If it wandered, it did so with the excitement of a traveller in search of exotic sensations for their own sake but who will not, for this reason, lose contact with his roots.

But there is definitely a shift, as Chinweizu has noted, from the juxtapositional technique of some of the poems in Labyrinths to the stylistic devices of traditional African poetry in "Path of Thunder." This shift did not begin, however, with "Path of Thunder" published in 1971. Okigbo's centenary poem on W. B. Yeats written in 1964 relies on the technical devices of Yoruba "Ijala." The "Ijala" is a "praise song," and Okigbo's "Lament of the Masks," written in honour of Yeats in a form which is derived from the traditions of the "praise songs" of Ede, is for Okigbo an acknowledgement of the validity of traditional forms as well as his own homage to another poet, who modelled some of his own poems on the ballad traditions of his native land.

As a praise song on Yeats, "Lament of the Masks" deserves special mention. In it Okigbo acknowledges Yeats's poetic achievement. Yeats is a great poetic architect who "converted a jungle into marble palaces" of art. He is also the "arch-priest" of the poetic craft. Okigbo implies in these tributes that Yeats found Irish poetry (perhaps all modern poetry) brick and left it marble. Therefore, it is time, he says, to descant the praise of this master-builder,

Who converted a jungle into marble palaces  
Who watered a dry valley and weeded its banks . . .

Who transformed a desert into a green pasture  
Who commanded highways to pass thro the forest--  
And will remain a mountain  
Even in your sleep . . .\*58

Peter Thomas, who was to Okigbo what Pound had been to Eliot, disclosed to me in a letter dated April 8, 1975 that despite Okigbo's technical affinities in the early poems with Pound and Eliot, Yeats and Robert Graves featured prominently in his discussions on poetry with Okigbo. His own poetry, Peters says, is affected by Yeats, and he adds that whatever admiration that Okigbo felt for Yeats must have been stimulated by Okigbo's interest in Peters's own poetry. Okigbo's tribute to Yeats in the centenary poem, "Lament of the Masks," appears to be a concrete objectification of his increasing recognition of the importance of Yeats.

In a consideration of the Gambian poet Lenrie Peters born in Barthust in 1932, who spent most of his early years in London as a medical student, one can return to Stephen Spender's concept of influence as "felt presence." But Spender's formula must be modified slightly before it can be applicable to Peters. In Peters there is not a felt presence of Yeats's personality as it exists openly in Achebe's first novel, for example; it is rather the presence of Yeats's literary attitudes manifesting themselves in Peters's poetic sensibility that one can reckon with. Peters recalls Yeats in his hatred of abstraction, in his impatience with the whirl and hurry of urban life. He is a lover of the gentle tempo and the idyllic composure of country life. He does not reach out, like the Yeats of the Celtic Revival, for country songs and legends; but his hatred of machinery

and the mechanization of the human will in the present technological world is rather unusual in a man of science, for Peters is by profession a medical doctor. His poem "Things Perplex Me" dramatizes his innate hatred for automation. Peters is perplexed in the poem by "THINGS that approximate I/to me and are /put in my place." His sympathies, on the other hand, are with "people/laughter and comfort/the use and pleasure of science." His head aches, he says, when "all I hear is/THINGS, THINGS, THINGS."<sup>59</sup>

Peters's combination of his professional responsibility with the demands of his artistic vocation as a poet is reminiscent of William Carlos Williams, but in his search for what he calls "integration of personality," Peters recalls Yeats's quest for "unity of being." The imagery in his own poetry represents, Peters admitted in a letter to me dated April 8, 1975, "a basic search for unification." "If one views existence as a whole," he revealed, "there must, it seems to me, be a point of departure or arrival, a moment however brief or extended, of transmutation. Modern life is so readily compartmentalized, that such a search seems to be worthy of pursuit." In poem 38 of Satellites Peters expresses very strongly this need for integration. "Integration is needful," he says, for "Flesh and red clay/alike comprehend/the futility of/dissociation." In spite of this, to Peters's dismay, "all dissociates/disintegrates like/autumn leaves/people too and love and sunlight."<sup>60</sup>

In his letter to me Peters also expressed his admiration for Yeats's poetic technique. Yeats, he wrote, is a "master of rhythm, words rolling like waves. Acute imagery and touching nostalgia. I think he will be read longer than Eliot." This statement sums up Peters's attitude generally towards Yeats. It is, however, easier, one may observe, to appreciate Yeats's rhythm and imagery than to attain a similar level of excellence and confidence in his use of both. What is much more easily inheritable is the "touching nostalgia." But then nostalgia is a universal human emotion. Although Peters did not need to know Yeats to express those emotions of nostalgia that haunt his verse, Yeats may have helped him to articulate his own emotion. What is most significant is his own evidence of his awareness of Yeats's achievement as a poet.

Lenrie Peters's acknowledgment of Yeats's command of rhythm is worth notice. Mahood had earlier referred to it as Yeats's rhetoric. This rhetoric is not to be confused with the moral didacticism of the Young Irelanders or of the English Victorians. By rhetoric, Mahood had in mind Yeats's lyrical intensity. Elsewhere Yeats calls it "passionate syntax."<sup>61</sup> He considers poetry song, whereas Pound and Eliot, while not ignoring this aspect of poetry, seem to be primarily interested in the amount of learning that has gone into its making. During the nineties, Yeats, "the golden nightingale," constantly reminded his fellow Irish poets of the necessity of mastering the technique of

singing. "The inspiration of God, which is, indeed, the source of all which is greatest in the world," he informed a gathering of the Irish National Literary Society in 1893, "comes only to him who labours at rhythm and cadence, at form and style, until they have no secret hidden from him."<sup>62</sup> In most of his literary essays emphasis crops up on the attribute of poetry as song. In "Speaking to the Psaltery," poets are imagined as "wild-eyed men speaking harmoniously to murmuring wires while audiences in many-coloured robes listened, hushed and excited";<sup>63</sup> and in "Adam's Curse," their art is seen as that of "articulating sweet sounds."<sup>64</sup>

It is possible that Yeats inherited this musical consciousness from his Irish background. The Irish imagination, he never tires of pointing out, is by nature lyrical, while that of England is analytical and rational. This, perhaps, is Yeats the nationalist speaking, but his insistence on the readiness of the Irish imagination to overflow itself into song is much more than the boasting of an enviable ethnic characteristic that it seems to be.

Traditional African poetry is, like Ireland's rich in musical cadences. For some modern African poets, this heritage could be exploited to an advantage. In an interview with Serumaga, the Ghanaian poet, George Awoonor Williams said:

I have always felt, perhaps involuntarily, I should take my poetic sensibility if you like the word, from the tradition that sort of feeds my language, because in my language there is a lot of poetry, there is a lot of music and there is a lot of the literary art, even though not written, and so I take my cue from this old tradition, and begin to break it into English, to give it a new dimension as it were.<sup>65</sup>

This intrusion, howsoever subconsciously, of the musical idiom of traditional poetry into the imagination of the modern African poet may explain the affinity a great many of them enjoy with Yeats in matters relating to rhythm. For, indeed, the poetry of, say, J. P. Clark, Wole Soyinka, and, to some extent, Lenrie Peters, has not been marred by those stylistic vices that alienated Yeats from the poetry of his contemporaries in America. His criticism of the poetry of Pound and Eliot is at bottom a criticism of their defective ear, although he abjures also their subject-matter, such as the treatment of Paddington Railway Station in poetry.<sup>66</sup> Pound's "unexplained ejaculations" or his "unbridged transitions,"<sup>67</sup> and Eliot's "rhythmical flatness,"<sup>68</sup> Yeats believes, have their origin in these poets' neglect of syntax. For syntax is to him an index to rhythm:

Because I need a passionate syntax for passionate subject-matter I compel myself to accept those traditional metres that have developed with the language.<sup>69</sup>

The syntactical aberrations of the poetry of his time and its disregard of logical connectives run counter to Yeats's conception of the traditional art of the poet, which consists, for him, in the shaping of collective or personal emotions

into a musical pattern.

The work of Clark, Soyinka, and Peters has not, in the main, abjured the use of logical connectives, nor has it dispensed entirely with the use of rational stanzaic structure as aid to meaning. The reaction from experiment in both prose and verse which began a few decades after the publication of The Waste Land and Joyce's Ulysses has, as far as the poetic work of these poets is concerned, actually caught on in Africa. As noted before, the poetry of Clark, Soyinka, and Peters shows evidence of a consciously cultivated rational, as well as musical, structure. Soyinka's prison poems open, for example, with this incantatory appeal to his ancestral deities for spiritual support at a crucial moment in his life:

Roots, be an anchor at my keel  
Shore my limbs against the wayward gale

Reach in earth for deep sustaining draught  
Potencies against my endless thirst.<sup>70</sup>

In spite of Okigbo's juxtapositional techniques, his poetry retains, all along, a rich rhythmical subtlety. Poetry is for him "logistics,"<sup>71</sup> that is, verbal mobility; and he calls himself the "sunbird," an appellation he seems to deserve from the incantatory ring of his verse:

Me to the orangery  
solitude invites  
a wagtail, to tell  
the tangled-wood-tale;  
a sunbird, to mourn  
a mother on a spray.<sup>72</sup>

It is, however, in the area of subject-matter that the influence of the Irish Literary Renaissance on the

Ibadan poets is most apparent. Yeats's nationalism which they cherished is not the political nationalism of the Young Ireland poets but rather an imaginative nationalism. Imaginative nationalism requires of the artist that he draw his inspiration from the land and life of his own people. Yeats defines national literature as the "work of writers who are moulded by influences that are moulding their country."<sup>73</sup> In a letter to Katharine Tynan he writes: "All poetry should have a local habitation when at all possible."<sup>74</sup> It is in this concern for locality, for sense of place, that landscape is significant. And, accordingly, Yeats reminds Katharine Tynan in a subsequent letter that "we should make poems on the familiar landscape we love, not the strange and rare glittering scenes we wonder at."<sup>75</sup>

Yeats's attitude to landscape implies much more than the conventional conception of the term. For him landscape embodies more than physical settings of scenery. It includes also the life that animates the scenery, and the customs and traditions that provide a given locality with its characteristic distinctions. "As soon as locality became important to him," writes Richard Ellmann, "he sought out all imaginative connections within places that he could find. Local customs, local characters, local songs and stories, local expressions gave the landscape its look more than sun or moon did."<sup>76</sup> In this attitude to landscape Yeats is close to the position of the celebrated American scholar of German extraction, Carl Ortwin Sauer.

The word landscape, Sauer discloses, is derived from the German term Landschaftskunde or Länderkunde, which means "a land shape," but he adds that "the process of shaping is by no means thought of as simply physical."<sup>77</sup> In a formal definition, landscape means, he says, "an area made up of a distinct association of forms, both physical and cultural."<sup>78</sup> The nature of cultural landscape is determined by the extent to which a given community undergoes what sociologists call the "process of acculturation." In a peasant community, the imaginative connections of its locality, the local customs, the local songs and stories, and the local expressions will give the cultural landscape of such a community its identity. In an urban community the elements of its cultural landscape are more sophisticated. Yeats was concerned especially with the peasant traditions of his native Ireland. With his associational conception of landscape in mind, one can understand his position in the essay, "Ireland and the Arts," where he wrote:

I am yet jealous for Cuchulain, and for Baile and Aillinn, and for those grey mountains that still are lacking their celebration.<sup>79</sup>

In this same essay, he announced his intention never to go for the scenery of a poem to any other country but Ireland:

I could not now write of any other country but Ireland, for my style has been shaped by the subjects I have worked on, but there was a time when my imagination seemed unwilling, when I found myself writing of some Irish event in words that would have better fitted some Italian or Eastern event.<sup>80</sup>

This time, of course, was the time of Crossways (1889), when Yeats was still unsure of the road his poetic imagination would travel. In Autobiographies Yeats stressed that one of his earliest programmes for his country, after his conversion, was to bequeath to it a new culture and immortalize her scenery in verse: "and I, that my native scenery might find imaginary inhabitants, half-planned a new method and a new culture."<sup>81</sup> He charged William Morris and Shelley with literary irresponsibility in giving their works a foreign setting; for providing literature with a setting that is familiar to the land and life of the artist is, to Yeats, an act of service to the author's native land:

I believe that if Morris had set his stories amid the scenery of his own Wales . . . that if Shelley had nailed his Prometheus, or some equal symbol, upon some Welsh or Scottish rock, their art would have entered more intimately . . . into our thought and given perhaps to modern poetry a breadth and stability like that of ancient poetry.<sup>82</sup>

What Morris or Shelley failed to do for their nations, Yeats hoped he would accomplish for Ireland. He would patronize Oisín or St. Patrick or Cuchulain. In this gesture he would be fulfilling the role he allocated to himself as Ireland's Homer: "Have not all races had their first unity from a mythology, that married them to rock and hill?"<sup>83</sup> Later in life, in "The Municipal Gallery Revisited," Yeats reminisces about these early dreams of his with sad feelings:

John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought  
All that we did, all that we said or sang  
Must come from contact with the soil, from that  
Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong.<sup>84</sup>

Yeats's rooting of himself to the soil like Antaeus, the son of the Greek goddess of the Earth, is important at a time when so many Irish writers must leave their country if they had to make a mark on the literary world. Joyce, Shaw, George Moore, Austin Clarke, and others did actually escape from their native environment, although Joyce was to return to it imaginatively. Synge thought he could succeed by escaping, but he was advised by Yeats to return to his roots and draw strength from them, as did Antaeus. Synge's reputation rests on his acceptance of this well-intentioned advice which encouraged him to exploit the literary resources of the Aran landscape. Pound and Eliot, one has to admit, are cosmopolitan poets. They have not wholly rooted their creative imagination in their native land. This observation is not intended as a devaluation of their literary achievement, nor has it anything to do with the aesthetic value of their work. The point that is being stressed is that, unlike Yeats, their literary imagination has not been wholly rooted in their native country. And this point has been argued by some of their readers. Edward Engelberg sees them as emigrants to the European culture.<sup>85</sup> Commenting on Yeats's role as a homesitter in contrast to Pound and Eliot's position as exiles, Elizabeth Drew writes:

Yeats is unlike all other poets of the century in that he was a national poet. All great poets are universal, as Yeats certainly is too; but many of the most distinguished in the present day, Pound, Eliot, Auden, exiled themselves from their own countries. Such a step would have been impossible for Yeats.<sup>86</sup>

Yeats's rooting of his poetic sensibilities in his native land is a nationalistic gesture; and the African poet whom history or education may have divorced from his native tradition may, in fact, re-establish contacts with his roots from the example of Yeats. Yeats's imaginative return to Sligo and his celebration of Oisín, Cúchulainn, and St. Patrick are paralleled by Okigbo's return to Idoto; Soyinka's celebration of Ogun; J. P. Clark's rooting of his poetic imagination in the riverain districts of his native Ijaw; and Lenrie Peters's longing in poem 8 of "Unpublished Manuscripts" for "the tender landscape" of his childhood world or the country of his birth, and "the harshly simple lives there."

In "An Acre of Grass," Yeats declared his resolve to remake himself:

Myself must I remake  
 Till I am Timon and Lear  
 Or that William Blake  
 Who beat upon the wall  
 Till Truth obeyed his call.<sup>87</sup>

In Yeats's own case, an unusual bond of sympathy existed, especially in his non-philosophical verse, between self and country. The destiny of the self that Yeats wished to remake was moulded very often by the influences that were moulding his country. Ireland's moments of glory were Yeats's and her vicissitudes reach the reader through Yeats's own personal vision. This vision is not communal, as is the case with the "young Ireland" poets who wrote according to a given formula. In Yeats's era, the

individual was emerging, Okigbo noted, as a man "with a load of destiny on his head."<sup>88</sup> Preoccupation with the collective fate of the race was beginning to give way to, or reassert its claims contemporaneously with, the contemplation of the tragic destiny of the individual. The nation in her moments of sorrow and glory could provide the poet with images for projecting a subjective emotion. Subjective emotion and technique are then two literary characteristics that distinguish Yeats from the "Young Ireland" poets, and the modern Nigerian poet from the Osadebay school and the Senghorian Negritude.

One issue that arises from Yeats's or the African writer's dedication to literary nationalism is the choice of a linguistic medium. Yeats often regretted his ignorance of Gaelic; and the Irish poet Dr. Hyde, and the Nigerian critic Obi Wali, have argued with conviction that a national literature to be really valid must be written in the language of the people whose emotions and experiences it purports to be expressing. Dr. Hyde writes:

But you ask, why should we wish to make Ireland more Celtic than it is--why should we de-Anglicize it all? I answer because the Irish race is at present in a most anomalous position, imitating England and yet apparently hating it. How can it produce anything good in literature, art, or institutions as long as it is actuated by motives so contradictory?<sup>89</sup>

Obi Wali comes to a similar conclusion in relation to African literature:

The uncritical acceptance of English and French as the inevitable medium for educated African writing is misdirected, and has no chance of advancing African literature and culture. In other words, until these writers and their western midwives accept the fact that any true African literature must be written in African languages, they would be merely pursuing a dead end, which can only lead to sterility, uncreativity, and frustration.<sup>90</sup>

Yeats appears to acknowledge the validity of this argument, but he is conscious of the problems that this issue poses:

If you say a national literature must be in the language of the country, there are many difficulties. Should it be written in the language that your country does speak or the language that it ought to speak?<sup>91</sup>

Yeats cites the instance of Milton and the Irish mystic Columbanus, both of whom wrote in Latin but who, nevertheless, he maintains, occupy an eminent position in the literature of their respective races. In Yeats's own case, his view on the question of language is that although Gaelic is his national language, English is his mother tongue.<sup>92</sup>

In a letter to the editor of United Ireland, where he replied to Dr. Hyde's programmes for De-Anglicizing Ireland, Yeats put forward further arguments in support of his adoption of English. Walt Whitman or Thoreau, he argued, are not less American by writing in English:

America . . . is creating a national literature which in its most characteristic products differs almost as much from English literature as does the literature of France.<sup>93</sup>

In the same letter Yeats added that it is not the language itself but the personality and the emotion that the language expresses which are immortal in literature:

When we remember the majesty of Cuchullin [sic] and the beauty of sorrowing Deirdre we should not forget that it is that majesty and that beauty which are immortal, and not the perishing tongue that first told of them.<sup>94</sup>

However, the African writer's stand on the question of language is similar to Yeats's in spite of Obi Wali's contention that he is approaching a dead end if he writes in a foreign language. Most of them see English as a tongue that the historical imperative of colonialism had made their own; and although there are some African writers that are writing in their vernacular language, as Dr. Hyde had written his Love Songs of Connacht (1894) in his native Gaelic,<sup>95</sup> the position of most African writers is summarized by J. P. Clark, to whom English is almost a "mother tongue":

As for the use of English and other European languages by writers in Africa and Asia today, this should now be accepted as a historical fact. We might say the colonial, made captive to an imperial flag, not only dislodged the ensign when independence came but actually took possession of a host of attributes that the master had held as his distinctive marks and emblems. Probably the most meaningful of these was language--which for me, a Nigerian, is English, a language that no longer is the copyright of any one people or nation, and which to my mind is a positive step back from Babel's house of many tongues.<sup>96</sup>

The African writer's adoption of English reinforces further the literary kinship he enjoys with Yeats.

African writers such as Okigbo, Clark, Soyinka, and Peters are now involved, as was Yeats in his time, in a movement for cultural revival in their respective countries, a movement which opened their eyes to the aesthetic

potential of the resources of their land and life. They, too, arose from a colonial background and developed a concern with technique and a critical insight that enabled them to detect the technical weaknesses of the work of their predecessors. They, too, feel English must be their medium of expression. As Clark noted, these Mbari writers did not constitute themselves into a movement; nor was their intention to localize their settings and subject-matter, an effort as self-consciously cultivated as was the case with the writers of the Celtic Revival. But like Yeats, again, the relevance of their work was not restricted to the boundaries of the nation within which it was produced. Images derived from the poet's own environment are used as metaphors for transmitting a universal experience. Thus when Okigbo stands naked before the watery presence of his family deity, "mother Idoto," he is undergoing a personal experience. But the purpose of this experience--rebirth or renewal--is the objective of all rituals of cleansing. As Yeats's younger contemporary Joyce is reported to have said with reference to his artistic use of Dublin, "in the particular is contained the universal."<sup>97</sup> The Nigerian poets could have been alert to their cultural responsibilities even if there had not been a movement for Literary Revival in Ireland. But the Anglo-Irish example has been to the perceptive talents among them a most welcome impetus.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Richard M. Kain, "Yeats and Irish Nationalism," in Centenary Essays on the Art of W. B. Yeats, ed., D. E. S. Maxwell and S. B. Bushrui (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1965), p. 54.

<sup>2</sup>W. B. Yeats, Essays and Introduction (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 256. Hereafter cited as Essays.

<sup>3</sup>Ernest Boyd, Ireland's Literary Renaissance (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), p. 84.

<sup>4</sup>Essays, p. 249.

<sup>5</sup>W. B. Yeats, A Book of Irish Verse (London: Methuen, 1920), pp. xix-xx.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. xxi.

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, Davis's poem (A Book of Irish Verse, p. xxi) which begins:

'Lead him to fight for native land,  
His is no courage cold and wary;  
The troops live not that could withstand  
The headlong charge of Tipperary.'

Yeats said of this verse that in it Thomas Davis was too desirous of making "the peasantry courageous."

<sup>8</sup>W. B. Yeats, "Some Irish National Books," in Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats, ed., John P. Frayne (London: Macmillan, 1970), I, p. 334.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>W. B. Yeats, The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 50. Hereafter cited as Collected Poems.

<sup>11</sup>W. B. Yeats, Autobiographies (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 202. Hereafter cited as Autobiographies.

<sup>12</sup>Frayne, p. 362.

<sup>13</sup>Cited from Janheinz Jahn, Neo-African Literature (New York: Grove Press, 1969), p. 252.

<sup>14</sup>Aimé Césaire, Return to my Native Land, trans. John Berger and Anna Bostock (Harmondsworth: Penguins, 1969), p. 75.

<sup>15</sup>Dennis Osadebay, "Who Buys My Thoughts," in West African Verse, ed. Donatus Ibe Nwoga (London: Longmans, 1967), p. 15.

<sup>16</sup>Nwoga, p. 20.

<sup>17</sup>Nwoga, p. 111. Notice that in most of these poems Africa is visualized as one country, and justifiably so, for to most people from the West, Africa appears as one geographic entity, as a country rather than a continent.

<sup>18</sup>Nwoga, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup>Dr. Drennan, "Eire," in Irish Minstrelsy, ed. H. Halliday Sparling (London: Walter Scott, 1887), p. 28.

<sup>20</sup>J. P. Clark, The Example of Shakespeare (London: Longmans, 1970), p. 65.

<sup>21</sup>Wole Soyinka, "And After the Narcissists?" African Forum, 4 (Spring 1966), 56.

<sup>22</sup>Nwoga, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup>J. P. Clark, A Reed in the Tide (London: Longmans, 1965), p. 30. Hereafter cited as A Reed.

<sup>24</sup>J. P. Clark, America, Their America (London: Heinemann, 1964), p. 51.

<sup>25</sup>Ewart Milne, "The Travail of Irish Poetry," Agenda, 12 (1974), 90.

<sup>26</sup>Essays, p. 361.

<sup>27</sup>Daniel Corkery, Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature (Dublin and Cork: Cork University Press, 1931), pp. 14-15.

<sup>28</sup>In a series of essays written between 1892 and 1895 Yeats singled out Professor Edward Dowden for special criticism because of his contempt for Irish literature. See "Dublin Scholasticism and Trinity College," Frayne, pp. 231-34; and "Professor Dowden and Irish Literature," first and second series in Frayne, pp. 346-49, and 351-53.

<sup>29</sup>Patrick Holland, "African Literature: From Nigeria to South Africa," Canadian Journal of African Studies, 9 (1975), 567.

<sup>30</sup>W. B. Yeats, John Sherman and Dhoya (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), p. 51.

<sup>31</sup>The myth of Leo Africanus is discussed by Richard Ellmann in his Yeats: The Man and the Masks (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1948), pp. 195-201.

<sup>32</sup>Frayne, p. 81.

<sup>33</sup>Essays, p. 248.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>36</sup>Stephen Spender, "The Influence of Yeats on Later English Poets," Tri-Quarterly, 4 (1965), 85.

<sup>37</sup>Spender, p. 85.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>41</sup>John Unterecker, A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats (New York: Noonday Press, 1972), p. 143.

<sup>42</sup>J. P. Clark, Casualties (London: Longmans, 1971), p. viii.

<sup>43</sup>See Alexander Gillies, "Some Thoughts on Comparative Literature," Year Book of Comparative Literature, 1 (1952), 17.

<sup>44</sup>Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse, African Writers Talking (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 64.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 64-65.

<sup>46</sup>Cyprain Ekwensi, "Literary Influence on a Young Nigerian," The Times Literary Supplement, June 4, 1964, p. 476.

<sup>47</sup>Duerden and Pieterse, p. 172.

<sup>48</sup>Molly M. Mahood, "Drama in New-born States," Présence Africaine, 32 (1966), 28.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>50</sup>Cited from Martin Banham, "African Literature: Nigerian Dramatists in English and the Traditional Nigerian Theatre," Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 3 (July 1967), 97.

- <sup>51</sup>Essays, p. 256.
- <sup>52</sup>Eldred Jones, "Wole Soyinka: Critical Approaches," in The Critical Evaluation of African Literature, ed. Edgar Wright (London: Heinemann, 1973), pp. 60-61.
- <sup>53</sup>Wright, p. 62.
- <sup>54</sup>Duerden and Pieterse, p. 66.
- <sup>55</sup>Herbert Marshall McLuhan applied this phrase to the poetic technique of Pound, Eliot, and the French Symbolists. See his essay, "Tennyson and Picturesque Poetry," Essays in Criticism, 3 (July 1951), 271.
- <sup>56</sup>Chinweizu, "Prodigals, Come Home!" Okike, 4 (December 1973), 4-5.
- <sup>57</sup>Romanus Egudu, "Okigbo's 'Distances': A Retreat from Christ to Idoto," Conch, 5 (1975), 29-42. Egudu's argument is centred on Okigbo's recognition of the need for a poetic pilgrimage to the shrine of his family deity, Idoto.
- <sup>58</sup>Christopher Okigbo, "Lament of the Masks," in Centenary Essays on the Art of W. B. Yeats, ed. D. E. S. Maxwell and S. B. Bushrui (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1965), p. xv. Where the asterisk [\*] appears after an ellipsis or a dash in a quotation, the mark is the poet's own, not the editor's.
- <sup>59</sup>Lenrie Peters, Katchikali (London: Heinemann, 1971), Poem 11.
- <sup>60</sup>Lenrie Peters, Satellites (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 68.
- <sup>61</sup>Essays, p. 522.
- <sup>62</sup>Frayne, p. 274.
- <sup>63</sup>Essays, p. 14.
- <sup>64</sup>Collected Poems, p. 89.
- <sup>65</sup>Duerden and Pieterse, p. 30.
- <sup>66</sup>Essays, p. 499.
- <sup>67</sup>W. B. Yeats, Oxford Book of Modern Verse (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970), p. xxv.
- <sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. xxi.

<sup>69</sup>Essays, p. 522.

<sup>70</sup>Wole Soyinka, A Shuttle in the Crypt (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 1.

<sup>71</sup>Christopher Okigbo, Labyrinths (London: Heinemann, 1971), p. 9. Hereafter cited as Labyrinths.

<sup>72</sup>Okigbo, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup>W. B. Yeats, Explorations (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 156. Hereafter cited as Explorations.

<sup>74</sup>Allan Wade, The Letters of W. B. Yeats (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p. 120.

<sup>75</sup>Wade, p. 99.

<sup>76</sup>Richard Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 14.

<sup>77</sup>Carl Ortwin Sauer, "The Morphology of Landscape," in Land and Life, A Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer, ed. John Leighly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 321.

<sup>78</sup>Sauer, p. 321.

<sup>79</sup>Essays, p. 209.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>81</sup>Autobiographies, p. 152.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>84</sup>Collected Poems, p. 318.

<sup>85</sup>Edward Engelberg, "The New Generation and the Acceptance of Yeats," in Maxwell and Bushrui, p. 98.

<sup>86</sup>Elizabeth Drew and George Connor, Discovering Modern Poetry (New York: Holt and Rinehart, 1964), p. 98.

<sup>87</sup>Collected Poems, p. 299.

<sup>88</sup>Labyrinths, p. xiv.

<sup>89</sup>Dr. Douglas Hyde, "The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland," in The Revival of Irish Literature, eds. Duffy, Sigerson, and Hyde (New York: Lemma Publishing Corp., 1973), p. 121.

<sup>90</sup>Obi Wali, "The Dead End of African Literature?" Transition, 10 (1963), 14.

<sup>91</sup>Explorations, p. 156.

<sup>92</sup>Essays, p. 520.

<sup>93</sup>Frayne, pp. 255-56.

<sup>94</sup>Frayne, p. 256.

<sup>95</sup>The following works are partially, if not wholly, written in Yoruba: S. A. Babalola, The Content and Form of Yoruba Ijala (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1966); D. O. Fagunwa, The Forest of a Thousand Daemons (London: Nelson, 1968); and B. A. Gbadamosi, Oriki (Ibadan: Mbari, 1961).

<sup>96</sup>A Reed, p. viii.

<sup>97</sup>Richard Ellmann, James Joyce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 520.

## CHAPTER II

### LANDSCAPE OF IDENTITY

In his poem "The Journey Back" (1949), the Scottish poet Edwin Muir urges the protagonist, who is probably his alter-ego, to "Seek the beginnings, learn from whence you come,/ And know the various earth of which you are made."<sup>1</sup> Muir is here proposing what sounds like a literary code of conduct for a writer interested in giving expression to his identity; but his "aesthetic" prescription, if one may so consider it, was not new. Yeats had voiced a similar sentiment several decades previously. In 1888 he was reminding Katharine Tynan that "we should make poems on the familiar landscapes we love, not the strange and rare and glittering scenes we wonder at."<sup>2</sup> And in the essay, "What is 'Popular Poetry'?" (1901), he had expressed the conviction that "one's verses should hold, as in a mirror, the colour of one's own climate and scenery in their right proportions."<sup>3</sup> Of his own development Yeats wrote:

It was years before I could rid myself of Shelley's Italian light, but now I think my style is myself.<sup>4</sup>

Several African poets have long realized, likewise, that they can find their true creative selves only when their imagination is rooted to their own environment. The whole idea of an African cultural renaissance hinges, indeed,

on the question of literary identity, a trend that seems to have been fostered in Nigeria particularly, as has been argued elsewhere, by the example, among others, of the Anglo-Irish Revivalists, notably Yeats. Okigbo is reported to have said in a conference on African literature that an African work "must have its roots deep in African soil, must take its birth from African experience, must pulsate with African feelings."<sup>5</sup> His Heavensgate (1962) may be considered an attempt to come to terms with this principle. The volume is dedicated to Okigbo's family deity, Idoto, a river goddess who is also an "earth mother." The Mbari edition of this sequence published in 1962 shows on a page facing the introductory poem entitled "Idoto" a nude boy in his early teens leaning on a tree, with his hands over his head, and poised in a gesture of meditation [see Figure 1]. The boy, in his nakedness and his humble solicitation of the spiritual support of a natural object, a tree, is enacting a ritual of intimacy with earth. From that introductory poem one learns that the tree is an oilbean tree, the traditional equivalent of the tree of life; the boy, a prodigal seeking his beginnings; his gesture, a symbolic self-surrender to the forces of the earth. The poem "Idoto" interprets the drawing on the frontispiece of the Mbari edition of Heavensgate:

BEFORE you, mother Idoto,  
 naked I stand,  
 before your watery presence,  
 a prodigal,

leaning on an oilbean;  
 lost in your legend. . . .

Under your power wait I on barefoot,  
 Watchman for the watchword at  
 HEAVENSGATE;

out of the depths my cry  
 give ear and hearken.<sup>6</sup>

In "Silences" (1962), Okigbo saw himself and his protagonists as wanderers "Outside the gates/In hollow landscapes."<sup>7</sup> In the poem "Idoto," the wanderer is a prodigal standing on the fringe of the gates of a home landscape suing for entry. Thus, traditional images predominate, although there are occasional occurrences of biblical allusion such as "prodigal," "watchword," and "hearken."<sup>8</sup> "Naked" and "barefoot" may have been derived from the Bible,<sup>9</sup> but their import is more traditional than biblical when examined in the context of a setting where a large percentage of the people once went naked. These two images belong also to the cluster of traditional images in that prefatory piece to "Heavensgate."

The purpose of Okigbo's return to Idoto is twofold. One is to re-enact, through art, the "ceremony of innocence" which his ancestors once knew but whose symbolic rituals were no longer observed in the present century. In Yeats's "The Second Coming," the "ceremony of innocence is drowned." Okigbo seems to be echoing Yeats when he imagined himself to be re-enacting in his poem a lost ceremony of innocence.

"Heavensgate," he revealed, is "a ceremony of innocence, something like a mass, an offering to Idoto, the village stream of which I drank, in which I washed, as a child."<sup>10</sup> The other purpose of his journey back is to drink of the waters of Idoto's sacred fountain, which he considers to be his helicon. These two themes emerge intermittently throughout the five sections of the sequence, variously named in Labyrinths "The Passage," "Initiations," "Watermaid," "Lustra," and "Newcomer."

From Okigbo's emphasis in "Heavensgate" on the question of his origins, one may conclude that he did not take seriously his earlier excursions into poetry. This attitude may explain his exclusion from Labyrinths of "Four Canzones," written between 1957 and 1961. The canzones are heavily charged with Vergilian echoes; there may be other literary echoes in "Heavensgate," but Okigbo seems to have seen himself in these poems as a poet who is about to launch out on a serious creative adventure. Such a journey, he seems to have realized, must start with his beginnings, since it is, indeed, a literary exploration of the meaning of his origins. Therefore, he found it necessary to offer the necessary sacrificial ritual to the gods of his earth. His intention to call his muse home provokes certain reminiscences of Yeats. The evocation of Idoto in Okigbo's literary adventure recalls Yeats's poem "To the Rose upon the Rood of Time," where he declares his intention to "sing of old Eire and the ancient ways." In the poem Yeats writes:

Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!  
 Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways:  
 Cuchulain battling with the bitter tide;  
 The Druid, grey, wood-nurtured, quiet-eyed,  
 Who cast round Fergus dreams, and ruin untold;  
 And thine own sadness, where of stars, grown old.<sup>11</sup>

The Rose (1893) is preceded in Yeats's canon by Crossways (1889), so named because in these poems Yeats "tried many pathways."<sup>12</sup> The Rose, Yeats believed, afforded him "the only pathway from which he might "hope to see beauty and wisdom with his eyes."<sup>13</sup> The Rose pathway led Yeats to a literary exploitation of Irish subject-matter. It is probably for this reason that most of the poems in The Rose were inspired by myths and legends, or places and personalities that were associated with Ireland. The rose is certainly one of those symbols Yeats classified as processional because of their power to call up "numberless meanings."<sup>14</sup> But he seems to have been attracted in the volume to the traditional image of the rose as a symbol of Ireland. "The ancient Celts," Yeats wrote, "associated the Rose with Eire, or Folta, or Banba--goddesses who gave their names to Ireland."<sup>15</sup>

Okigbo's gesture in the poem "Idoto" is similar to Yeats's position in the opening lines of "To The Rose upon the Rood of Time." Both poets are asserting an identity with the spiritual essence of their land symbolized in Okigbo by Idoto and in Yeats by Eire. Eire (Idoto) will inspire, and Eire's (Idoto's) predicaments will become the subject of the poet's song. Structurally, both poems share certain technical characteristics; in both, the rhythm is solemn,

and the mood serious. Here is Okigbo once more in "Idoto"

BEFORE you, mother Idoto,  
naked I stand,  
before your watery presence,  
a prodigal.

In "To the Rose," Yeats intones:

Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!  
Come near me while I sing the ancient ways.

As The Rose opens with this invocatory prayer to Ireland, so does it conclude with Yeats's desire that posterity reckon with the fact that his heart and rhyme were tied to "the red-rose-bordered hem" of his land:

I cast my heart into my rhymes,  
That you, in the dim coming times,  
May know how my heart went with them  
After the red-rose-bordered hem.<sup>16</sup>

In Yeats's modernized version of an anonymous medieval lyric "I am of Ireland," he once more declares his identity with the "Holy Land of Ireland."<sup>17</sup>

As Ireland is the imaginative centre of much of Yeats's creative expression, so is the native earth of Okigbo, Clark, Soyinka, and Peters their inspiration, though to a lesser degree in the case of the last named writer. In "Heavensgate," Okigbo, for example, is seeking to recover a forgotten religious landscape to which he belongs. This concern with his religious beginnings originated from his view of himself as a poet-priest. In an interview with Marjory Whitelaw he disclosed his personal involvement with ancestor worship in his family:

I am believed to be a reincarnation of my maternal grandfather, who used to be the priest of the shrine called Ajani, where Idoto, the river goddess, is worshipped. This goddess is the earth mother, and also the mother of the whole family. My grandfather was the priest of this family, and when I was born I was believed to be his reincarnation, that is, I should carry on his duties. And although someone else had to perform his functions, this other person was only, as it were, a regent. And in 1958, when I started taking poetry very seriously, it was as though I had felt a sudden call to begin performing my full functions as the priest of Idoto.<sup>18</sup>

For this reason, Okigbo said of "Heavensgate" that it is "an offering to Idoto, the village stream of which I drank, in which I washed, as a child." In the poems of the first sequence, "The Passage," the village stream has lost its "innocence," and the goddess the spiritual control it once exercised on the life of the people. The poet is a "sunbird" mourning "a mother on a spray," but through this act of mourning he hopes to preserve through his art both the sanctity of Idoto and the purity of her waters.

"The Passage" deals, therefore, with the poet's childhood transition from one religious landscape to another, but it marks also the beginning of his symbolic return to the "watery presence" of an ancestral deity. The enemies of the poet's traditional religion are the Christians. Their image is played down in the third movement of "The Passage" so that the poet may assert the moral and spiritual superiority of his own traditional religion. The scene shifts here from Idoto's sanctuary to the premises of the Christian Church, where some religious ceremony is taking place; but this ceremony is "festivity in black":

SILENT FACES at crossroads:  
 festivity in black . . .

Faces of black like long black  
 column of ants,

behind the bell tower,  
 into the hot garden  
 where all roads meet:  
 festivity in black . . .\*<sup>19</sup>

"Black" in the last line implies that, in the poet's judgment, the proceedings of the Christians are devilish. The poet dissociates himself from those proceedings, and takes refuge in the cornfields, where he listens to the music of nature. This music is superior to the organ music that accompanies the proceedings of the black festivities of the Christian Church:

we are listening in cornfields  
 among the windplayers,  
 listening to the wind leaning over  
 its loveliest fragment . . .\*<sup>20</sup>

In the second sequences, "Initiations," the poet is initiated into the mystery of an alien religious tradition. The "crucifix" which he wears as a symbol of his new religious status is a "scar" that marks his contact with this religious landscape. Although the damage done to the poet is emotional, he chooses to convey its impact in physical terms. His allegiance to tradition compels him to use traditional initiation symbols as metaphors for the waters of Christian baptism:

SCAR of the crucifix  
 over the breast,  
 by red blade inflicted  
 by red-hot blade,  
 on right breast witnesseth

mystery which I, initiate,  
 received newly naked  
 upon waters of the genesis.<sup>21</sup>

To clarify the exact implication of the image of the "SCAR of the crucifix," Okigbo does evoke John the Baptist and his waters of baptism in the first movement of "Initiations." John's religion, he felt, has not heralded an era of self control or order, but one of confusion in the spiritual, social, and public life of its new recipients. Further, it manipulates the people's fear of hell in order to win a following, and the acceptance of its "gambit" on "life without sin" leads to egocentricity:

so comes John the Baptist  
 with bowl of salt water  
 preaching the gambit:  
 life without sin, without

life; which accepted,  
 way leads downward  
 down orthocenter  
 avoiding decisions.<sup>22</sup>

In the above quote the first stanza is linked to the second with a word compound, "without life," which indeed ought to stand together but which draws attention to itself by the enforced splitting. By placing "without" and "life" at such strategic points in the poem, Okigbo implies that the new dispensation is a way of life that is indeed "without life." Also, the word "orthocenter" (the common intersection of the three altitudes of a triangle)<sup>23</sup> appears

to be a deliberate pun on "autocentre" or self-centredness. In the second movement of "Initiations," Okigbo brands the followers of the new religion "selfish selfseekers." These include "priests and popes," "brothers and deacons," "organizing secretaries and party managers." Again, the implication is that Idoto's worship stands for the virtues that are opposed to selfishness. With this point in mind, Okigbo distinguishes genuine innocence from the supposed innocence of orthodox Christianity which "denies inhibitions."

In the third movement of "Initiations," two local prophet-figures, Jadum and Upandru, foresee the chaos that is bound to follow in the wake of the communal acceptance of the alien ways of worship. These two local figures are pitted deliberately against John the Baptist. Jadum, "a half-demented village minstrel," and Upandru, "a village explainer," are both conscious of "the errors of the rendering" (the reception of the crucifix). The worship of Idoto is a religion that gives their spiritual life its identity. Jadum is more vocal and more insistent in his warnings. As the voice of the land, he speaks in proverbs. A hasty embrace of the new belief and an even too hasty desertion of the old are fraught with severe repercussions. Doing either is as dangerous as wandering in a field of speargrass in the dark, or probing lairs of vipers with stockings; for the stockings, Jadum warns, considering the seriousness of the tragedy that threatens, cannot protect the feet from the sting of an adder, nor can the human body resist the

incisions of the speargrass:

Do not wander in speargrass,  
 Afer the lights,  
 Probing lairs in stockings  
 To roast  
 The viper alive, with dog lying  
 Upside down in the crooked passage . . .\*24

Jadum's metaphors are derived from his immediate environment. His home is the grassland of Aguata in the former Eastern Nigeria. In the Mbari edition of "Heavensgate" already mentioned, Jadum is introduced in the stanza that reads:

Say if thou knowest  
 from smell of the grassland  
 a village where liveth  
 in the heart of Aguata  
 a minstrel who singeth.<sup>25</sup>

The advantage for Okigbo's readers in having this early version of the poem is that it gives Jadum a local habitation. One may argue that Okigbo's footnotes in the Labyrinths version of "Heavensgate" reveal Jadum's identity. However, the revelation in the earlier version that Aguata is a grassland gives the image of "speargrass" a local status. Local superstitions enhance this status. In Jadum's part of Nigeria, the sight of a dead dog lying on the road is regarded as a sign of ill omen. The Nigerian critic, Sunday Anozie, has noted that, as a local image, "viper" is pertinent in its context. "In a land where vipers and snakes lurk both literally and metaphorically in the grass," he writes, "the wisdom of Jadum's address lies in its localized understatement."<sup>26</sup> Jadum is then Okigbo's focal point of consciousness in "Heavensgate." He

enunciates the wisdom of his race, and guards against the intrusion into his land and life of an alien mode of religious worship.

The religious motif, in so far as it is related to the antagonism between tradition (Idoto) and change (Christianity), phases out quietly in the first movement of the section, "Newcomer," where the Christians are summoned to a devotional exercise by the "bells of angelus." But these bells are "bells of exile" to the poet. Opposing their chimes is the sound of an inner bell which tolls within the poet's mind: "softly sings my guardian angel."<sup>27</sup> The voice the poet hears within him is the voice of his inner conscience. This is the voice that defines for him his own identity.

The "angelus" section of "Newcomer" ends with a coda in which the poet appeals to Anna, identified by Anozie as Okigbo's mother,<sup>28</sup> to protect the poet and the fragile sanctuary ("sandhouse") of the bones of his dead ancestors from the fanatical greed of the Christians. The appeal suffers from a lightness of touch arising from Okigbo's use of obscene language:

Anna of the panel oblongs,  
 protect me  
 from them fucking angels;  
 protect me  
 my sandhouse and bones.<sup>29</sup>

"Sandhouse" is a shrine with mud walls and thatched roofs in which Okigbo's household gods are housed. Of this mud sanctuary, Okigbo wrote:

the women of the family will from time to time scrub the walls . . . and the men of the family will repair the thatched roof to prevent it leaking.<sup>30</sup>

In those sections of "Heavensgate" where tradition is deliberately pitted against change, Okigbo tilted the balance intentionally in favour of the former. This partiality for tradition is his own way of performing aesthetically the "ceremony of innocence" which he set out to accomplish. That ceremony is a ritual, a mass offered to Idoto. By offering it Okigbo is approaching step by step the familiar religious landscape to which he belongs. In the interview with Marjory Whitelaw mentioned earlier, Okigbo confirmed that his creative activity is linked to his priestly obligations to mother Idoto. "Every time I write a poem," he said, "I am in fact offering a sacrifice. My 'Heavensgate' is in fact a huge sacrifice."<sup>31</sup>

Yeats, too, thought of his poetic activity as evidence of his allegiance to "indomitable Irishry." In "Under Ben Bulbin," Irish poets are urged to sing their peasantry, their heroic legacies, and their aristocratic traditions. This dedication was for Yeats a nationalistic gesture as well as a sacred mission.

As noted before, the course that is open to Okigbo in his journey back is bilateral. He can steer himself to his landscape of identity through the path that is religious; or he can pilot himself to the same destination through the road that is aesthetic. The two routes are interrelated in the sense that the religious landscape which Okigbo seeks is also the fountain-head of poetic inspiration.

In other words, Idoto is his ancestral deity as well as his creative muse; and her "watery presence" is a holy spot as well as the poet's helicon. Just as Yeats had believed, in "To the Rose," that Eire would inspire, so did Okigbo realize that Idoto's "watery presence" was bound to become the main spring of his own creative inspiration.

Okigbo's image of himself as a poet-priest is not necessarily contingent upon the well-known fact that he was a nominal priest of Idoto. He may have learned from Joyce and Yeats that poetry is a holy office. Joyce saw himself in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man as the priest of the eternal imagination.<sup>32</sup> Yeats saw the poet as "a vessel of the creative power of God"; his verse is a "little ritual" which resembles "the great ritual of Nature."<sup>33</sup> In "Ireland and the Arts," Yeats came out positively with this identification of poetry with religion. "We who care deeply about the arts," he said, "find ourselves the priesthood of an almost forgotten faith, and we must . . . take upon ourselves the method and the fervour of priesthood."<sup>34</sup>

This idea may not be new, as Robert Graves has shown in his book The White Goddess;<sup>35</sup> but it is no mere conceit with Joyce or Yeats or Okigbo. Every creative endeavour, Okigbo believed, requires a serious religious preparation. It is in this sense that the title word "Heavensgate" becomes important. Tracing its origin to Shakespeare or someone else is an issue of secondary importance, unless such source-hunting is accompanied with an explanation of Okigbo's symbolic intention in the choice

of that title. Sunday Anozie in his Christopher Okigbo: Creative Rhetoric and Dan Izevbaye in his "Okigbo's Portrait of the Artist as a Sunbird: A Reading of 'Heavensgate'," have implied that Okigbo's "Heavensgate" title was derived from Shakespeare's Sonnet 29. Anozie's discussion of the poem is prefaced with the following lines from Shakespeare's sonnet:

and then my state,  
 (Like to a lark at break of day arising  
 From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate.<sup>36</sup>

Izevbaye alluded to this same source, and included a passage from Cymbeline as a possible influence that might have worked on Okigbo.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, Okigbo's friend and mentor, Peter Thomas, informed me in a letter dated June 24, 1975, that Okigbo took the title of his sequence from his own poem entitled "Heaven's Gate," which begins:

NOW I CAN say I've stood at Heaven's Gate  
 And leaned across the brink of ecstasy:  
 Going, like Pilgrim in the Bunyan story,  
 Alone, expectant, by a miry way,  
 Within a wicket, on a sudden shoulder  
 I found the wedding place of earth and sky.

If source-hunting for the sake of source-hunting is relevant, one may also include Yeats on the list of influences. Oisín, returning from the land of Tir-nan-Og and compelled to confront the world of experience, lamented his destiny:

these were ancient Oisín's fate  
 Loosened long ago from Heaven's gate,  
 For his last days to lie in wait.<sup>38</sup>

What is more important, it may be reiterated, is not where Okigbo got the word, but the implication for him of the image "Heavensgate." The word suggests that the artist about to create is a suitor knocking at the gates in order to be allowed to enter into the heavenly palace of art. In this sense, Okigbo is closer to Yeats than to Shakespeare or Peter Thomas, for Yeats was aware that no one who has not performed the necessary ritual could gain entry into this marble palace: "None could pass Heaven's Door/That loved inferior art."<sup>39</sup> Yeats's "Heaven's Door" has an analogical connotation with Okigbo's "Heavensgate." And Okigbo's centenary tribute to Yeats becomes more meaningful when examined in the light of Yeats's allusions to the immortal palace of art. Immortal poets, Yeats wrote, are those who erected palaces of art during their lifetime:

While a writer lives . . . it takes generations  
before he sinks far enough into the distance for  
his palace of art to stand clear against the  
heavens.<sup>40</sup>

And the true poet, he said, is one who labours all his days to be artistically beautiful: "The poets labouring all their days/To build a perfect beauty in rhyme."<sup>41</sup> Thus, in his tribute to Yeats, Okigbo acknowledged Yeats's achievement as a master-builder.<sup>41</sup>

Who converted a jungle into marble palaces  
Who watered a dry valley and weeded its banks . . .<sup>\*42</sup>

In the Byzantium poems Yeats did knock at the gate of the Byzantine artifice of eternity; and he did behold therein "Marbles of the dancing floor." But he was aware

in the essay "The Holy Places" (1906) that literary monuments are wrought of the brick and mortar of the author's own land: "I cannot believe in the reality of imaginations that are not inset with the minute life of long familiar things and symbols and places."<sup>43</sup> And again: "a man should find his Holy Land where he first crept upon the floor."<sup>44</sup> Okigbo is in the same state of mind in his return to his own holy land in "Heavensgate."

If the poem is now to be considered as an exploration of the various stages which the creative imagination must undergo before it can finally crystallize itself into an art-work, some of the images and symbols already examined can sustain an analysis independent of their earlier association with ancestor worship. The Orpheus-protagonist in search of his creative self must pass through certain ritual landscapes before he can create. The journey begins with "The Passage," and continues through "Initiations" and the section called "Watermaid." Sometimes the quest involves cleansing and meditation, and Orpheus becomes a Christ-figure who goes to the mountain, as in "Lustra." And in Section V entitled "Newcomer," the itinerant poet has reached his destination. He is himself the poem that is created or the sequence that is completed. He is also the poet that is now sure of himself, one who is finally inspired, and whose spirit is "in ascent." Each of these ritual landscapes is located in Okigbo's homeland. As an African Orpheus, he does not need to consult the aid of a

foreign muse in his creative enterprise. He knocks humbly at the divine gates of Idoto, "the water spirit that nurtures all creation."<sup>45</sup>

In the second movement of "The Passage," the poet is a young bird in the rite of passage. He is standing on one leg, and is about to embark on the "dark waters" of his literary beginnings. The image of "dark water" is linked to Idoto's "watery presence," but "dark" suggests doubt and uncertainty, for the poet is as yet unsure of himself. This idea is implied by the poet's image of himself as a supplicant standing "on one leg" before mother Idoto's watery landscape. Okigbo's creative expectations are suggested in this movement by the images of "ray" and "rainbow":

Rays, violet and short, piercing the gloom,  
foreshadow the fire that is dreamed of.

Rainbow on far side, arched like boa bent to kill,  
foreshadows the rain that is dreamed of.<sup>46</sup>

The "rays" foreshadow a quickening of his creative power, and the "rain" suggests that a creative imagination so quickened will bequeath posterity with a deluge of literary artifact. Okigbo's premature death forestalled his grand literary designs. As he foresaw, his creative "rays" were short.

In "Initiations," two mythical figures initiate the poet into the art of song. Jadum, "a half-demented village minstrel," and Upandru, "a village explainer" are already established in the craft. Jadum is introduced in the third

movement as "a minstrel who singeth"; his lamentation of "the errors of the rendering" is partly related to the poet's own song. Upandru's role is to remind the poet of the hazards of his vocation. Poetry, he said, is a verbal game of chess, "Logistics":

And I said:  
 The prophet only the poet.  
 And he said: Logistics.  
 (Which is what poetry is) . . . \*<sup>47</sup>

Yet, there is the mention in this section of another local celebrity, Kepkanly, whom the poet introduces as "a half-serious half-comical primary school teacher of the late thirties." Okigbo's imaginative return to these local personages who are associated with Idoto's neighbourhood is similar to Yeats's imaginative sympathy with the peasant community of the neighbourhood of Ballylee in the second part of "The Tower." Ballylee's landscape is as aesthetically gratifying as is Idoto's. From the top of his tower Yeats's creative beams (Okigbo used the word "rays") shot through Raftery, Mary Hynes, Hanrahan, and Mrs. French, each numbered in the poet's song, and each enabling the poet to give that song shape and form. From Idoto's neighbourhood Okigbo evoked the legendary presences of Kepkanly, Jadum, and Upandru. As a "half-demented village minstrel," Jadum is of kindred spirit with the blind Gaelic bard Raftery, whom Yeats called a "wandering country poet."<sup>48</sup> In "The Tower," Yeats identifies himself with Raftery, designated this time as "beauty's blind rambling celebrant."<sup>49</sup> In "Initiations," Okigbo views Jadum and Upandru not as his

opposites but rather as aspects of his own personality, for he shares with both the gift of poetry and the power of prophecy. More important is the imaginative premise that dictated their evocation. Local characters, Ellmann has written, give the landscape its "look."<sup>50</sup>

In the poems of the third sequence, "Watermaid," the poet is standing on a beach where his mental and physical facilities are exposed to the open prospects of sea and sky. He is here in search of the stars of inspiration symbolized by the image of the "watermaid":

EYE OPEN on the sea,  
 eyes open, of the prodigal;  
 upward to heaven shoot  
 where stars will fall from.<sup>51</sup>

The "watermaid," or the star of the sea, is again a localized legendary figure. In the Ibo popular belief she is known as "mammy-wota" (woman of the waters). Stories about her reach the hinterland from the fishermen and the creek traders who ply the river-route that links Onitsha and Asaba in the former Eastern Nigeria. One legend associates the "mammy-wota" with kidnapping. She is believed to be fond of eloping with mortal lovers to her kingdom beneath the sea. Yeats chronicled an Irish version of this legend in the poem "Mermaid":

A mermaid found a swimming lad,  
 Picked him for her own,  
 Pressed her body to his body,  
 Laughed; and plunging down  
 Forgot in cruel happiness  
 That even lovers drown.<sup>52</sup>

Okigbo's "watermaid" is not a kidnapper. She is for Okigbo the African equivalent of the mythical female figures that are supposed to fecundate the creative imagination. Peter Thomas mentions the "Lady of the Lake" and Robert Graves's "White Goddess" as two examples of such muselike figures in the Western tradition.<sup>53</sup> Stephen's birdlike girl in A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man and Yeats's Queen Maeve belong to this galaxy of muses. In Mythologies Yeats refers to Queen Maeve as "Our Lady of the Hills" and the "White Lady."<sup>54</sup> Okigbo's "watermaid" is also associated with "white"; she wears "white light about her" in the second movement of the sequence named after her; and in the third movement the poet calls her "my white queen." Details of imagery in the opening poem of this sequence take the reader back to the first poem in "Heavensgate." The poet is still a prodigal knocking at the gates for the "watchword." The sea image evokes reminiscences of Idoto's "watery presence," and the "watchword" is here the "watermaid." Thus, Okigbo apparently intends the reader to identify his watermaid with Idoto. In either case his muse is still located on his earth.

In "Watermaid" the muse did answer the poet's summons, but her tryst with the poet-lover was not long enough to assuage his creative unease; hence the plaintive tone of the ensuing stanza:

So brief her presence--  
 match-flare in wind's breath--  
 so brief with mirrors around me.<sup>55</sup>

In consequence, the poet is entangled once more in what Okigbo calls "the agony of composition."<sup>56</sup> The dominant mood in "Watermaid" is one of lamentation, of a striving after the unattainable, the elusive, the impossible, which is no other than the poet's inconstant muse. It is with this note of disappointment that the section concludes. The poet's creative agony is vocalized in the last four stanzas:

THE STARS have departed,  
 the sky in monocle  
 surveys the worldunder,

The stars have departed,  
 and I--where am I?

Stretch, stretch, O antennae,  
 to clutch at this hour,

fulfilling each moment in a  
 broken monody.<sup>57</sup>

"Lustra" is an important milestone in Okigbo's creative journey in "Heavensgate." The poet must undergo further cleansing rites if he is to regain the poetic insight that eluded him in "Watermaid." The scene of his cleansing rites on this particular occasion is the hills that surround Idoto's sacred enclave:

SO WOULD I to the hills again  
 so would I  
 to where springs the fountain  
 there to draw from

And to hill top clamber  
 body and soul  
 whitewashed in the moon dew  
 there to see from

So would I from my eye the mist  
 so would I  
 thro' moonmist to hilltop  
 there for the cleansing.<sup>58</sup>

The hills are evoked as a place of symbolic retreat, where the poet can effectively prepare himself spiritually for the creative ordeal that confronts him.

Okigbo's "Lustra" rites seem to have yielded fruit, for the last poem in this sequence is one thunderous applause to his muse. Idoto's grove resounds with echoes of celebrative drums and cannons:

THUNDERING drums and cannons  
 in palm grove:  
 the spirit is in ascent.

I have visited;  
 on palm beam imprinted  
 my pentagon--<sup>59</sup>

Thus, "Newcomer," the final sequence in "Heavensgate" is a complementary piece to "Lustra," bringing to a climax the note of elation that concluded the sequence that immediately precedes. At the end of "Lustra" Okigbo had visited the Muses' sanctuary:

I have visited, the prodigal . . .

In palm grove,  
 long-drums and cannons:  
 the spirit in the ascent.<sup>60</sup>

In "Newcomer" he has come to the end of his creative enterprise; he has entered Idoto's palace of art. The motif of arrival is further highlighted by the allusion in the second movement of "Newcomer" to Okigbo's sister-in-law,<sup>61</sup> Georgette, and to her new-born babe. This movement is dedicated to Georgette and her baby who was born shortly

before "Newcomer" was composed. Georgette's baby is an image with which the motif of arrival is given a concrete objectification.

Georgette's presence in "Newcomer" may be considered a continuation of the image of female principle whose influence dominates "Heavensgate." As a member of the poet's family, is she not indeed a human symbol of mother Idoto herself? Still, Georgette's presence serves Okigbo for other poetic purposes; coming at the end of the sequence, and being herself the procurer of the image with which the motif of arrival is concretized, does she not also remind one of the parallel between female womb and the womb of poetic imagination? In using Georgette and her baby at so crucial a point in "Heavensgate," Okigbo seems to imply that the word has materialized physically in "Newcomer," in the form of the completed sequence, just as its biological equivalent (child) has been given a concrete living shape in the womb of the poet's sister-in-law, Georgette. All this naturally evokes echoes of Joyce's Stephen Dedalus. "In the virgin womb of imagination," said Stephen, "the word was made flesh."<sup>62</sup> If this interpretation of the presence in the poem of Georgette and her baby is accepted, then Okigbo has not lost sight of his environment. What looks like a foreign intrusion into the poem's symbolic structure is the season of arrival itself. Spring, the universal season of rebirth, is the season that announces the arrival of the poet-protagonist at his creative terminal:

IN THE CHILL breath of the day's waking,  
comes the newcomer,

when the draper of May  
has sold out fine green garments,

and the hillsides have made up their faces,  
and the gardens, on their faces a painted smile.<sup>63</sup>

Perhaps, spring, in its role as a universal image of rebirth and renewal, is appropriate for Okigbo's purpose.

In general, Idoto's landscape reflects the changing mood and fortune of the itinerant poet. At the beginning of his creative pilgrimage, Okigbo was confronted by "DARK WATERS of the beginning." In the poems of the opening sequence he was standing on one leg; but in "Newcomer" he is standing above a "bridgehead":

I AM standing above the noontide,  
Above the bridgehead.<sup>64</sup>

The gap between uncertainty and self-assurance has been bridged. "The questing poet" is riding the waves of creative confidence at noontide. The waters of noon displace the "DARK WATERS of the beginning." The journey which was begun at a time of gloom and darkness, when the poet was unsure of himself, comes to an end at noon, a time of bright daylight:

I am standing above the noontide  
with my head above it;

Under my feet float the waters  
Tide blows them under . . .<sup>65</sup>

The experience of "Heavensgate" shows that Okigbo is aware of the importance to his creative self of a home-ward journey to and through the landscapes of his identity.

His imagination, he seems to realize, must pass through familiar sights and scenes in this creative journey. Idoto is the muse that guides his quill, compelling him to reckon with the literary possibilities of her "tangled-wood-tale." The Okigbo of the Sumerian and Babylonian mythologies in certain poems in the second half of "Limits" is like the Yeats of the Arcadian and Indian romance in Crossways. The evocation of the remote legends and myths of Ancient Near East in "Limits" sounds like a digression in the journey back. This point has been noted by the Nigerian novelist Achebe in the essay "Africa and Her Writers." There is a new poetic thunder, an African thunder, argues Achebe, in Okigbo's last poems, "Path of Thunder." The predominance of African subject-matter in this volume, and Okigbo's ease in handling it is proof, according to Achebe, of Idoto's maternal care as Okigbo's poetic muse:

It was as though the goddess he sought in his poetic journey through so many alien landscapes and ultimately found at home had rewarded him with this new thunder.<sup>66</sup>

As previously noted, Yeats was also launched on a homeward journey in the volumes that immediately followed Crossways. In "To the Rose upon the Rood of Time," he declared that his creative imagination was to be nourished by the holy land of Ireland. His imaginative identification with the landscape of Ballylee in certain sections of "The Tower" is one typical example of Yeats's sympathies with his land and life. This tendency to call the muse home was declared early in the Preface to a selection of his poems

published in 1908:

When I first wrote I went here and there for my subjects as my reading led me, and preferred to all other countries Arcadia and the India of romance, but presently I convinced myself . . . that I shall never go for the scenery of a poem to any country but my own.<sup>67</sup>

If J. P. Clark were as vocal as Yeats in matters relating to his literary development, he might make a similar confession. His early manuscripts betray his initial difficulties as a poet. His imagination was as yet unsure of itself in most of these poems. The search was not merely for subject-matter but for a model as well. There was a poem on "Dew," another on "Easter," and yet another entitled "Outside Gethsamene." Christian festivities and biblical stories with which Clark was familiar provided him with materials for occasional poems. Sometimes it is Clark's knowledge of the literary idiosyncracies of a given period in English literature which is reflected in his early poetic experiments. The poem entitled "Passion is a Fuel" mimics the platitudes and commonplace witticisms of an Elizabethan love lyric:

Passion is a fuel  
driving me a rudderless ship,  
and your friendship  
the indifferent cruel  
sea wherein I drift.<sup>68</sup>

Clark's interest in the poem does not seem to go beyond his enthusiastic discovery of the wit that establishes a corollary between the emotions of a passionate lover and the combustible energies of a fuel. The first stanza is wholly devoted to a conscious elaboration of this metaphor, and

once the potentialities of this startling discovery have been exhausted the poet's poetic fuel is also extinguished.

The dew that Clark writes of in the poem "Dew" has no local habitation. It could be an African dew or a European dew. It is not the particularities of a given dew that attracted Clark's attention but the cycle in the elemental processes that make and unmake dew:

O tread not on the dew  
 So fresh, pure and bright!  
 She was born of the noon  
 In the silence of night  
 And tomorrow--even at dawn  
 She shall rise to the sun.<sup>69</sup>

It is not artistic heresy on the part of any poet to write on any subject of his choice. But his performance may attain what Yeats called "breadth and stability"<sup>70</sup> if he writes of the things he is most familiar with. William Morris and the Shelley of Prometheus Unbound lack this "breadth," in Yeats's opinion, because these writers have not anchored their creative sensibility to the realities of their own environment.

Clark's poems were first gathered together by the Mbari Publishers in Ibadan in 1962. The volume entitled Poems includes some forty poems from Clark's early manuscripts. As an arm of the literary journal Black Orpheus, which was founded by Ulli Beier in 1957 to promote Negro art, the Mbari Publishers observed the editorial policy of this literary periodical. Preference was given to creative literature written by Negro-African writers. Thus, in the first published edition of Clark's

poems such "unlocated" pieces as his "Dew" were few in number. "Easter" and "Outside Gethsemane" reappeared, but they were placed at the end of the new edition. Poems on African theme and with African setting predominated. Certain titles indicated Clark's favourites as far as literary models are concerned. "Variations on Hopkins on the Theme of Child Wonder" and "Ibadan Dawn (after 'Pied Beauty')" tend to establish Hopkins as the favoured master, but the poem "Why Should I Rage" betrays echoes of Yeats, the more so because it is unrequited love that made Clark rage. Unrequited love was one of the twin plagues (the other is old age) that harassed Yeats. More important, however, is the fact that the volume showed generally Clark's increasing interest in his environment. His imagination was beginning to identify itself with his landscape. His poetic materials were drawn from familiar sights and scenes, and his protagonists were individuals rooted to their land. The change is important, for it smacks of what Yeats called "imaginative nationalism."<sup>71</sup>

The poem "Olokun," for example, was inspired by the legend surrounding Olokun, the Yoruba goddess of the sea. To the Binis of the mid-Western state of Nigeria who share a common boundary with the Ijaws of the Niger Delta where Clark belongs, Olokun is also a sea deity. The social-anthropologist, P. Amoury Talbot, reveals that the sea over which she presides spreads "eastward from Lagos lagoon towards the Niger Delta."<sup>72</sup> Another version of the Olokun

legend holds that Olokun is the goddess of beauty and of wisdom. Clark's poem (which is a homage to the goddess) combines both of these attributes. His amorous gesture in the first stanza takes account of Olokun's kinship with the sea:

I love to pass my fingers,  
As tide through weeds of the sea.  
And wind the tall fern-fronds  
Through the strands of your hair  
Dark as night that screens that naked moon.<sup>73</sup>

The poet's fingers are "tides" acting out their will on the weedy curls of his lady's hair. The tide image is as appropriate to Olokun as it is natural to Clark's homeland in the Niger Delta, where flood is one constant feature of the landscape. This image plays an important role in Clark's writings. In A Reed in the Tide (1965), Clark is preoccupied with the reed-and-tide phenomena of the Delta landscape. Talbot bears testimony to the geography of the land in this area. "The country inhabited by the Ijaws," he writes, "consists for the most part of the Niger delta with its swamp-lands and maze of creek and rivers which meander through the bush like veins of some giant leaf. A very small proportion of the country is solid land."<sup>74</sup>

Half the poems in A Reed in the Tide look backwards to Clark's local environment. The title deserves a close examination. It may have originated from Clark's earlier work, The Raft, written in 1961, where a wayward woman is imaged as "a reed in the tide."<sup>75</sup> In that case only the title counts and not its implication in this particular

context. For Clark, it appears, represents himself in the volume as a reed swayed by the wind:

But you and I two reeds swaying on  
The banks with the wind of world-blight  
How long this hedging listing and roll  
Before our self-split selves unite?<sup>76</sup>

This verse recalls Yeats several references to the image of wind in reeds. Apart from his own volume of poems entitled The Wind Among the Reeds (1899), Yeats had earlier betrayed an interest in the image cluster of wind, reed, and tide. In The Celtic Twilight (1893), the faeries are said to lament man's fallen world in "the lamentation of the wind-tossed reeds";<sup>77</sup> and in a review article entitled "A Symbolical Drama in Paris" (1894), Yeats wrote of certain incidents in the past "when I heard the wind blowing in a bed of reeds by the border of a little lake."<sup>78</sup> The image of wind in reeds seems to have served Yeats as a symbol of the lyric imagination. In his book Poetic Knowledge in the Early Yeats, Allen Grossman points out that Yeats considered the image of wind among the reeds the Celtic equivalent of the aeolian harp. "The difference between the romantic instrument . . . and Yeats's symbol for the Celtic afflatus," writes Grossman, "lies in the fact that Yeats removed the factor of artificiality: the reed sings in its natural bed on the shore of the lake."<sup>79</sup> In the two prose passages cited earlier from Yeats, the emphasis is indeed on the sonic impact of wind on reeds. A passage in Yeats's Introduction to his anthology of Irish verse hinges on the sonic echo of wind on reeds. "The poor peasant of the eighteenth

century," Yeats writes, "could make fine ballads by abandoning himself to the joy or sorrow of the moment, as the reeds abandon themselves to the wind which sighs through them."<sup>80</sup> By entitling his own edition of his poems A Reed in the Tide, Clark may have considered himself a reed singing in the tide, just as Yeats must have seen himself in The Wind Among the Reeds as a reed whose lyric impulse is stimulated by wind. In both cases the singer and the song are rooted to their own earth, for Yeats's "tides" and "reeds" derive from his childhood experience in Sligo which he saw as his native place. Between Sligo and Rosses Point, Yeats wrote in Autobiographies, "there is a tongue of land covered with coarse grass that runs out into the sea or mud according to the state of the tide."<sup>81</sup> While he was in London as a boy, his thoughts returned frequently to the reed-strewn banks of the Sligo Bay:

I did not know what it was to be alone, for I could  
wander in pleasant alarm . . . round some ponds  
imagining ships going in and out among the reeds and  
thinking of Sligo.<sup>82</sup>

"Reed" and "tide" emerge in some of the earlier poems as a physical reality of the Sligo landscape. In "Meditations of the old Fisherman," for instance, a Sligo fisherman regretted that "The herring are not in the tides as they were of old."<sup>83</sup> And in "The Host of the Air," another Sligo character, O'Driscoll, is said to have chased away with a song

The wild duck and the drake  
 From the tall and the tufted reeds  
 Of the drear Hart Lake.

And he saw how the reeds grew dark  
 At the coming of night-tide.<sup>84</sup>

Hart Lake, writes Sheelah Kirby in The Yeats Country, is located on the top of Ox Mountains in Ballisodare (County Sligo); the "tufted reeds" and "night-tide" are familiar features of its surroundings.<sup>85</sup>

In the same way, reed and other local images appear as the physical accessories of Clark's own locality in some of the poems in A Reed in the Tide. In the first poem in the collection, "For Granny (from Hospital)," "flood," "lettuce," the "Niger," "reed," "silt," and "mud" give the poem's riverain landscape its identity. As elements of the poet's locality, they seem to have been evoked without any laboured effort. "For Granny" is both an inquiry into the nature of maternal love and a recollection of one instance in the past when the poet was himself a beneficiary of those loving sentiments:

Tell me, before the ferryman's return,  
 What was that stirred within your soul,  
 One night fifteen floods today,  
 When upon a dugout  
 Mid pilgrim lettuce on the Niger,  
 You with a start strained me to breast:  
 Did you that night in the raucous voice  
 Of yesterday's rain,  
 Tumbling down banks of reed  
 To feed a needless stream,  
 Then recognize the loud note of quarrels  
 And endless dark nights of intrigue  
 In Father's house of many wives?<sup>86</sup>

Time is measured in floods, for flood and the ebb and flow of the tide remain a permanent legacy of the land. In

Clark's manuscript, this poem bears the title "A Night on the Niger." In another version which appears in an anthology of Nigerian prose and verse selected by Frances Ademola, the poem is entitled "For Granny (written in Hospital)."<sup>87</sup> The poem may have been written in hospital, but what lingers in Clark's imagination is not the hospital experience but the realities of the Niger: the Niger with "banks of reeds," "pilgrim lettuce," and overflowing floods.

Clark's other poem "Night Rain" is a poetic comment on the facts of weather in an environment that is familiar to the poet. The rains are nocturnal and vehement in his own part of the Niger:

It is drumming hard here  
And I suppose everywhere  
Droning with insistent ardour upon  
Our roof thatch and shed.

The word "here" in the first line localizes Clark's experience, and "everywhere" in the second may suggest that in tropical Africa as a whole rains are vehement. The vehemence of the storm is suggested by the auditory images "drumming" and "droning," while visual images ("orange" and "mango") emphasize the weight and vigour of rain-reeds:

Great water drops are dribbling  
Falling like orange or mango  
Fruits showered forth in the wind.

The unhappy victims of this night invasion of rainstorm are as helpless as the disabled night creatures of the poem such as "bats" and "owls":

We have drunken tonight of a spell  
 Deeper than the owl's or bat's  
 That wet of wings may not fly  
 Bedraggled up on the iroko, they stand  
 Emptied of hearts, and  
 Therefore will not stir.<sup>88</sup>

"Owl" and "bat" reinforce the nocturnal setting that is suggested in the poem's title, while the image "iroko" localizes it, for the "iroko" is specifically a tropical tree. Clark's sense of identity is not only regional, therefore; it is also African.

In his other rain poem, "The Year's First Rain," Clark's understanding of identity from a perspective that is both regional and African is evident. As in the previous rain poem "Night Rain," rain descends on earth in fevered distillations:

Rain comes . . .  
 After long surcease in desert  
 Rain comes,  
 Hot-breathing, alert  
 And swift to thunder rolls and claps.<sup>89</sup>

But the sexual metaphor in the fourth line, "Hot-breathing," introduces another symbolic dimension into Clark's concept of tropical thunderstorm. It is not only its vehemence that fascinates the poet but the image of rain as the earth's lover, and of earth as mother or woman. Indeed, the idea that has caught Clark's attention in the poem is the traditional concept of earth as mother and of rain as her lover. The poem's aesthetic appeal lies in the conscious exploitation of this conceit. The image of earth as mother is, of course, not traditional to Africa alone. Concerning the universal applicability of this metaphor, Martin

Grotjahn writes in his book The Voice of the Symbol: "In the unconscious the land is the mother's body from which the child receives so much joy."<sup>90</sup>

For the African writer, however, the image stimulates peculiar attention. Clark's first play Song of a Goat is structured, for example, on a continuous manipulation of the analogy that equates woman to land, and vice versa. The analogy originated in the role to which the African woman has been assigned by tradition. She is still considered a maternity symbol. Her basic function is child-bearing. Her husband's duty is to till her womb as the farmer tills the womb of the earth. For a people close to the land, as the majority of Africans are, and whose basic occupation is farming or husbandry, the analogy is a natural equation. Thus, in Clark's play already mentioned, a fortune-teller named Masseur reminds Zifa, the impotent husband (a pun too on husbandry) of the land-woman, Ebiere, that he has neglected to attend to the womb of his wife with a marital care:

You have allowed the piece of fertile  
Ground made over to you to run fallow  
With elephant grass.<sup>91</sup>

In the poem, "The Year's First Rain," the earth mother lies "fallow" like Ebiere, waiting for the arrival of rain, the "long missed one." Rain comes, hot with desire, to revitalize the sterile womb of the mother. The offspring of its cosmic embrace with earth is "life." The sexual metaphor is worked consistently into the entire structure of the poem:

Now with more than tongue can tell  
 Thrusts, he strokes her, swamps her,  
 Enters all of him beyond her fell,  
 Till in the calm and cool after  
 All alone, earth yawns, limbers her stay,<sup>92</sup>  
 Swollen already with life to break at day.

"Yawns" in the last line but one is perhaps an unconscious echo of Yeats's frequent use of this image as euphemism for what F. A. C. Wilson calls "post-coital lassitude."<sup>93</sup> In Yeats's poem "On Woman," for instance, excess of passion made two lovers to "stretch and yawn." In Clark's poem, mother earth relapses into a fit of yawning after her sexual union with rain.

In Soyinka's poem, "I think it rains," rain is situated in a position of sexual kinship with earth; for it functions as earth's lover, as in Clark:

Rain reeds, practised in  
 The grace of yielding, yet unbending  
 From afar, this your conjugation with my earth  
 Bares crouching rock.

This particular rain, like Coleridge's midnight frost, recalls other emotions (for example "Purity of sadness"), but the role of rain as a life-force symbol remains unchanged. In the first stanza, it is rain's function to assuage the thirst of a parched tongue, and set it free from the forces that bind it to the dry roof-tops of the mouth. A tongue, metaphorical or literal, so resuscitated and revived will bear fruit ("knowledge") in its due season:

I think it rains  
 That tongues may loosen from the parch  
 Uncleave roof-top of the mouth, hang  
 Heavy with knowledge.<sup>94</sup>

If Soyinka's parched tongue is applicable, too, to a parched tongue of earth, one may understand G. J. Afolabi Ojo's opinion that the fear of drought is deeply rooted in the minds of the Yorubas of Western Nigeria:

Drought struck at the root of the agricultural economy, roasted seed in heaps or mounds, caused young shooting plants to wither, made crops fail and brought in prolonged seasons of hunger. Rain was eagerly awaited. If it did not fall in good time it had to be encouraged by invoking the supernatural powers of some of the gods and ancestors.<sup>95</sup>

Soyinka's imagination appears to reckon with this fear, but although his poetry does not exploit the ritual of invocation, it frequently emphasizes the revitalizing aspect of rain. Water and streams, pools and lakes, springs and runnels, and even wine, are extensions of the image of rain. These images foster life and guarantee continuity. With Yeats, too, water is a symbol of continuity ("What's water but the generated soul?"),<sup>96</sup> but his recreative water is a Platonic derivation, whereas Soyinka's water symbolism is further enriched by the poet's knowledge of the fear of drought among his own people. In the poem "O Roots," which appears in Soyinka's second book of verse, A Shuttle in the Crypt, the shuttle which is in search of life, longed for the draughts of spring water as "potencies against my endless thirst."<sup>97</sup> And in the poem "Dedication," in which Soyinka prays for his daughter, Moremi, even as Yeats had prayed for his in "A Prayer for my Daughter," rain-water featured in the ritual that invoked the blessing of fruitfulness on Soyinka's daughter:

This, rain-water, is the gift  
Of gods--drink of its purity, bear fruits in season.<sup>98</sup>

Rain is then the symbol of life, whether biological or vegetational, in Soyinka's iconography. The original source of this symbolism is agricultural, as the passage quoted from Ojo shows. Soyinka extends the relevance of rain in the earth's womb to the relevance of the sperms of life in the female womb. This metaphor assumes a parallel between land and woman. In the poem "In Paths of Rain," the analogy between land and woman is the starting point for the poet's reflection on the emergence of seed from a successful sexual embrace between man and woman:

In paths of rain, in rock grooves, may  
These rare instants of wild fox-fires  
Write on moments, lives.<sup>99</sup>

Emphasis is heavily concentrated on the first half of the opening line, and on the last word in the last. But as the phrase "in paths of rain" is accentuated, so is its adverbial adjunct which resembles it in structure: "in rock grooves." Life, Soyinka assumes, can emerge even from the crevices of rocks when these grooves are watered by rain. Even so, prays the poem's male persona, may life emerge from moments of sexual passion. The poem's male persona and his beloved are the human complements of rain and earth in their function as continuity symbols in the natural world.

The poem expresses the emotions of a man who, it is presumed, has recently renewed a broken relationship with a woman. The "instants of wild fox-fires" are not frequent, but when they do occur they are "rare" in the sense of being

highly prized. The fires are those of legitimate passion, since the life that results from the sexual embrace is gladly welcome. The low tempo of sexual fulfilment is implied in the lines "shy lights from your night redress/ My darkness." The woman's coldness towards her lover launches the man into a dark night of the soul. However, "a captive tenderness" is emerging from "deep wells of denials." The renewed relationship is also yielding fruit, and seed is the emblem by which the success of the union is measured:

The last despairing pause, birth-teasing  
 Yields dues on precipice, to love,  
 Reassurance, and strangled seeds  
 Unleashed, exult.<sup>100</sup>

"In Paths of Rain" belongs to that section of Soyinka's collection, Idanre and Other Poems, which is entitled "For Women." Its metaphors operate on the traditional concept of land as woman and of rain as the land's fertilizer. In another poem of this section, "Psalm," woman is both land and harvest. As a hymn on fecundity "Psalm" exploits the parallel between biological gestation and land husbandry. Land husbandry culminates in harvest or seedling season; so can the "husbandry" of a woman's womb culminate in a different kind of harvest, birth:

the seeds have ripened fast my love  
and the milk is straining at the pods

the ever-eager thought is chaste  
at the ruin of your corn-stalk waist

swaddlings of my gratitude  
stir within your plenitude.

moist the quickening consciousness  
sealed in warm mis-shapeness

ivory granaries are filled  
a prize of pain will be fulfilled.<sup>101</sup>

The phrase "ever-eager thought" in the second stanza is a metaphor for the fire of passion. Passion can be sober ("chaste") only after the woman's virtue (her "corn-stalk waist") had been ruined. "Corn-stalk waist" reinforces the analogy between woman and harvest, and between her and land by extension. The second and fifth stanzas postulate an ironic situation which recalls Stephen Dedalus's insight in Joyce's Ulysses that "Time's ruin build eternity's mansion."<sup>102</sup>

In the third stanza, the germs of life which have been deposited within the woman's womb become her lover's "swaddlings of . . . gratitude"; these "swaddlings" stir within the woman's "plenitude" (womb). They are referred to in the fourth stanza as the "quickening consciousness/sealed in warm mis-shapeness." In the seventh stanza, land and woman merge into one entity; the woman's "sanctuary" (womb) is sealed in "earth" from whence emerges seed in both biological and vegetational connotations: "sealed in earth your sanctuary/yields to light." The prenatal contractions of the womb are "a mystery of pulses." The poet contemplates

this mystery as well as the new life which it precipitates:

a mystery

of pulses and the stranger life  
comes to harvest and release  
the germ and life exegesis<sup>103</sup>  
inspiration of your genesis.

The persistence of land imagery in the poems of Clark and Soyinka, and its correlation to woman, derive, as has been hinted, from the natural affinity between man and land in Africa. Man still relies on the resources of the land there for his daily existence. In Ireland, too, the land is a force to be reckoned with, as Daniel Corkery has noted in his book on Synge. Ireland, he says, is a "peasant-ridden country."<sup>104</sup> Yeats's image of Ireland is also agrarian. He frequently contrasts this side of Ireland with the industrial traditions of England:

Ireland will always be in the main an agricultural country. Industries we may have, but we will not have as England has, a very rich class nor whole districts blackened with smoke like what they call in England their 'Black Country.' . . . Ireland will always be a country where men plough and sow and reap.<sup>105</sup>

However, the agrarian aspect of Ireland does not frequently emerge in Yeats's poetry. His "grey Connemara" man in the poem "The Fisherman," and the legends around him suffice Yeats for the peasant image of Ireland. But Clark and Soyinka reckon with physical earth itself and its relevance to the life of the country-based African.

Embedded in Soyinka's imagination as he exploits the parallel between land and woman is a remote echo of the Yoruba god Ogun, who is the symbol of creative essence

itself. Rain and harvest, which play so dominant a role in his poetry, are Ogun's seasons.<sup>106</sup> In the epic poem "Idanre," which celebrates the various myths that surround Ogun, rain heralds the coming of the god to earth; and harvest is the essence of that advent. In the opening poem "Deluge," rain is part of the cosmic ritual that prepares the earth for the god's descent. Before the god can come, earth must be cleansed by rain. Thus, in this section of the poem "Roaring vats of unstoppered heaven deluge/earth in fevered distillation."<sup>107</sup> After this ritual of cleansing, earth is fertilized and all nature fructified. In the final lines of "Deluge," therefore, nature is on her edges in a symbolic gesture of preparedness:

And no one speaks of secrets in this land  
 Only, that the skin be bared to welcome rain  
 And earth prepare, that seeds may swell  
 And roots take flesh within her, and men  
 Wake naked into harvest-tide.<sup>108</sup>

One of Ogun's first assignments on his arrival to earth is to acknowledge his creative covenant with her. He visits the cornfields as the "first of reapers," his footprints "furrows" from which "giant roots" will sprout in the future. It is not only vegetable nature that was so honoured with fruitfulness. Oya, the wine-girl who was "dazed" by "divine dallying," was also a beneficiary of some divine boon: her womb was blessed. Ogun's pilgrimage to the harvest fields was a gesture by which he identified himself with nature ("Ogun/Teased his ears with tassels").<sup>109</sup> There is a reminiscence of the image of the land-woman in

Oya who, in being herself fructified by the god and in her role, too, as Ogun's erstwhile bride, is the symbol of Ogun's creative covenant with earth:

And she swam an eel into the shadows, felt her limbs  
Grow live, the torrents ran within and flooded us  
A gourd rose and danced between--without  
The night awaited the celebration of the crops--  
She took, and held it to her womb.<sup>110</sup>

But Ogun who creates is a god who also destroys. He is the god of war as well as the guardian of the road; and the road is the one means by which Ogun's destructive will is fulfilled. In "Idanre" he is called the "godfather of all souls who by roads/Made the voyage home."<sup>111</sup> Men are reminded that "Fated lives ride on the wheels of death when,/ The Road waits, famished."<sup>112</sup> The first victim in "Idanre" of Ogun's "famished" road is, ironically, Oya, who is presented in the poem as an individual with multiple personality: she is both human and divine. It is the human side of her personality that became the victim of Ogun's vindictive road. Oya the wine-girl became in the second part of the poem "a greying skull/On blooded highways."<sup>113</sup>

Death by road is the central concern of the poems in that section of Idanre and Other Poems entitled "Of the Road." The road landscape in these poems becomes significant in its role as an important symbolic referent to Soyinka's god, Ogun. But the first poem in this section is entitled "Dawn." It is an ode to dawn, a celebration of "the rites of dawn." These rites are essential; through these the ghostly presences of night may be banished, and

the god who presides over the twilight zone that intervenes between night and day may be summoned. Dawn is important to Ogun because of his association with the road. It is Ogun's hour in the sense that it is the hour of travel:

Traveller, you must set out  
At dawn. And wipe your feet upon  
The dog-nose wetness of earth.<sup>114</sup>

So reads the second poem in the road section of Idanre and Other Poems. But it is appropriate that this section which is pervaded by Ogun's presence should open with a poem which welcomes the god of dawn himself:

O celebration of the rites of dawn  
Night-spread in tatters and a god  
Received, aflame with kernels.<sup>115</sup>

The title of the second poem in this section, "Death in the Dawn," introduces the basic symbolism of the road landscape in this section. The "byways" are "grey," and are haunted by "swift, mute/Processions" of Ogun and his weird agents. Travellers are reminded that they must stay indoors "When the road waits, famished." The first victim of the road in "Death in the Dawn" is dawn's trumpeter itself, a cockerel:

On this  
Counterpane, it was--  
Sudden winter at the death  
Of dawn's lone trumpeter.<sup>116</sup>

Soyinka's headnotes to the poem give a full account of the circumstance in which it was written. Such a prefatory remark is an invaluable aid to the poem's meaning. Soyinka's notes read:

Driving to Lagos one morning a white cockerel flew out of the dusk and smashed itself against my windscreen. A mile further I came across a motor accident and a freshly dead man in the smash.<sup>117</sup>

Therefore, the "counterpane" is a windscreen of the poet's car, and the "sudden death" is the sudden smash that ended the cockerel's life. The "freshly dead man" is the "Wraith" in the poem's final stanza. Man, then, is the road's second victim:

But such another Wraith! Brother,  
Silenced in the startled hug of  
Your invention.<sup>118</sup>

The elegiac poem, "In Memory of Segun Awolowo," blames the death in a motor accident of Awolowo's son, Segun, on the road:

The road, the aged road  
Retched on this fresh plunder  
Of my youth.

But the greater blame lay on Ogun:

The Fault  
Is His of seven paths whose whim  
Gave Death his agency.<sup>119</sup>

As god of the road, Ogun supervises modern means of travel. "Around us, Dawning" is one of the road poems of Idanre. Death is as imminent in a jet flight as it is on the road. The tracks of a jet plane are the roads of the sky. Those who travel by air are not immune to Ogun's deathly whims. They are indeed "Passive martyrs, bound to a will of rotors" through which Ogun's own will may manifest itself. The poet, who is himself a passive martyr on this occasion of a jet flight, concretizes his apprehensions with an image which locates him in the twilight zone between life

and death: he is honed to death's still point:

I am light honed

To a still point in the incandescent  
Onrush, a fine ash in the beasts sudden  
Dessication [sic] when the sun explodes.<sup>120</sup>

The Sidhe who act through the agency of the wind in the Irish popular tradition may be likened to Ogun's vindictive use of the road. In the poem "The Hosting of the Sidhe" their chant rings drear to mortal ears:

The winds awaken, the leaves whirl round,  
Our cheeks are pale, our hair is unbound,  
Our breasts are heaving, our eyes are a gleam,  
Our arms are waving, our lips are apart;  
And if any gaze on our rushing band,  
We come between him and the deed of his hand,<sup>121</sup>  
We come between him and the hope of his heart.

In his notes to The Wind Among the Reeds Yeats said of the Sidhe that they are believed by the country folk in Ireland to be fond of sweeping mortals away in a blast of wind. Ogun, the Sidhe, or Idoto appear in the poems of Soyinka, Yeats, or Okigbo, respectively, as a gesture of symbolic identification on their part with their own land and life.

In the case of Lenrie Peters, the story is different. Peters occupies a rather curious position on the issue of identity. His first verse publication, entitled Poems, was brought out by Mbari in 1964. This volume is a collection of poems written in England. In 1967 Peters published a personal edition of his own poems, a step that Clark had taken two years earlier. The new volume, Satellites, consists of twenty-one poems from the earlier publication, and thirty-four new ones. A look at the title of Clark's

and Peters's personal editions of their poems may suggest the nature of their poetic sensibilities. Clark's volume is entitled A Reed in the Tide, and Peters's Satellites. Clark is a reed singing in the tides of the Niger Delta. In Peters's Satellites one wonders where to look for the volume's key image. It turns out that the "cosmos," as the title suggests, is the word. "The universe is/my book," Peters warns the reader early in Poem 9 of Satellites.<sup>122</sup> In consequence, cosmic landscapes are frequently evoked in the volume. In the satire on the European attitude to love in Poem 37, one lover is said to be merely a body in the "satellite of partners." Passion, too, in the Western love ethic, is measured with a cosmic yardstick: "Their tunnel of desire/could swallow more than flesh/a universe."<sup>123</sup>

There is in Satellites, generally, a remarkable absence of those landscapes of identity which anchor a local artist to his land and life. Peters's readers have commented on his literary cosmopolitanism. In a review of Satellites in West Africa, the Ghanaian poet and dramatist Ama Ata Aidoo says of Peters that his "imagination roams over a limitless area of the earth."<sup>124</sup> Eldred Jones of Sierra Leone makes a similar observation in a survey article on African literature. Peters, he says, "has a universality of outlook and is not confined to Africa for inspiration."<sup>125</sup> This point is the major conclusion of another review of Satellites in the journal Ibadan. "In these

poems," writes the reviewer, "Peters writes like an assimilated expatriate poet living in Britain--so very western European is the sensibility unfolded in them."<sup>126</sup>

The biographical facts noted earlier are responsible for the cosmic orientation of Peters's poetic vision. Most of the poems in Satellites were written while Peters was living in England. It is not surprising that some of the poems in this volume betray Peters's awareness of what was happening around him. The elegy on Winston Churchill (Poem 31), who died in 1965, is one example of Peters's sensitivity to the realities of his foreign environment. Churchill's death is not England's national tragedy alone but a universal bereavement: it is a loss "our world/will never see again."<sup>127</sup>

The realities of English seasons impinge naturally on Peters's imagination. There is a romantic evocation of the scenes, sights, and sounds of autumn in Poem 28. Nature loses her beauty while autumn lasts. The leaves seen by the poet as the erstwhile "pride of Spring/And Summer's canopy" begin to decay. The dispirited birds await the approach of winter in dismay; men foresee their own death in the "Napoleonic legions" of dead autumn leaves "destined for snow burial"; and love tends to wane:

On slimy pavements  
 Broken leaves  
 Recently the pride of Spring  
 And Summer's canopy

Advance, trembling  
 In the frenzy of death  
 Napoleonic Legions  
 Destined for snow-burial.<sup>128</sup>

This threnody is repeated in most of the autumn poems in Satellites, although there is generally, at the end, an affirmation of hope, for autumn, as Peters says in Poem 2, is "wonder and wonder is hope." The imagery in the above lines taken from Poem 28 of Satellites is indicative of the extent to which the sensibility that operates in these poems is dominated by alien perspective. Peters is still fascinated by such cliches as "pride of Spring" and "Summer's canopy." His dead autumn leaves must be measured in terms of a familiar European military debacle before the magnitude of this enormous funeral of leaves could successfully, as he imagines, be conveyed to his readers. Still more significant is the fact that his autumn emotions are the emotions that are traditionally associated with autumn. There is a catalogue of these emotions in Yeats's autumn poem "The Falling of the Leaves":

Autumn is over the long leaves that love us,  
 And over the mice in the barley sheaves;  
 Yellow the leaves of the rowan above us,  
 And yellow the wet wild-strawberry leaves.  
 The hour of the waning of love has beset us,  
 And weary and worn are our sad souls now;  
 Let us part, ere the season of passion forget us,  
 With a kiss and a tear on thy drooping brow.<sup>129</sup>

The similarity in mood and sentiment between Yeats's poem and some of Peters's autumn poems is startling. In

Poem 2 of Satellites, for example, Peters writes:

I will not mourn the sadness  
 I will go dead-leaf gathering  
 for the fire in a slice of sunlight  
 to fill my lungs with odours of decay  
 and my eyes with mellowed rainbow colours

I will go creeping down tasselled  
 latticed tree-avenues of light  
 and listen to squirrel tantrums  
 punctuate the orchestration of autumn silence  
 and hold in my hand the coiling stuff of nature.<sup>130</sup>

The poet is resolved not to mourn the "sadness" of autumn. He will instead "go dead-leaf gathering/for the fire in a slice of sunlight." In Poem 28, men "see/Their death fall/Certain as the leaves."<sup>131</sup> Yeats's "Falling of the Leaves" is a Crossways piece. As such it is one of those poems he called "my more literary work,"<sup>132</sup> in the sense that the inspiration behind them is foreign. The foreigner in this case is English poetry. Of Katharine Tynan's volume, Irish Love Songs, Yeats wrote:

A book such as you are doing should be Irish before all else. People will go to English poetry for "literary poetry" but will look to a book like your collection for a new flavour as of fresh-turned mould.<sup>133</sup>

Yeats's judgment of Synge's Paris writings may be applied with justice to Peters's English poems: life, from the African point of view, has cast no light into them.<sup>134</sup>

As Peters inherits in England the legacies of her seasons, so does he inherit there too the legacy of his colour: loneliness and isolation. "Mine is the silent face/in the railway compartment," he rails in Poem 5, adding, "I travel through desperate/deserted places" and "catty

cobbled alleys."<sup>135</sup> The loneliness of a long-distance student is also evoked in Poem 30, where Peters sees himself as a "dead wood" in a foreign landscape, his mind a vacant house for the "toad." Such toady moments may motivate Peters's longing for the landscape of the world he left behind. And there are indeed several poems of "homecoming" in Satellites. But when Peters looks back on Africa, it is usually with the eye of an outsider, of an individual seized by a sense of wonder at the horror as well as the glory of Africa. In Poem 63 of Katchikali, his second major volume, the African identity includes not only what he calls elsewhere the "gilt-edged present"<sup>136</sup> (his metaphor for city glass structures), but the realities of the village:

Go into villages, not palaces;  
look among goats and sheep  
under pyramids of squalor  
degradation, the moon's eclipse

Octogenarian breasts at twenty  
enthroned in the pools of urine  
after childbirth, whose future  
is not theirs to mould or flirt with mirth.<sup>137</sup>

There is the glory in the bird's eye-view of Freetown in Poem 10 of Satellites. The city is here

A glitter of rock salt  
encircled by mountains  
she tilts skyward  
seaward and skyward  
in the sun drench  
like some shore-washed monster  
feeble at the lion's feet  
for they are the Lion Mountains;  
the Sierra Leone.<sup>138</sup>

Peters is not a part of his surroundings in this poem. In other words, there is as yet no inside-view in his

perception of African scenery. His cosmic imagination intrudes into the remaining picture of the cityscape. Freetown is probably the city whose "cosmic atmosphere" whirls him round in Poem 11. Here in Poem 10 she wears the anonymity of all big cities, for although she draws her spiritual sustenance from the symbolic cotton tree which seems to be representative of the ancestral spirit that watches over the land ("her every root and hope/lies in the cotton tree"),<sup>139</sup> yet "the city is like any other, but free."

The people identify with the city (although the reader does not know who they are) but not the poet. "The people," Peters says, "are like the city/The people are the city." The poet is merely a narrative consciousness "telling" the reader things he feels the reader ought to know about the city. Rather than embody his conceptions of the city in concrete images which define its identity, Peters prefers to be himself the descriptive mouthpiece of those conceptions:

The people of the city are velvet dark  
they blossom at moonfall.

Two seasons alternate  
The wet heat and the dry  
Ocean breeze desert wind  
plough up what they can find;  
The people's thoughts are no less protean.<sup>140</sup>

The observer-attitude to scenery is apparent in Poem 16, where Peters has come home to an Africa where

The gurgling drums  
Echo the stars  
The forest howls  
And between the trees  
The dark sun appears.

Peters's Africa in this poem is a land of "lightning-flash/  
and thundering rain," of "famine" and "drought," where "The  
sodden spirit/Lingers on the road/Supporting the tortured  
remnants/of the flesh."<sup>141</sup>

Generally, Peters's personal world is the cosmic earth, the universalized landscape with no local habitation and a name. In Poem 36 (Satellites) he is standing on a beach (which could be any beach) where "seagulls lay their eggs/Half under the cracking waves/With seaweed under my nails."<sup>142</sup> On this unidentified spot, Peters's "amputated feet" are "buried in soft sand/Within the blue shadows." Peters's imaginative estrangement from the inner essence of the African landscape may be explained by the fact that he has no Ogun nor Idoto to celebrate there. Consequently, his sensibilities are not wholly rooted to his land and life as Clark's creative faculties are deeply embedded in the riverain regions of the Niger Delta and Yeats's in county Sligo and the locality of Ballylee and Coole Park.

The African title of Peters's second collection Katchikali would imply that Peters is at last coming to a kind of understanding with his African background. But his imagination is still roaming. There is in this volume as there is in Satellites (Poem 9) an apologia piece which seems to establish Peters's role as a bard of the shapeless cosmos.<sup>143</sup> In Poem 16 he is sitting on the "fence" that separates the new from the old, and the local from the universal. He insists on wearing the mask of literary

anonymity:

There where the dim past and future mingle  
 their nebulous hopes and aspirations  
 there I lie.

The affirmation in the fifth stanza should be noted:

It seems the world has changed her garment  
 but it is I who have not crossed the fence.

Peters has always been concerned with the dignity of man irrespective of his racial origin. There is the important reminder in Poem 42 that all mankind belong to the brotherhood of the human race:

'we two are common citizens  
 without tribe, cast, nation, race  
 without the mischievous  
 cloak of fiscal shrouds.'

Nevertheless, Peters is increasingly aware in this volume of his African beginnings. More poems are devoted to an authentic evocation of familiar scenes, sounds, and places. This note, even though it is not a dominant one in the volume, is struck early in the book. In Poem 3 the River Gambia emerges as "a slender river," "a trusting limb of elegance" which flows

three hundred miles to harbour;  
 wide-mouthed towards the sun  
 down inguinal pursuit  
 of open sea.

This river has a name, as well as a significance that is important to the poet. It is a river "where first I awoke to hear/the anger of the sea." Geographers confirm that the River Gambia "discharges its waters into the Atlantic at Bathurst through a magnificent estuary."<sup>144</sup> But Peters is not merely describing for the sake of description. From

the local he rises like Clark, Soyinka, Okigbo, and Yeats to the universal. The river's harbour is the cradle that initiated him into what Yeats calls "this filthy modern tide."<sup>145</sup> For the anger of the sea is Peters's metaphor for the legacies of human condition which the poet inherited as a child born into the world. In Poem 13 man is caught up with the sea's anger. Rescue men await the fall of the tide before they can go to the aid of a storm-tossed craft. "Wharf towns" line up the coast of the Gambia, and here, as in Yeats's Sligo Bay, tragedy is a daily occurrence. The rescue team waiting for the dawn of calm weather "look deep into/each others eyes/to see if the yellow curtain has died, /Down the Bay." The yellow curtain is the sun whose rays are amber at sundown.

But perhaps the best evocation of African landscape in the volume occurs in Poem 59. The neo-classical expletives of the first stanza--"rasping winds," "demented strings," "antique sleep," "tearful trees"--sound artificial; nevertheless, the poem is an important ode to mother earth; and, as it unfolds, it represents Peters's most comprehensive vision of an African scenery. In the first stanza, earth is awakened from her "antique sleep" by a pounding mortar of demented winds. As earth is resuscitated by a tropical thunderstorm, all nature joins this "ritual dance" of cosmic renewal:

The rasping winds lash with demented strings  
 their old protagonist earth from antique sleep  
     the tearful trees unbend from ritual dance  
             and shake their heads and stand erect.

Rain serves the same purpose here as it does in Clark's or Soyinka's rain poems. The difference is that for Peters the renewal of earth is tantamount, in the second stanza, to the rebirth of Africa. In a sense, mother earth is Africa, and Africa is mother earth:

Africa awakened to new beginnings, preens her head  
like nourished blades of grass forced out of earth.

The renewed earth is as young as the youth of the world.

The world that Peters has in mind is pre-colonial Africa.

It is for him a world that had the dignity of "kings." All this sounds like a romantic evocation of the African past.

Soyinka dismisses this view of Africa as a naive conception.<sup>146</sup> For Peters, however, the conceit may be allowed to stand. The renewed earth, in its beauty and purity, reminds him of the dignity (a superficial one probably) of kings. She sits "silent like some throne of kings." With this impression Peters leaves mother earth alone in the third stanza, and shifts his attention in the fourth to other sights and scenes of nature. His attention is pitched on "fresh bosomed" water-lilies lying by a "glass lake," and on the rapturous songs of "weaver birds":

on a glass lake water-lilies fresh bosomed  
swell with pride of being what they are  
and yellow-back raptures of weaver birds  
inverted in their nests, transect the air.

The poem takes a dramatic turn in the fifth stanza. At last Peters comes out openly with what the reader has suspected all along. This new world, this new Africa, is Peters's world (his world in the context of the poem). The

landscape he has so far delineated is a landscape to which he is strongly attached:

home is this clod of watery sodden earth  
of woodsman turning home with axe about his neck.

If Katchikali was written in England, as one strongly suspects it to have been, Peters expressed here an anxiety that wracked Yeats throughout his adolescent days in London. As this clod of African earth haunted the England-based Peters, so did Sligo haunt Yeats in London: "I longed for a sod of earth from some field I knew, something of Sligo to hold in my hand."<sup>147</sup> While there, Yeats confessed to Katharine Tynan that "the very feel of the familiar Sligo earth puts me in good spirits. I should like to live here always, not so much out of liking for the people as for the earth and the sky here, though I like the people too."<sup>148</sup> The last qualifying tag is typical of the antithetical Yeats. Peters admires the earth he evokes as well as its people. The last three stanzas of Poem 59 form a picture of village-  
scape and seascape. In the village green women are pounding corn, and men are wrestling. The traffic down the sea includes the hullabaloo at the quay where passengers board wooden canoes, their relatives waving good-bye signs with handkerchiefs:

on the sea stern boats turning on wooden keels  
sails waving with last memory of a handkerchief  
and the revolving wheel silenced as in a dream  
and life takes up her cudgels once again.

In the African poems, Peters seems to be more self-assured. The verse is more densely textured, the imagery

richer, and those broken rhythms and irregular stanzaic formations which betray his sense of psychic incompleteness are fewer. The one common weakness that his African poems share with those on English seasons is related to the nature of their impact. The overall effect is more panoramic than organic. Peters is unable to use an image as a starting-point for a more extended elaboration of a personal or universal poetic vision. Clark and Soyinka achieve this feat with the image of rain on land, Okigbo with the various meanings he works into the image of Idoto's "watery presence." Peters nearly achieved this effect in his skilful manipulation of the interaction of wind and rain on land in the first stanza of Poem 59. But he abandons this organic technique early in the poem in order to settle on his favourite panoramic approach. From the panoramic it is but one step away from Peters's preoccupation with the universal. Poem 59, however, remains his most vocal testimony to the reality of an African landscape.

The predominance of Irish landscape in Yeats's poetry is for him a celebrative gesture as well as an act of service to his nation. With Ireland in mind he writes in "First Principles":

In the small nations which have to struggle for their national life, one finds that almost every creator, whether poet or novelist, sets all his stories in his own country.<sup>149</sup>

There is also the confession in "Ireland and the Arts" that

I am yet jealous for Cuchulain, and for Baile and Aillin, and for those grey mountains that still are lacking their celebration.<sup>150</sup>

These sentiments are given utterance in "Municipal Gallery Revisited":

John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought  
All that we did, all that we said or sang  
Must come from contact with the soil, from that  
Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong.<sup>151</sup>

Contact with the soil, or knowledge "of the various earth" of which they are made, is the basic inspiration of the poems of Okigbo, Clark, Soyinka, and Peters. That contact may yet prove to be the most important consideration in assessing the literary value of the work of these poets.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Edwin Muir, Collected Poems (New York: Grove Press, 1957), p. 141.

<sup>2</sup>Allan Wade, The Letters of W. B. Yeats (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p. 99. Hereafter cited as Letters.

<sup>3</sup>W. B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 5. Hereafter cited as Essays.

<sup>4</sup>Essays, p. 208.

<sup>5</sup>Cited by Sunday Anozie, Christopher Okigbo: Creative Rhetoric (London: Evans, 1972), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup>Christopher Okigbo, Heavensgate (Ibadan: Mbari, 1962), p. 5. Heavensgate first appeared as a separate publication in 1962. The title of this edition is underscored, but subsequent citations from the poem are taken from the edition that appeared in Okigbo's selection of his poems entitled Labyrinths.

<sup>7</sup>Christopher Okigbo, "Silences," Transition, 8 (1963), 14.

<sup>8</sup>The story of the "Prodigal Son" is told in Luke 15: 11-32, The Holy Bible: The Revised Standard Version (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1953), pp. 87-88; for "watchword" see, 2 Samuel 18:25-26, *ibid.*, p. 340; and for "hearken," see Deuteronomy 7:2, *ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>9</sup>Isiah 20:2-3, *ibid.*, p. 728.

<sup>10</sup>Christopher Okigbo, Labyrinths (London: Heinemann, 1971), p. xi. Hereafter cited as Labyrinths.

<sup>11</sup>W. B. Yeats, The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 31. Hereafter cited as Collected Poems.

<sup>12</sup>Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach, The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 846. Hereafter cited as Variorum.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

- <sup>14</sup>Essays, p. 87.
- <sup>15</sup>Variorum, p. 812.
- <sup>16</sup>Collected Poems, p. 50.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 262.
- <sup>18</sup>Marjory Whitelaw, "Interview with Christopher Okigbo," Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 9 (July 1970), 36.
- <sup>19</sup>Labyrinths, p. 5. Where the asterisk [\*] appears after an ellipsis or a dash in a quotation, the mark is the poet's own, not the editor's.
- <sup>20</sup>Labyrinths, p. 5.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 6.
- <sup>22</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup>See Figure 2.
- <sup>24</sup>Labyrinths, p. 8.
- <sup>25</sup>Heavensgate, p. 17.
- <sup>26</sup>Sunday Anozie, Christopher Okigbo: Creative Rhetoric (London: Evans, 1972), pp. 55-56.
- <sup>27</sup>Labyrinths, p. 17.
- <sup>28</sup>Anozie, p. 50.
- <sup>29</sup>Labyrinths, p. 17.
- <sup>30</sup>Whitelaw, p. 30.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 35-36.
- <sup>32</sup>James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916; rept. Harmondsworth: Penguins, 1960), p. 221. Hereafter cited as A Portrait.
- <sup>33</sup>Essays, p. 202.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>35</sup>"The function of poetry," says Robert Graves, "is the religious invocation of the Muses." See his book The White Goddess (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 14. Graves adds: "Originally, the poet was the leader of a totem society of religious dancers. His verses . . . were danced around an altar or in a sacred enclosure and each verse started a new turn or movement in the dance" (The White Goddess, p. 422).

<sup>36</sup>Anozie, p. 41.

<sup>37</sup>Dan Izevbaye, "Okigbo's Portrait of the Artist as a Sunbird: A Reading of 'Heavensgate' (1962)," African Literature Today, 6 (1973), 4.

<sup>38</sup>Collected Poems, p. 361.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>40</sup>W. B. Yeats, "The Death of Oenone," in Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats, ed. John P. Frayne (London: Macmillan, 1970), I, 252.

<sup>41</sup>Collected Poems, p. 64.

<sup>42</sup>Christopher Okigbo, "Lament of the Masks," in Centenary Essays on the Art of W. B. Yeats (1865-1965), eds. D. E. S. Maxwell and S. B. Bushrui (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1965), p. xv.

<sup>43</sup>Essays, p. 296.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>45</sup>Labyrinths, p. xi.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>48</sup>Essays, p. 212.

<sup>49</sup>Collected Poems, p. 195.

<sup>50</sup>Richard Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 14.

<sup>51</sup>Labyrinths, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup>Collected Poems, p. 219.

<sup>53</sup>Peter Thomas, "The Water Maid and the Dancer: Figures of the Nigerian Muse," Literature East and West, 12 (March 1968), 86-89.

<sup>54</sup>W. B. Yeats, Mythologies (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 90 and 101. Hereafter cited as Mythologies.

<sup>55</sup>Labyrinths, p. 11.

<sup>56</sup>Whitelaw, p. 34.

<sup>57</sup>Labyrinths, p. 13.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>This fact is revealed in Anozia's Christopher Okigbo, pp. 7 and 61.

<sup>62</sup>A Portrait, p. 217.

<sup>63</sup>Labyrinths, p. 18.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Chinua Achebe, "Africa and Her Writers," in In Person: Achebe, Awoonor, and Soyinka, ed. Karen L. Morell (Seattle: University of Washington, 1975), pp. 18-19.

<sup>67</sup>Variorum, pp. 843-44.

<sup>68</sup>J. P. Clark, "Manuscript Poems," p. 13.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>70</sup>W. B. Yeats, Autobiographies (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 150. Hereafter cited as Autobiographies.

<sup>71</sup>W. B. Yeats, Explorations (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 343. Hereafter cited as Explorations.

<sup>72</sup>P. Amoury Talbot, The Peoples of Southern Nigeria (London: Frank Cass, 1969), p. 103.

<sup>73</sup>Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier, Modern Poetry from Africa (Harmondsworth: Penguins, 1963), p. 85.

<sup>74</sup>Talbot, pp. 98-99.

- <sup>75</sup>J. P. Clark, Three Plays (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 131. Hereafter cited as Three Plays.
- <sup>76</sup>J. P. Clark, A Reed in the Tide (London: Longmans, 1965), p. 11. Hereafter cited as A Reed.
- <sup>77</sup>Mythologies, p. 104.
- <sup>78</sup>Frayne, p. 324.
- <sup>79</sup>Allen R. Grossman, Poetic Knowledge in the Early Yeats: A Study of "The Wind Among the Reeds" (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1969), p. 57.
- <sup>80</sup>W. B. Yeats, A Book of Irish Verse (London: Macmillan, 1920), p. xxvii.
- <sup>81</sup>Autobiographies, p. 46.
- <sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 26.
- <sup>83</sup>Collected Poems, p. 21.
- <sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 54.
- <sup>85</sup>Sheelah Kirby, The Yeats Country (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1963), p. 24.
- <sup>86</sup>A Reed, p. 1.
- <sup>87</sup>For variations in the title of Clark's poem, see Manuscript Poems, p. 17; and Frances Ademola, Reflections (Lagos: African University Press, 1965), p. 51.
- <sup>88</sup>A Reed, pp. 2-3.
- <sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 14.
- <sup>90</sup>Martin Grotjahn, The Voice of the Symbol (New York: Delta, 1973), p. 91.
- <sup>91</sup>Three Plays, p. 6.
- <sup>92</sup>A Reed, p. 14.
- <sup>93</sup>F. A. C. Wilson, W. B. Yeats and Tradition (London: Methuen, 1958), p. 220.
- <sup>94</sup>Wole Soyinka, Idanre and Other Poems (London: Methuen, 1967), p. 43. Hereafter cited as Idanre.
- <sup>95</sup>G. J. Afolabi Ojo, Yoruba Culture (London: University of London Press, 1966), p. 214.

<sup>96</sup>Collected Poems, p. 239.

<sup>97</sup>Wole Soyinka, A Shuttle in the Crypt (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 11. Hereafter cited as A Shuttle.

<sup>98</sup>Idanre, p. 25.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>102</sup>James Joyce, Ulysses (1922; rept. Harmondsworth: Penguins, 1969), p. 388. Joyce appears to have borrowed this phrase from Yeats, or rather from Yeats's master Blake, whom Yeats evoked in the following terms: "He [the Irish story-teller] understands as well as Blake that the ruins of time build mansions in eternity" (Explorations, p. 9).

<sup>103</sup>Idanre, p. 34.

<sup>104</sup>Daniel Corkery, Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature (Cork: Cork University Press, 1931), p. 21.

<sup>105</sup>Cited from Richard Ellmann, Yeats: The Man and the Masks (London: Macmillan, 1949), p. 116.

<sup>106</sup>Idanre, p. 86.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

- <sup>119</sup>Idanre, p. 14.
- <sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 12.
- <sup>121</sup>Collected Poems, p. 53.
- <sup>122</sup>Lenrie Peters, Satellites (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 19. Hereafter cited as Satellites.
- <sup>123</sup>Ibid., p. 67.
- <sup>124</sup>Ama Ata Aidoo, "Lenrie Peters' Wide World," West Africa, Nov. 9, 1968, p. 1318.
- <sup>125</sup>Eldred Jones, "African Literature 1966-1967," African Forum, 3 (Summer 1967), 11.
- <sup>126</sup>Ayo Banjo, "Satellites by Lenrie Peters," Ibadan, 28 (February 1968), 90.
- <sup>127</sup>Ibid., p. 54.
- <sup>128</sup>Ibid., p. 50.
- <sup>129</sup>Collected Poems, pp. 14-15.
- <sup>130</sup>Satellites, p. 4.
- <sup>131</sup>Ibid., p. 50.
- <sup>132</sup>Letters, p. 58.
- <sup>133</sup>Ibid., pp. 205-206.
- <sup>134</sup>Essays, p. 298.
- <sup>135</sup>Satellites, p. 11.
- <sup>136</sup>Ibid., p. 10.
- <sup>137</sup>Lenrie Peters, Katchikali (London: Heinemann, 1971), Poem 63. The poems in Katchikali are numbered; there is no pagination. Poem numbers will stand for references in the volume. These references will not be footnoted in subsequent allusions to this collection.
- <sup>138</sup>Satellites, p. 20.
- <sup>139</sup>Ibid., p. 21.
- <sup>140</sup>Ibid., p. 22.
- <sup>141</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

142 Satellites, p. 63.

143 An adaptation of Father Noon's appellation for James Joyce. He calls Joyce the "Bard of the Shapeless Cosmopolis" in Humanities Association Bulletin, XVI (Fall 1965), 45.

144 Lewis H. Gann and Peter Duignam, Africa, The Land and the People (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1972), p. 26.

145 Collected Poems, p. 323.

146 Leopold Senghor, whose poetry typifies for Soyinka the image of an idealized Africa such as the one that Peters is trying to evoke in this poem, is often the butt of Soyinka's criticism. Soyinka's remark that a tiger does not go around proclaiming his tigritude is made with Senghor and Negritude in mind. The same criticism is repeated in the statement credited to Soyinka that "the duiker will not paint 'duiker' on his beautiful back to proclaim his duikeritude; you'll know him by his elegant leap." For these two proclamations of Soyinka, see respectively, Gerald Moore, Seven African Writers (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. xvi; and Bernth Lindfors, "The Early Writings of Wole Soyinka," Journal of African Studies, 2 (Spring 1975), 86.

147 Autobiographies, p. 31.

148 Letters, p. 49.

149 Explorations, pp. 160-61.

150 Essays, p. 209.

151 Collected Poems, p. 318.

## CHAPTER III

### INTIMATIONS OF APOCALYPSE

From the argument of the last chapter, it would appear that Okigbo, Clark, Soyinka, and Peters had picked up hints of Yeats's early theories concerning the use of setting and scenery in art. The poets of any locality, Yeats believed, are the writers who are best qualified to present the landscape of that locality in their art. However, Yeats's homeland, whose landscape he loved, was involved during his lifetime in struggles for national independence. The struggle culminated in the Irish Civil War of 1922. Yeats's poetry bears imprints of the bitter social unrest in his country. The major concern appears to centre on the damage inflicted on land and life by war.

In Nigeria, too, there was a civil war which lasted for nearly three years (July, 1967-January, 1970). Nigerian poets naturally reflected the war situation in their poetry. To some extent, they saw themselves in a position similar to Yeats's during the period of the Irish Civil War. They exhibited a concern for their land threatened by the ravages of war in the same manner that Yeats did for his native land. J. P. Clark went so far as prefacing his war volume, Casualties, with an excerpt from Yeats: "We have no gift to set a statesman right,"<sup>1</sup> Clark wrote, echoing Yeats's poem

"On Being Asked to Write a War Poem." Clark's Casualties is devoted to the Nigerian Civil War. Okigbo had intimations of the apocalypse that was coming in certain poems in Labyrinths, notably in "Fragments out of the Deluge," and in "Silences." The postscript verse "Path of Thunder" is subtitled "Poems Propheying War." Soyinka had previsions of the impending doom in the section of Idanre and Other Poems entitled "October '66." Certain poems of his prison collection, A Shuttle in the Crypt, reflect the war situation in Nigeria. Lenrie Peters, too, has written poems which have war as their theme. But his position in this regard is rather different from that of his Nigerian colleagues since he is not reacting to a specific war situation. However, one central motif runs through the work of these poets which will be examined in this chapter. Their poems dealing with war project the devastating effect of war on land and life. Earth is scorched, or is seriously threatened with ruin and destruction. It is in this sense primarily that the term "apocalypse" is used in this chapter.

"Fragments out of the Deluge" is Okigbo's Red Hanrahan's lament about Nigeria. It was published in 1962 and preceded the Nigerian Civil War by about five years. Okigbo did not at this time (at least not in the poem) anticipate the civil war in Nigeria. He was merely directing his anger in this early poem against the white man's invasion of his fatherland. Ironically, however, it

anticipated "Path of Thunder" in its use of the image of apocalyptic eagles. The poem is a retrospective recollection of the black man's destiny. In mood and imagery it recalls Yeats's "Red Hanrahan's Song About Ireland," which is also a retrospective monody on the Irishman's burden. The difference, however, is that Okigbo's poem is religious in theme but Yeats's is political in its orientation. The religious reading is encouraged by Okigbo himself. In the Introduction to Labyrinths he writes:

"Fragments out of the Deluge" renders in retrospect certain details of the protagonist and of his milieu--the collective rape of innocence and profanation of the mysteries, in atonement for which he has had to suffer immolation.<sup>2</sup>

This introductory remark has certain Yeatsian echoes. Okigbo is saying that the ceremony of innocence which used to be observed in his protagonist's traditional milieu has now been drowned in the apocalyptic tides of colonial Christianity. Perhaps the African is here being projected as "a noble savage," but the projection is not an issue of much importance; what matters is the symbolic communication of the idea. Okigbo's "fragment" is the word, the logos, or his poetic testimony of the deluge, which alone survived it.

"Fragments out of the Deluge" is the second part of two sequences of poems which Okigbo entitled "Limits." The first sequence, "Siren Limits," consists of four sections (Limits I-IV). Its subject is discussed in a separate section of this work. The second sequence consists of eight

sections (Limits V-XII). In "Limits VI," Christ, the rock of love and understanding on which the Church is founded, "appeared in true form":

HE STOOD in the midst of them all and appeared in true  
form,  
He found them drunken, he found none thirsty among them.<sup>3</sup>

But the missionaries or the agents of colonial Christianity, lacking his doctrine of love, lend themselves to religious fanaticism. For this reason they appear to Okigbo as aggressors in an unholy crusade.

And they took the hot spoils off the battle,  
And they shared the hot spoils among them:  
Estates, among them.<sup>4</sup>

The "Estates" are the sanctuaries of native gods. The image reappears later in the poem as "bombax," forest "of oilbean," "grove," and "shrinehouse." In each instance the holy places are the victims of an apocalyptic action. Okigbo uses military terminology intentionally, for he saw the confrontation between traditional gods and the alien mode of worship as a military issue. In "Limits X," for instance, the Christian missionaries go into action only after a logistical survey of enemy grounds had indicated that the action could be taken with minimum risk on the side of the invaders:

AND TO US they came--  
Malisons, malisons, mair than ten--  
And climbed the bombax  
And killed the SUNBIRD.

And they scanned the forest of oilbean,  
Its approach; surveyed its high branches . . . \*<sup>5</sup>

In "Limits VIII" the Sunbird played the role of sentinel in the camp of native gods. It foresaw from an observation post high over the shrinehouse a fleet of eagles descending on the village square with resplendent wings:

BUT THE sunbird repeats  
Over the oilbean shadows:

'A fleet of eagles  
    over the oilbean shadows,  
Holds the square  
    under the curse of their breath.'<sup>6</sup>

It was therefore necessary to eliminate first the "sunbird," who otherwise would have alerted the enemy before the invaders could go into action. When this was done in the first two stanzas of "Limits X" cited earlier, the apocalyptic eagles assaulted "the twin-gods of the forest":

And they entered into the forest,  
And they passed through the forest of oilbean  
And found them, the twin-gods of the forest . . .  
.....  
Their talons they drew out of their scabbard,  
.....  
Their beaks they sharpened;  
And spread like eagles their felt-wings,  
And descended upon the twin gods of Irkalla.\*<sup>7</sup>

Not much is gained by way of poetic effect in the reference to Irkalla who, as Okigbo's footnotes indicate, was the queen of the underworld in Sumerian mythology,<sup>8</sup> unless this allusion is intended to suggest that the twin gods are doomed to death, and destined to inhabit the underworld where Irkalla reigned. But even then, the image is not quite apt in its context, for the simple reason that the twin gods are the tortoise and the python which are representative, respectively, of the masculine and feminine

principles in Okigbo's ancestral belief, while Irkalla was a female goddess of the underworld. Okigbo may, however, be implying that the female essence of the gods of his traditional religion is stronger than the masculine.

In "Limits XII," the overthrown gods are mourned not with the ritual long drums and cannons but only through art, through poetry:

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

And the gods lie unsung,  
Veiled only with mould,  
Behind the shrinehouse.<sup>9</sup>

Okigbo sees the victorious fanatics of the Church as kites hovering with a deadly intent over the burning rich lands of his fatherland. This view is communicated proverbially in "Limits VII":

who says it matters  
Which way the kite flows,  
Provided the movement is  
Around the burning market--\*10

Towards the end of this section Africa emerges as an "orchard" set ablaze by the tendentious sermons of an Irish missionary, Flannagan. Flannagan encourages his converts to keep the embers of religious conflict ablaze wherever they go. His sermons reflect this purpose; their duty as devout Christians was

To sow the fireseed among grasses,  
& lo, to keep it till it burns out . . .\*11

The reference to Flannagan is important, if only on account of his nationality. Okigbo's glossary notes

describe him as "a well-known Irish priest of the 1940's."<sup>12</sup> Peter Thomas informed me in a letter dated August 30, 1975, that Flannagan was the first principal of a leading missionary high school in Onitsha where Okigbo was educated. Flannagan imported the Irish priestly zeal to Okigbo's part of the world. Joyce reacted by exile against the priestly obsession of his fatherland. Ireland was for him a "Sow that eats her young."<sup>13</sup> Yeats was not quite as outspoken on this issue as Joyce, although he spoke approvingly in the poem "Lofty Beautiful Things" of his father's satirical allusion to Ireland as "'This land . . . of plaster saints.'" He noted also in "September 1913" that adding "prayer to shivering prayer" can dry the marrow from the bone. Okigbo reacts against the Christian background of his childhood education in order to identify himself closely with the "twin-gods of the forest." This act has some political overtones as well, for in the early days of colonialism, the Christian missionary was usually an ally of the colonial officer. Therefore, the symbolic eagles in Okigbo's poem sustain an ironic connotation which is applicable to the political arms of a colonial establishment. In this regard, then, Okigbo's "Fragments" is inspired by the same kind of patriotic sentiment that motivated Yeats into writing his "Red Hanrahan's Song About Ireland." In Yeats's poem apocalyptic winds howl, but their victory over the nationalist cause will remain temporary as long as the freedom-fighters retain in their hearts the undying image of Ireland

symbolized in the personality of Cathleen ni Houlihan:

Our courage breaks like an old tree in a black wind and  
dies,  
But we have hidden in our hearts the flame out of the  
eyes  
Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.<sup>14</sup>

Okigbo concludes his poem on a similar note of hope. The gods may have been "killed" but their undying spirit abides with the living. The Sunbird killed in "Limits X" during the apocalyptic invasion of the shrinehouse of the twin gods of the forest is resurrected in "Limits XII" to sing like Yeats's "golden bird" in "Sailing to Byzantium" to future generations:

The sunbird sings again  
FROM the LIMITS of the dream;  
The Sunbird sings again  
Where the caress does not reach,  
of Guernica.<sup>15</sup>

The reference to Guernica tends to exaggerate the situation. What is at issue in Okigbo's poem is a cultural rather than a physical confrontation. To have likened this cultural conflict to the physical bombardment of Guernica by General Franco's Air Force during the Spanish Civil War of 1937 seems to have overstated the case. The Guernica situation might have been much more effectively utilized if Okigbo had applied the image to one of the poems in "Path of Thunder." However, in the context of apocalyptic landscape, the Guernica symbolism contributes to the overall effect of disaster which Okigbo is aiming at. Picasso's painting is generally considered an important symbol of disaster. In his brief study of apocalypse in modern

literature, Frank Kermode remarked that "Guernica" is supposed to reflect the medieval apocalypse that interested Picasso.<sup>16</sup> Domenico Porzio and Marco Valsecchi observed also in their recently published volume on Picasso that "Guernica" is a "huge graphic apocalypse" which has brought together Picasso's "human and civic indictment of the horrors of war."<sup>17</sup> The images in the picture, such as the head of a wailing woman, the remains of a warrior clutching a broken sword, and a dying horse are supposed to have reflected Picasso's horror of violence.

Okigbo came to know Picasso in 1961 when he was librarian at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka. Sunday Anozie noted that he used to have with him at this time a newsprint slide of Picasso's "Guernica." The poet is said to have had great admiration for the art of the great Spanish painter. "If any single painting influenced Okigbo at the early stages of his poetic career," writes Anozie, "it was undoubtedly Picasso's 'Guernica.'"<sup>18</sup>

Although the reference to "Guernica" emphasizes the apocalyptic theme, the poem comes to an end on a note of rebirth or "cancelling out." The Sunbird's radiance defied in the end the powers of death and frustrated the intentions of the eagles. It is thus the tree of life ("a fennel") which grows on a death-suffused landscape (the "sarcophagus"). "Fennel" and "sarcophagus" are the key images in the poem's opening stanza:

ON AN empty sarcophagus  
 hewn out of alabaster,  
 A branch of fennel<sup>19</sup>

The Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language defines "sarcophagus" as "a lime stone used among the Greeks for coffins," and "fennel" as "a perennial European herb." "Sarcophagus" is then an image of death, and "fennel" one of life. About a sarcophagus Okigbo writes: "The body of one of the Egyptian pharaohs is said to have metamorphosed into a fennel branch."<sup>20</sup> It is very tempting to apply the end-product of this metamorphosis, that is, "fennel," to the new, metamorphosed form of the resurrected "sunbird." If this interpretation is correct, the poem's beginning anticipates in some ways its conclusion.

Okigbo's "Silences," inspired like his "Fragments" by public events, is heavily charged with apocalyptic innuendoes. Consisting of two sequences of elegiac lamentations, the poem originates from several experiences of a public and a tragic character. The first sequence is entitled "Lament of the Silent Sisters," first published in 1962; and the second is "Lament of the Drums," which appeared in 1964. Perhaps the covering title of these two poems and the lament motif are sufficient indications that death is the central theme and elegiac the dominant mood of both poems. "Lament of the Silent Sisters" grew out of Okigbo's disillusionment with two great political crises in Africa; the first is the upheavals in Western Nigeria in 1962, in which several lives were lost; the other is the

civil war in the Independent State of Congo Kinshasha (now Zaire), soon after it had won political autonomy in the late fifties, the one in which that country's first Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, lost his life in 1960. "Lament of the Drums" is also linked to two tragic circumstances. The first is the imprisonment in 1962 of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, one of the leading political figures who fought for Nigerian independence from Britain, and a one-time Prime Minister of that country's Western Provinces. The other event is the death in a motor accident of his own eldest son, Segun, in 1962. The two poems, in their mood of despair and in the image of a stricken landscape through which this mood is projected, look forward to Okigbo's war poems, "Path of Thunder." By a curious irony of history, too, the two "Laments" are historically related to "Path of Thunder." There was indeed a miniature civil war during the political crisis in Western Nigeria before the whole country became engulfed in it on a large scale in 1967. That crisis, with its attendant carnage on life and property, was one of the first early signs of the disaster that was to overtake the whole country only a few years later. Also, the civil war in the former Congo Kinshasha anticipated the blood-bath in Nigeria.

However, Okigbo's two "Laments" are not overtly occasional pieces like Yeats's poem "Easter 1916" for instance; and yet it is with such occasional poems of Yeats's that they have much in common from a circumstantial point

of view. The major political figure lamented in Okigbo's first lament poem is Patrice Lumumba; in the second it is Obafemi Awolowo. As public figures, Lumumba and Awolowo recall the heroes of the Easter 1916 Rising in Dublin. Yet, Yeats could mention the leaders of this rising by their names without entertaining fears for his own personal safety. Okigbo, on the other hand, was conscious of the risks involved in saying "NO in thunder"<sup>21</sup> in those early years of Nigerian independence. His two "Laments" do not possess the intensity of emotion nor the lyrical beauty of Yeats's "Easter 1916," for example; but they rely for their impact on another poetic technique which Yeats admired, the mytho-symbolic approach.

"I have no speech but symbol,"<sup>22</sup> Yeats declared; and in the essay, "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry," he wrote: "The poet of essences and pure ideas must seek in the half-lights that glimmer from symbol to symbol . . . all that the epic and dramatic poet finds of mystery and shadow in the accidental circumstances of life."<sup>23</sup> The mytho-symbolic technique appears to have been fathered, in the context of English literary tradition, by Yeats. In the essay, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," Eliot defines the mythic technique as a continuous manipulation of the parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity.<sup>24</sup> Although Eliot is here writing specifically of the method of Yeats's contemporary and compatriot, Joyce, he admits that the sophisticated use of myth and symbol in imaginative

literature is "a method already adumbrated by Mr. Yeats, and of the need for which I believe Mr. Yeats to have been the first contemporary to be conscious."<sup>25</sup>

Following the mytho-symbolic tradition, Okigbo disguised his meaning in his two laments under the cloak of myth. Only later, in 1965, did he supply in his Introduction to Labyrinths the materials that now serve as clues to "Silences." In "Lament of the Silent Sisters," an apocalyptic landscape is evoked through the myth (Okigbo uses the word "illusion") of "a storm-tossed ship at mid-sea";<sup>26</sup> in "Lament of the Drums" it is suggested through the myth of vegetation gods and their seasonal disappearance from earth which renders the land barren. Okigbo noted, in connection with the first myth, that a certain relationship exists between his silent sisters and the drowning Franciscan nuns in Hopkins's poem, "The Wreck of the Deutschland";<sup>27</sup> in relation to the second he cited Ishthar and her laments for Tammuz in the Babylonian mythology.<sup>28</sup> Okigbo quoted these sources where Yeats would have instanced the Anima Mundi or the Great Memory which is the original storehouse of all the myths and symbols that nourish every mythic imagination. "Everything in heaven or earth," Yeats wrote, "has its association, momentous or trivial, in the Great Memory."<sup>29</sup> The motif of "a storm-tossed ship at mid-sea" appears to be a variation of the symbolism of deluge which Okigbo utilized in "Fragments out of the Deluge." The Babylonian account of the temporary disappearance of the vegetation god Tammuz

might be considered a variation of the biblical account of the temporary death of Christ. In either case, the death of the god augured disaster for the land of his people. Christ's temporary disappearance provoked an earthquake in the land of the Jews. Yeats was familiar with Mallarme's favourite dictum in the nineties that "his epoch was troubled by the trembling of the veil of the Temple."<sup>30</sup> From Yeats's point of view, the two motifs which Okigbo utilized in "Silences" would appear to be mythic materials which have long been buried in the womb of world memory.

The social message disguised under the cloak of myth and symbolism in "Lament of the Silent Sisters" is that a nation torn by civil strife is like a ship caught in the throes of a storm. The storm is the "terrible beauty" that such a tragic situation can beget. It is perhaps proper that this sad situation should be mourned by women, for women tend to be more deeply affected by tragedy than men. Images related to military operation enable Okigbo to emphasize the fury of the storm. In the first stanza of the poem the silent sisters are victims of a mortar fire issuing from a squadron of aggressive waters. Enchafed waterfalls invading their storm-tossed craft are "globules of anguish." "Globule" is suggestive of bullets of water:

IS THERE . . . Is certainly there . . .  
 For as in sea-fever globules of fresh anguish  
 immense golden eggs empty of albumen  
 sink into our balcony . . .\*<sup>31</sup>

In the Transition edition of this poem, this passage reads:

Is there is certainly there this sound of fury,  
and we camp in a convent in the open . . .\*32

The word "silent," it has been noted, has a funereal connotation; one thinks of a funeral calm. But "silent" suggests also helpless, powerless, and abandoned. As such the silent sisters see themselves as "dumb-bells" in "hollow seascapes." In their role as mourners they are dumb in the hollow seascape of death:

Dumb-bells outside the gates  
In hollow seascapes without memory, we carry  
Each of us an urn of native  
Earth.<sup>33</sup>

Death is evoked by the image of Moloch. He is the presiding deity in the silent sisters' valley of death:

THIS SHADOW of carrion incites  
and in rhythms of silence  
Urges us; gathers up our broken  
hidden feather-of-flight,  
To this anguished cry of Moloch.<sup>34</sup>

It is possible that the ominous sound one hears after this passage is the "cast-iron steps" of Moloch:

What cast-iron steps cascading down the valley  
all forged into thunder of tanks;  
And detonators cannoned into splintered flames  
in this jubilee-dance of fireflies!<sup>35</sup>

The image of cannon and tanks appears later in "Lament of the Drums" with a different connotation. In that poem Okigbo writes:

Thunder of tanks of giant iron steps of detonators  
Fall safe from the clearing, we implore you.<sup>36</sup>

The sound here is the rumble of ceremonious drums and cannons which is being invoked to lend solemnity to the burial of a leader. In "Lament of the Silent Sisters" it is

apocalyptic. Such also is the significance of these images in "Path of Thunder" where they appear. "Politicians," Okigbo says in this later poem, "are back in giant hidden steps of howitzers, of detonators."<sup>37</sup> His "cast-iron steps . . . forged into thunder of tanks" echo Yeats's "Thunder of feet, tumult of images,"<sup>38</sup> both of which are strongly resonant with apocalyptic premonitions. However, Okigbo returns ultimately in the first part of "Silences" to an earlier interest in sea metaphor. The change from "hollow landscapes" in an earlier version of the poem to "hollow seascapes" in the Labyrinths edition is indicative of his strong attachment to sea symbolism. In the Transition edition of the poem the silent sisters sing:

We are the dumb bells  
 We are the dumb bells  
 Outside the gates  
 In hollow landscapes.<sup>39</sup>

In Labyrinths this stanza reads:

Dumb-bells outside the gates  
 In hollow seascapes without memory, we carry  
 Each of us an urn of native  
 Earth.<sup>40</sup>

The waves gather fury in Section IV of the poem. Okigbo says of this section that it is here that "the sea herself . . . is celebrated in her many colours."<sup>41</sup> Those colours, one may presume, are bloody by implication. The sea's face which had never been smooth in the poem is further distorted with wrinkles from cyclones:

Wild wind cry out against us  
 We shall swallow our heart in our stomach  
 More wrinkles on a salt face of glass  
 The winds' broom sweeps only the surface.<sup>42</sup>

The cyclonic winds have roused the waters into further action, and in their destructive fury it is not only the sisters but all living objects on the sea's surface which are gathered into the womb of the sea:

The kingfisher gathers his ropes in the distance  
 The salt water gathers them inward  
 The dipping paddle blades, the inconstant dolphins  
 The salt water gathers them inward.  
 Will the water gather us in her sibylline chamber?<sup>43</sup>

The dolphins are of no avail to man in this landscape of demonic waters. Okigbo tends rather to accuse them of betraying their traditional friendship with man by collaborating with the elements. For although the water tosses them around, too, it may be presumed that since they are citizens of the sea, they will survive the ordeal. For this reason Okigbo thinks of them as unfaithful; they are "inconstant dolphins." In Section V of the poem, they reappear as a "choir of inconstant/Dolphins."<sup>44</sup> The phrase is strongly reminiscent of Yeats's "choir of immortal love." This echo does not seem to be accidental. In his essay "Bishop Berkeley," Yeats recalled the Greek conception of paradise as a haven for "the choir of immortal love."<sup>45</sup> Yeats's "choir of immortal love" reappears in two poems that etch this paradise as "choir of love." In one of these poems, "News for the Delphic Oracle" (the other is "The Delphic Oracle upon Plotinus"), the dolphin image occurs. Yeats wrote:

Straddling each a dolphin's back  
 And steadied by a fin,  
 Those Innocents re-live their death.<sup>46</sup>

Okigbo may have been aware of Yeats's poem, or, as a classical scholar, he may have been familiar with Stephen Mackenna's translation of "Porphyry's Life of Plotinus" which, says Norman Jeffares, was Yeats's source for both the topography and citizenry of the Greek Heaven.<sup>47</sup>

But more important than the apparent rhythmic echo of Yeats's "choir of immortal love" in Okigbo's "choir of inconstant/Dolphins" is the role of dolphin in both poets. Okigbo's apocalyptic waters are as "dolphin-torn and gong-tormented" as Yeats's sea of life in "Byzantium." (The gong in Okigbo is the roar of surging waves.) But in Yeats the dolphins bridge for man the gulf that intervenes between the seas of life and death. F. A. C. Wilson suggests that Yeats is aware of the traditional belief that "dolphins . . . form a mystic escort of the dead to the islands of the Blest."<sup>48</sup> In Okigbo's poem the waters are so threateningly uproarious that man cannot hope for salvation from the dolphins. The "kingfisher" in that poem is probably Christ, the Master Fisherman. He too is defied by the apocalyptic waves.

Okigbo follows the tradition of some Irish writers in associating the sea with the female principle. His poem, he writes, "celebrates the sea in her many colours." Yeats, too, wrote of the sea as a mother. In the Introduction to Fighting the Waves he recalled one German psychoanalyst who "has traced the 'mother complex' back to our mother the sea."<sup>49</sup> But in his poems the feminine attribute

of the sea is not as obviously suggested as it is in Joyce, for instance, who recalls, in Ulysses, Swinburne's allusion to the sea as "Our mighty mother."<sup>50</sup> In Yeats's poem "Her Triumph," two lovers "stare astonished at the sea" when a "miraculous strange bird shrieked."<sup>51</sup>

In Okigbo's "Lament of the Drums" the sea still retains her feminine attributes, but it is a sea that is more sinned against than sinning:

Silver of rivulets this side of the bridge,  
Cascades of lily-livered laughter,  
Fold-on-fold of raped, naked blue--  
What memory has the sea of her lover?<sup>52</sup>

The sea which the poet perceives as being originally a fountain of pure water, for such is the implication of the image of the sea as rivulets of silver, has been transformed by crime into "fold-on-fold of raped, naked blue." In an earlier version of the poem "naked blue" read "naked waters."<sup>53</sup> "Naked" suggests original purity and "raped" implies spoliation. To Okigbo, "raped sea" is a metaphor for a despoiled land. "Lament of the Drums," it will be recalled, was inspired by the imprisonment of Obafemi Awolowo. In his earlier role as a leader, Awolowo is the sea's lover forgotten, during his imprisonment, by the land he had led: "what memory has the sea of her lover?" In his role, too, as a one-time pilot of the ship of state, Awolowo is a Palinurus figure, "the helmsman," as Okigbo's Introduction explains, "of Aeneas' ship during his legendary voyage to Italy."<sup>54</sup> This motif emerges in Section III of the poem:



Okigbo prefers to link the robbers with "fishermen":

THEY ARE FISHING today in the dark waters  
Where the mariner is finishing his rest . . . \*<sup>59</sup>

and again

Fishermen out there in the dark--O you  
Who rake the waves or chase their wake--  
Weave for him a shadow out of your laughter.<sup>60</sup>

The "mariner" of the first passage is the personage referred to as "him" in the second. He is, as has been noted, the leader languishing in prison. But the image of "fishermen" which is consistently applied to those who run the affairs of the nation is the more ironically effective in this particular context because of the contrast between the fishermen of this poem and the "kingfisher" in its companion piece. In "Lament of the Silent Sisters" the "kingfisher" is a compassionate, conscientious Christ-figure who struggles to retrieve his land from the furies of the wave, but in "Lament of the Drums," the weavers of political history in the Nigeria of the early sixties fished in the dark; and they also lacked the compassion that one may presume in the "kingfisher." Okigbo solicits that compassion on behalf of the imprisoned leader when he asks the fishermen to "weave for him a shadow out of your laughter."

The image of weaving is reminiscent of Joyce, to whom makers of history are "all them that weave the wind."<sup>61</sup> However, it is Yeats and his concern for leaders as well as the land they lead that are immediately suggested by Okigbo's similar concern for land and leader. Okigbo's

admiration for Awolowo the nationalist parallels Yeats's high regard for the Olympians in the pantheon of Irish nationalism. Foremost among these are John O'Leary and Parnell. "Lament of the Drums" has the elegiac tone of "September 1913." It is as if Okigbo is saying, to modify his metaphor, that the Nigeria of the era of silver rivulets of cascading waters, if there was indeed such an era, is dead and gone, for it is with Awolowo in his prison catacomb. Still, the poem recalls "Parnell's Funeral" in its strong evocation of doom. With the death of the leader the nation is suspended in an abyss of chaos in Okigbo's poem. In "Parnell's Funeral" Yeats implies subtly that the land would not have been torn apart by civil rancour if Parnell had not been harried to death by his political enemies:

Had de Valera eaten Parnell's heart  
No loose-lipped demagogue had won the day,  
No civil rancour torn the land apart.<sup>62</sup>

The inevitable disaster is suggested at the beginning of the poem with images of storm:

A bundle of tempestuous cloud is blown  
About the sky; where that is clear of cloud  
Brightness remains.<sup>63</sup>

In reality, Parnell's funeral was accompanied by an apocalyptic omen. Yeats recalled in Autobiographies that Maud Gonne informed him of the "star that fell in broad daylight as Parnell's body was lowered into the grave."<sup>64</sup> He added that in popular imagination such unusual occurrences were considered signs of ill omen.<sup>65</sup>

In a poem not included in the definitive edition of his poems, Yeats thought of an Ireland deprived of Parnell as a doomed land:

Mourn ye on grass-green plains of Eri fated,  
 For closed on darkness now,  
 Is he who laboured on, derided, hated  
 And made the tyrant bow.<sup>66</sup>

However, Parnell was the victim of that frenzy which Yeats constantly alluded to as the "hysterica passio"<sup>67</sup> of the mob; Awolowo, on the other hand, was the victim of the "hysterica passio" of a ruling elite. Both poets saw each hysterical clique as harpies. In a poem not related to Parnell, but whose "hysterica passio" is suggestive of the "popular rage" that dragged Parnell down, Yeats uses "brazen hawks" as an image for the mob. His hawks are armed with "grip of claw" and with "innumerable clanging wings" that can put out the moon.<sup>68</sup> More directly related to the action of Okigbo's harpies is the dangerous dance of the daughters of Herodias. As harpies, their purpose is hidden in

the labyrith of the wind;  
 And should some crazy hand dare touch a daughter  
 All turn with amorous cries, or angry cries,  
 According to the wind, for all are blind.<sup>69</sup>

In the final stanza of "Lament of the Drums," Okigbo returns to the consequence upon the land of the absence of the betrayed leader. The myth of the temporary disappearance from earth of vegetation and fertility gods served him as an appropriate analogue for the Nigerian situation. Ishthar's lament for Tammuz, it will be recalled, is the variation of this myth which Okigbo used. His poem

follows closely a version of this lament recorded by the anthropologist Stephen Langdon in his book, Tammuz and Ishtar. In Langdon the lament reads:

For the far removed there is wailing,  
 Ah me, my child. The far removed,  
 The wailing is for the plants, the first lament is  
 'they grow not.'  
 The wailing is for the barley; the ears grow not.  
 For the habitations and the flocks it is: they produce  
 not.  
 For the perishing wedded ones, for perishing children  
 it is: the dark-headed people create not.  
 The wailing is for the great river: it brings the  
 flood no more.  
 The wailing is for the fields of men: the gunū grows  
 no more.<sup>70</sup>

Okigbo's variation runs as follows:

FOR THE FAR removed there is wailing:  
 For the far removed;  
 For the distant . . .

The wailing is for the fields of crop:  
 The drums' lament is:  
 They grow not . . .

The wailing is for the fields of men:  
 For the barren wedded ones;  
 For the perishing children . . .

The wailing is for the Great River:  
 Her pot-bellied watchers  
 Despoil her . . .\*71

About this section of the poem Okigbo says that "Here the theme of the poem is no longer suggested but stated; the personages of the earlier sections together become fused with that of Tammuz, and consequently with the movement of the seasons."<sup>72</sup> The poem seems at this point to have summarized Okigbo's judgment of land-leader relationship.

In "Path of Thunder" it is the death of a leader that has opened up an "iron chapter" in the history of his

land. Okigbo's symbols in these poems for the coming apocalypse are iron, thunder, wind, and storm. In the poem "Thunder Can Break," the iron handiworks which in Yeats's Byzantium poems symbolize the highest achievement of art are transformed into instruments of destruction. The war that Okigbo foresees is one in which sophisticated weaponry will play a dominant role:

This day belongs to a miracle of thunder;  
 Iron has carried the forum  
 With token gestures. Thunder has spoken.<sup>73</sup>

The poem functions as a prelude to the apocalyptic premonition of the whole series of poems in "Path of Thunder." Its title implies that thunder can break upon the land. The poet's first reaction in the face of the threat is to retreat for safety into the maternal womb of the Earth-- "Thunder can break--Earth, bind me fast."<sup>74</sup> But in the last poem in the volume, "Elegy for Alto," he retracts from this position. He prays to Mother Idoto to release him from the creative covenant that binds him to her: "Earth, unbind me; let me be the prodigal; let this be/the ram's ultimate prayer to the tether . . ."<sup>75</sup>

The repentant prodigal of "Heavensgate" has resumed his fugitive role in his last poetic testament, although this later separation from mother Idoto has not been engineered by an alien culture but by a national emergency. Idoto is a welcome sanctuary in time of peace; in time of crisis the poet "will follow the wind to the clearing."<sup>76</sup> The Sunbird (for Okigbo is no less), who in "Fragments out

of the Deluge" defied the apocalyptic eagles, will once more reassert its heroism. Significantly, too, those eagles reappear in "Elegy for Alto" as "robbers" and "politicians." In either role they threaten disaster on land and life, for they are associated with the "pot-bellied" despoilers of the land in "Lament of the Drums," and, more importantly, with the intimidating monster with "cast-iron steps" that are "forged into thunder of tanks" in "Lament of the Silent Sisters." The sound of these steps always intimidated Okigbo just as the thundering feet of the apocalyptic horses intimidated Yeats in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen." In Okigbo's "Elegy for Alto" the apocalyptic menace issues from the tread of feet. One hears in the poem "black sudden steps of showers, of caterpillars," and "giant steps of howitzers, of detonators."<sup>77</sup> In the poem "Come Thunder" the ominous treads of the apocalyptic monsters are replaced by a conflagration on the land and by what looks like an earthquake precipitated by an unnamed rough beast which is more dreadful because unnamed, and more subtle and furtive in its mode of operation. Okigbo calls it "a great fearful thing" and a "secret thing" which "in its heaving/Threatens with iron mask/The last lighted torch of the century."<sup>78</sup> The last "lighted torch" is possibly the land of the Rising Sun, Biafra, which was the youngest, though still-born, nation in Africa. The effect of the impact of the "great fearful thing" on the land is universal. All objects on the land are affected by its fury. One encounters in the poem

a landscape reminiscent of the waste land of the final section of "Lament of the Drums":

A great fearful thing already tugs at the cables  
of the open air,  
A nebula immense and immeasurable, a night of deep  
waters--  
An iron dream unnamed and unprintable, a path of stone.

The drowsy heads of the pods in barren farm lands  
witness it,  
The homesteads abandoned in this century's brush fire  
witness it:  
The myriad eyes of deserted corn cobs in burning barns  
witness it:  
Magic birds with the miracle of lightning flash on their  
feathers . . . \*79

The difference between Okigbo's "Path of Thunder" and Clark's Casualties is such as can exist between the oracular poet and the descriptive poet. One speaks in riddles, the other is plain-spoken. One is premonitory in tone, the other is recapitulatory in intention. Okigbo's "Path of Thunder" is subtitled "Poems Prophesying War"; Clark's Casualties are poems concerning war. Okigbo is forewarning; Clark is recalling. Okigbo writes as a prophet, Clark as an eye-witness observer. He is probably closer experientially to his subject than Okigbo and may, for this reason, be closer to Yeats of the poems of the Black and Tan Terrorism in the Irish Civil War. Casualties are meditations not necessarily in times of, but about a time of, civil war. Okigbo did not survive the war, and did not write as an eye-witness observer. His "Path of Thunder," written between December 1965 and May 1966, though published posthumously in 1968, foresaw the advent of the disaster that was to claim his life in 1967.

Published in 1970, Casualties is, in Clark's own words, a "personal account of some of the unspeakable events that all but tore apart Nigeria."<sup>80</sup> If the book was published in 1970, it may have been written in the heat of the war years. However, the period in time covered by the volume spans the years that intervene between 1966 and 1968. These years were marked by tumultuous events in the history of Nigeria.

The first military coup in Nigeria happened in 1966. It was offset by a counter coup six months later. Between May and October of 1966 there was a hate-engineered pogrom against the Ibos in parts of the Northern Provinces of the country which claimed thirty thousand lives. By April of 1967, a great many of the Ibos in other parts of Nigeria had returned to their region of origin in the East. On May 30, 1967, the former Eastern Region of Nigeria proclaimed itself the Independent Republic of Biafra. Less than two months later (July 6, 1967), the Nigerian Civil War began. Casualties is partly Clark's version of the experience that Okigbo anticipated in "Path of Thunder" and partly his personal account of the actual disaster that followed closely in the wake of the military intervention of 1966. The volume is made up of two parts. Part I is entitled "Casualties," Part II "Incidental Songs for Several Persons." This later section is not relevant to the subject of the present discussion. In Part I the basic inspiration is war and its apocalyptic consequences on land and life. In the

title poem the war is seen as the scourge of the general public:

Caught in the clash of counter claims and charges  
 When not in the niche others have left,  
 We fall,  
 All casualties of the war.<sup>81</sup>

There is a retrospective reminiscence of the signs of the coming danger in the poem "Seasons of Omen," where calabashes are receptacles for liquids that turn men to faggots and houses to ashes:

WHEN CALABASHES HELD petrol and men  
     turned faggots in the streets  
 Then came the five hunters  
 When mansions and limousines made  
     bonfires in sunset cities  
 Then came the five hunters.<sup>82</sup>

These lines underscore the technical distance between Clark and Okigbo. Okigbo reaches out for an appropriate mythic analogue for events and personal emotions, but Clark is rather prosaic and factual in his approach. The events in the poem recall the atrocities that accompanied the crisis in Western Nigeria in 1962. That crisis is what Okigbo tries to relate in a language highly charged with myth and symbolism in "Lament of the Silent Sisters." The five hunters in the poem are the five army officers who master-minded the first military coup of 1966. Even though their action was well-intentioned, it deprived the land of her leaders. The penalty, according to Clark, is that the land will be watered with more and more blood. In Okigbo's "Lament of the Drums" the effect on the land of the death of leaders is projected through the myth of the

temporary disappearance from the earth of the fertility god whose absence renders the land barren. In Clark's "Seasons of Omens" this idea is couched in prosaic terms:

Fallen on 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.<sup>83</sup>

Although Clark tries to project the moral quality of the three Nigerian leaders killed during the first military coup of 1966 by associating them with symbolic animals, placed in a landscape which is characteristic of the physical features of the area in which their respective seats of government are located, the poem remains largely descriptive in technique. The "lion" is Sir Ahmadu Bello, the former Premier of the Northern Region noted for its grassland and desert landscape. The "jackal" is probably Samuel Akintola, the former Premier of Western Nigeria, a region of thick forest. The "shepherd-sheep" is, of course, the former Prime Minister of Nigeria, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Belewa, whose government was based on the coastal city of Lagos.

However, the descriptive technique appears to have been a style that Clark cultivated intentionally in Casualties. He hoped thereby to reach a wider audience at home. He admitted in the Preface to the volume that he had half a mind to record the experience which inspired it in prose.<sup>84</sup> More important than the gain in local appeal is another advantage that originates from his factual approach. Clark tunes his reader more frequently than does Okigbo in

"Path of Thunder" to the alarms of a situational emergency. This urgency is perhaps one quality he has more in common with Yeats than does Okigbo. In both Clark and Yeats the sense of the immediate here and now is suggested by their tendency to represent the war landscape as human habitation. In the poem "July Wake" Clark writes:

IN THE STREETS the jungle-gear'd jeeps roar,  
Glint of SMG, 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.<sup>85</sup>

In this passage, "street," the occupied "ministry," "market," and "bed" betray the human factors of the scenery. In "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" Yeats complained of "violence upon the roads." In "Meditations In Time of Civil War" he was repelled by the presence close to the road leading to his door of "An affable Irregular." In the same poem he lamented that "My wall is loosening." There are loosening walls in "Leda and the Swan," for instance, but the falling towers there do not have the local urgency of the loosening masonry of Yeats's personal tower in "Meditations." Also the sense of the immediate now is reinforced by the motif of closing in. In the passage from Clark under discussion, men are closed in just as they had been in Yeats's Ireland of civil war. Writing to Herbert Grierson in 1922 Yeats said:

Yesterday morning our wild men blew up the sorting  
office. We are preparing here, behind our screen  
of bombs and smoke a return to conservative politics.<sup>86</sup>

In "Meditations," written in the same year, Yeats remembers this situation:

We are closed in, and the key is turned  
 On our uncertainty; somewhere  
 A man is killed, or a house burned.<sup>87</sup>

Still, the generic land, representing the nation, is important to Clark. The fate of the land is an issue of concern to him. Even in the passage where human aspects of the scenery predominate, the fate of the generic land is important. It is the health of the land which will determine the condition of its human environment. In that passage from "July Wake," the operative concept is the fact that the sun is "setting over the land." Concern for the generic land is the main issue in the poem "The Locust Hunt." Here Clark warns that

A river under clear skies  
 Keeps to its channel, but let  
 The clouds break, let them break  
 And ripped below are the banks upon the plains.<sup>88</sup>

Yeats is also concerned with the generic as well as the specific. Sometimes the situation of the particular is suggestive of the condition of the general. The loosening masonry of his personal tower is symbolic of the crumbling masonry of the national tower, the land. In "Blood and Moon" he wonders if every modern nation is half-dead at the top like his tower: "Is every modern nation like the tower/ Half-dead at the top?"<sup>89</sup> Granting the symbolic equation between tower and land, one could rephrase Yeats's statement thus: Is every modern nation a cursed land as Ireland is?

In Section VI of "Meditations," the relationship between land and tower is no longer suggested but stated:

I climb to the tower-top and lean upon the broken stone,  
A mist that is like blown snow is sweeping over all,  
Valley, river, and elms, under the light of a moon  
That seems unlike itself, that seems unchangeable,  
A glittering sword out of the east.<sup>90</sup>

As the tower is broken, so is the land impaired. One recalls that Yeats wrote of Ireland in "The Statues" as a nation wrecked by "the formless spawning fury" of "this filthy modern tide."<sup>91</sup> In the last passage from Clark, the river is unlike itself. It has been roused into action by a rain-storm. In Yeats's poem the moon is unlike itself. It is the beholder of an apocalyptic upheaval. In Clark the enshafed river inundates the plains. In Yeats the stormy weather affects the plains; the snowstorm sweeps over "valley, river, and elms." The attitude of both poets to the social upheaval in their respective countries is one of horror. This attitude is the direct consequence of the two poets' disapproval of bloodshed, and of their genuine concern for the sanctity of their lands. It is not surprising, therefore, that Clark's publishers should have noticed the similarity in poetic vision between Clark and Yeats. Casualties, says the Publishers' blurb on the back cover of the Longman's edition of Clark's collection, is "the work of a poet who, like W. B. Yeats, saw his country's tragedy whole and has transmitted it to poetry through the quality of his vision."

Clark's stance in the poem "Dirge" has much in common with Yeats's attitude to the Easter 1916 Rising in Dublin. The poem seems to have been written with Yeats's "Easter 1916" in mind. Like Yeats Clark is intimidated by the terror and the violence which have been unleashed on the land. In Clark's poem hearts are turned to stone, and, like Yeats, he appeals for moderation and restraint in a war in which brother kills brother:

Earth will turn a desert  
 A place of stone and bones  
 Tears are founts from the heart  
 Tears do not water a land  
 Fear too is a child of the heart  
 Fear piles up stones, piles up bones  
 O let us light the funeral pile  
 But let us not become its faggot.<sup>92</sup>

The same humanistic concern for loss of life is displayed in "The Flood." "Grief" gusts of rain, Clark says in the poem, have now engulfed the land. He sees himself as a victim of the flood, but he is not concerned with his own predicament only; he remembers his fellow writers on the other side of the conflict who are swept away by the apocalyptic flood:

I flounder in my nest, a kingfisher,  
 Whose flockmates would play  
 At eagles and hawks, but like  
 Chickens, are swept away  
 By flood fed from septic tanks, till  
 Together, we drift and drown,  
 Who were at home on sea, air, and land.<sup>93</sup>

The last line is a bathetic conclusion to an otherwise well-written stanza. It suffers from a certain melodramatic blemish through Clark's conscious effort to hold it forth as a polishing-off line. The stanza retains its integrity without it. However, this slight technical shortcoming is

compensated by the apocalyptic intensity of the poem, "The Beast," which is one of the finest pieces in Casualties. The beast of the poem is a fire-spitting dragon which converts cities into catacombs, sets rivers on fire, and blocks waterways with debris from its drippings. Clark's beast is kin to Yeats's rough beast of "The Second Coming," and to the deadly monster in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," for in the last named poem days are "dragon-ridden." Social order symbolized by the act of dance has been disrupted by a doom-heralding dragon:

a dragon of air  
Had fallen among dancers, had whirled them round  
Or hurried them off on its own furious path.<sup>94</sup>

In Clark's poem the land is poisoned by mortar fire and some deadly jets of air emitted by the dragon:

Wind from the dragon takes possession  
Of masks; dung from the dragon  
Makes catacombs of cities and farms;  
With mere drippings the dragon sets  
Rivers on fire.<sup>95</sup>

In the third stanza, aerial bombers symbolized by birds such as kites and swallows "scream" like Juno's peacock as they dive for their targets on the doomed land:

In the sunset sky kites of all colours take  
The wind, swifts and swallows escort them.  
Above, how they scream diving for flags  
Of fire rooted to the heart.<sup>96</sup>

Clark's apocalyptic kites recall Yeats's apocalyptic swan. In "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" an ominous swan rides "Those winds that clamour of approaching night."<sup>97</sup> Yeats dreaded this particular swan although elsewhere he had used swans as a symbol of consummated desire. In "The Wild

Swans at Coole," the swans paddle lover by lover. Here in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" the swan is a portent that can "bring a rage/to end all things."<sup>98</sup> The birds mentioned in Clark and Yeats have an apocalyptic association with Okigbo's "iron birds." In the poem "Come Thunder" Okigbo speaks of "Magic birds with the miracle of lightning flash on their feathers."<sup>99</sup>

"Kite," "swan," and "magic birds" anticipate the "steel kites" in Soyinka. In the poem "Flowers for my Land," Soyinka writes:

I saw:  
 Four steel kites, riders  
 On shrouded towers  
 Do you think  
 Their arms are spead to scatter mountain flowers?<sup>100</sup>

The question posed by Soyinka here is important. It will be resolved in the course of the present discussion. No less important is the title of his poem; it shows the continuing concern on the part of the poets of the Nigerian Civil War for land and life. "Flowers for my Land" first appeared in 1969 in a leaflet consisting of two poems (the other is "Live Burial") which Soyinka entitled "Poems from Prison." These two poems were later included in his prison collection, A Shuttle in the Crypt, which was published in 1972.

Soyinka betrays in "Flowers for my Land" a pathetic concern for his land. The flowers of his land have been sacrificed on the altars of merchants of death. The poem owes its symbolic impact to the subtle manipulation of the image of flower, a manipulation that imposes on the flower multiple

layers of meaning. The flowers are the youths of the land in the first stanza of the poem:

From a distant  
Shore they cry, where  
Are the flowers gone?  
I cannot tell  
The gardens here are furrowed still and bare.<sup>101</sup>

In the next stanza the flowers become synonymous with death, for the scavengers who trade in death wear flowers ("garlands") as their trademark. As human agents of death, they sow death in the garden of decay. The implication is that the nation (the poet's land) has been transformed into a garden of decay where the bones of the dead bloom:

Death alike  
We sow. Each novel horror  
Whets inhuman appetite  
I do not  
Dare to think these bones will bloom tomorrow.<sup>102</sup>

In a subsequent shift in meaning, the flowers become rain reeds, that is, bombs that fall on the land after aerial bombardments and noonday thunderclaps:

Voices of rain in sunshine  
Blue kites on ivory-cloud  
Towers  
Smell of passing hands on mountain flowers.<sup>103</sup>

These flowers of evil (the bombs)--it does not appear as if Soyinka had Baudelaire in mind--are counter-balanced by another kind of flower, the heavenly flower of love. The poet says that he knows of "flowers unseen" which "Distil beatific dawns." This function is contrasted with the role of the flowers of evil which is to destroy. The evocation of the beatific radiance of the flower of heavenly love highlights the brutality of the human

messengers of death, the scavengers whose deadly garlands

"weigh/Heavy on human breasts":

Garlands  
Of scavengers weigh  
Heavy on human breasts  
Such  
Are flowers that fill the garden of decay.<sup>104</sup>

What emerges in "Flowers for my Land" is a landscape reeking with odours of death and decay and appearing to be the more dreadful because of the reader's awareness of the flowers that bloom in a different kind of landscape and of his implied consciousness of the fragrance distilled by the flowers which grow in the heavenly garden of love:

I know  
Of flowers unseen, and they  
Distil beatific dawns  
But tares withhold possession of our mangled lawns.<sup>105</sup>

The contrast here is between the pastoral and the apocalyptic.

It may be noted that Yeats, too, used flower as a symbol of the continuity of generation, and feared for its extinction in a time of civil war as does Soyinka. In "Meditations" he perceived "an acre of stony ground, where the symbolic rose can break in flower,"<sup>106</sup> but at the same time he reminded himself of the ruin that may befall that flower in the event of war: "And what if my descendants lost the flower/through natural declension of the soul?"<sup>107</sup>

Soyinka's prison house is the "distant shore" in the first stanza of "Flowers for my Land," from where he still had the conscience to inquire of the fate of the flowers of his land. The same long-distance concern for his

land is evident in the poem "Massacre, October '66," written in Tegel in Western Germany. In this poem Soyinka writes:

I borrow seasons of an alien land  
 In brotherhood of ill, pride of race around me  
 Strewn in sunlit shards. I borrow alien lands  
 To stay the season of a mind.<sup>108</sup>

Soyinka's racial pride seems to echo Yeats's own pride in his ethnic characteristics. In Explorations Yeats wrote:

I have before me an ideal expression in which all that I have, clay and spirit assist; it is as though I most approximate towards that expression when I carry with me the greatest possible amount of hereditary thought and feeling, even national and family hatred and pride.<sup>109</sup>

In Soyinka's poem, the serenity of Tegel landscape does not assuage the tempest in the poet's mind; rather does it exacerbate it through the poet's secret knowledge of the contrast between the serenity of the alien landscape and the whirlwinds that blow in his home landscape. The images which the poet borrows from an alien land include "acorn" and "autumn." Human heads cropped in his homeland by the whirlwinds of hate are acorns. The choice of acorns is particularly apt because of the fact that the exploding shells of acorn mimic the exploding cannons of destruction back home. Also, October, which in Europe is a season of harvest, has become a season of hate in the poet's land, Nigeria. The acorns falling in Tegel in this season of harvest reminds the poet of the fall of human heads at this particular moment in time in his own country:

I trod on acorns; each shell's detonation  
 Aped the skull's uniqueness.<sup>110</sup>

Autumn in its symbolic relevance to the events in Nigeria is in the poem the "removal man" who gathers into its granary of shambles the skulls of the victims of the October massacre:

The oak rains a hundred more  
 A kind confusion to arithmetics of death:  
 Time to watch autumn the removal man  
 Dust down rare canvasses.<sup>111</sup>

The poem "Harvest of Hate" reads like a sequel to "Massacre, October '66," but in Soyinka's volume of verse Idanre and Other Poems, where both appear, the first poem precedes the second. A Yeatsian thought lingers behind the title "Harvest of Hate." Yeats had a deep-rooted aversion for hatred although he himself may have hated. In his theory of hatred, hate begets hate. In Autobiographies he writes:

Certain evocation with symbols has taught me that much that we think limited to certain obvious effects influence the whole being. A meditation on sunlight . . . affects the nature throughout producing all the effects which follow from the symbolic nature of the sun. Hate must, in the same way, create sterility.<sup>112</sup>

Yeats blames the tragedy of Irish politics on hatred. In the same book he affirms that

The root of it all is that the political class in Ireland . . . have suffered through the cultivation of hatred as the one energy of their movement.<sup>113</sup>

For this reason Yeats belabours hatred in "A Prayer for my Daughter." He writes in the poem that "to be choked with hate/May well be of all evil chances chief."<sup>114</sup> However,

a special contempt is reserved for "intellectual hatred," which, unquestionably, is the worst of all evils. In "Meditations" he implies that part of the problems of Irish politics lies in the fact that there is "More substance in our enmities/than in our love."<sup>115</sup> In Soyinka's poem, universal disaster is perceived as the direct consequence of hatred. Because men have hated, nature suffers a reversal of its normal cycle:

So now the sun moves to die at mid-morning  
And laughter wilts on the lips of wine  
The fronds of palm are savaged to a bristle  
And rashes break on kernelled oil.<sup>116</sup>

There is an eclipse on the land, for the sun had died at "mid-morning" when it ought to be rising. Wind of hate has frustrated all life impulse. Soyinka's favourite life symbols, such as "palm" and "oil," suffer a negation of their symbolic connotation: "The fronds of palm are savaged to a bristle" and "rashes break on kernelled oil."<sup>117</sup> Human habitations feel the effect of the hateful wind. In stanza two "The hearth is pocked with furnacing teeth";<sup>118</sup> and human lives symbolized in the poem as "fledgling birds" fall victim to an apocalyptic conflagration:

wings womb-moist from the sanctuary of nests  
Fall, unfledged to the tribute of fire.<sup>119</sup>

The picture of universal chaos depicted in the poem is rendered more pathetic by the pastoral reminiscences of its ending. The poet remembers days when time was golden:

There has been such a crop in time of growing  
 Such tuneless noises when we longed for sighs  
 Alone of petals, for muted swell of wine-buds,<sup>120</sup>  
 In August rains, and singing in green spaces.

In the poem "Conversation at Night with a Cockroach," which appears in A Shuttle in the Crypt, Soyinka continues to present death, sterility, and waste as the legacies of hatred. In a section of the poem the land is seen as a human body plagued by hatred, which is imaged as a tumour:

They do not bleed whose breaths are stilled  
 In sludges or sewers, who slither down  
 To death on the burst tumours of hate's  
 Inventive mind.<sup>121</sup>

Tumour in this passage is not just a local malignant growth. It is a disease that has spread to other parts of the body. The image of "burst" implies that Soyinka intends the reader to see "tumour" as a tide overflowing the dykes of the body's resistance. Perhaps "bursts" is intended deliberately to prepare the reader for the increasing status of flood as a dominant symbol in this particular poem. Even in the present passage flood is suggested in such images as "sludges," "sewers," and "slither." Earlier Soyinka wrote in the same poem that

None came living from the floods  
 Of hate's dark waters.<sup>122</sup>

"Conversation" reaches back in time to a period in the history of the poet's land when hate was the nation's harvest. In the imaginary conversation between the poet's persona and the cockroach of the poem, Soyinka maps the political history of Nigeria from the time of the first

military coup of 1966 up to the outbreak of the civil war in July 1967. For Soyinka that first military take-over was a necessary intervention. He says of it in his prison notes, The Man Died, that "the basic motivation was of a genuine revolutionary zeal."<sup>123</sup> In "Conversation" he sees the military intervention as an action "heat-drawn by fire/Of truth."<sup>124</sup> It was for him "The first fire-arc of regenerative eyes/Lowered beneath the rotted roots."<sup>125</sup> Its purpose was "To force impurities in the Nationweal/Belly up," and to "free our earth/Of distorting shadows cast by old/And modern necromancers."<sup>126</sup> The cockroach in the poem is an arm of the "old necromancers." As a symbol of evil and the enemy of all revolutionary initiatives, the cockroach impaired the healthy objectives of the coup with secretions from its duct:

Saw teeth, dribbling a caress  
Of spittle on the wound, you nibbled trust  
From the heart of our concerted bond.<sup>127</sup>

Although the precise meaning of the symbolism of the cockroach is not essential for an understanding of the poem, it may be observed that Soyinka uses the image as a metaphor for all supporters and perpetrators of the pre-revolutionary status quo. The term "scavenger" is another symbol by which they may be recognized in the poem. Soyinka accuses the cockroach of lighting a counter fire which set in motion a wave of apocalyptic chain reaction. The approach of the counter-fire is forcefully intimated with the image of a whirlwind:

We knew the tread and heard  
The gathering heart-beat of the cyclone heart.<sup>128</sup>

The coming disaster itself Soyinka calls "the dread approach/  
Of the Visitation."<sup>129</sup> Its approach is sometimes suggested  
with the image of thunder:

And while the rumble yet  
Was far, we closed, we spread the tentacles.<sup>130</sup>

However, it is flood that appears to Soyinka as the most  
appropriate symbol for illustrating the nature of the  
disaster unleashed on land and life by "cyclone heart":

many drew last breath  
Beneath the earth, below corrupted waters  
Many, buoyed on the swollen husks  
Of past departures, thrashed a dying hope  
To banks.<sup>131</sup>

In the closing stanzas of the poem Soyinka seems to  
be speaking in his own personal voice:

I murmured to their riven hearts:  
Yet blood must flow, a living flood  
Bravely guarded, boldly spilt  
A potency to rejuvenate  
Mothers-of-all earth, the river's  
Endless cycle with the sap  
Of trees, wine of palm, oil  
Of kernels, lamp-light in rock bearings  
Let even as treasures are  
An offering to red pulses  
Beating to the larger life  
Oh I know my lore, I've heard the poets.<sup>132</sup>

In the first line Soyinka is referring to those whose hearts  
have been ruptured by "tumours of hate." In the subsequent  
lines he foresees the eruption on the land of the floods of  
retributive justice. The floods of retributive justice will  
counter the "floods/Of hate's dark waters." But that is by  
no means the end of the matter. The picture that emerges is

a gloomy one, for the "blood-dimmed tide" will always be let loose. Life, Soyinka implies, is as eternal as a river; and life is as cyclical as the rivers of blood are doomed to be cyclical. For Soyinka, as for Yeats, endless cycles of bloodshed have become part of the repeating pattern of history. In Nigeria and Ireland the cycle of bloodshed is continuing. Soyinka admits in the last line that he learnt his lore from the poets he had read. One wishes he had annotated this particular allusion. He may have been aware of the Shakespearean warning that blood will have blood; but it seems, from the cyclical context of the passage and from the echo of Yeats's "blood-dimmed tide" implicit in the collocation of "blood" and "flood" in the second line, that Yeats may have been one of his masters.

One may at this point examine Lenrie Peters's position in relation to the subject of apocalyptic landscape, although the Nigerian situation is not strictly relevant since he is a Gambian. Some of his poems do indicate, however, that their author was aware of the Nigerian tragedy. In Poem 53 of Katchikali, for instance, he remembers Okigbo killed in the war and Soyinka's spending most of the war years in prison:

Okigbo for love of tribe  
Where now your jewelled talent?  
    roaring at the door Soyinka  
    for love of principle?<sup>133</sup>

Poem 64 of this same volume seems to have been written with the Nigeria of the civil-war era in mind, for Nigeria is probably the nation addressed in the poem as the "country of

great hopes":

Oh country of great hopes  
and boundless possibilities  
will the seed grain  
perish for ever

will rivers run  
endlessly with blood,  
saints resort to massacre  
and all your harvests burn?

will no one see  
no sign instruct  
till Noah's ark  
comes sailing on in flood?

Generally, however, Peters's apocalyptic landscapes have no local habitation and a name. The universe is Peters's poetic domain. His characteristic stance then is that of an observer of human nature. He has surveyed the present state of the world only to discover as Yeats had done that "Man is in love and loves what vanishes."<sup>134</sup> Man, from Peters's point of view, has not allowed reason to be the guide of his daily proceedings. Reason is symbolized in many of Peters's poems by images that connote light, such as sun, candle, star, and moon. Thus, in Poem 20 of Katchikali mankind has rejected "the sun's welcome hand/in our most rational mood." Man prefers on the other hand to pitch his camp on locations where no sunlight intrudes, such as

the refuse-littered shore  
the lunatic abyss,  
where the faecal air  
is not sweetened by the rose,  
nor the tearful breast  
made fruitful with milk.

This picture is indicative of what Peters' apocalyptic landscape holds in store for the reader. There no light

intrudes, there no life; only energies that frustrate life may therein dwell. In Poem 64 of Katchikali, already mentioned, "rivers run/endlessly with blood," and a second flood is expected as an eschatological solution to human irrationality. Flood has appeared in the works of Okigbo, Clark, Soyinka, and Yeats which have been already examined. It establishes a symbolic affinity between Peters and the Nigerian poets, and between him and Yeats.

Noah's ark is hailed in Poem 64 out of a sense of outrage. Peters's vision of reality acknowledges the existence of evil, but man, he believes, must not compromise his dignity in spite of that. To Peters's disappointment, however, man's mind has been poisoned by evil. Instead of isolating evil, man's mind breeds and radiates it. For this reason, human happiness has been impeded by war, treachery, ambition, and all other forms of evil. Thus, man builds atom bombs for his own destruction. In the poem "Skyflood of Locusts," irrational streams of blood stain earth. The flood image in the title recalls Yeats's "blood-dimmed tide," and "locust" is reminiscent of Yeats's description of Madame Blavatsky as a woman who devours her followers "like the locust in the Apocalypse."<sup>135</sup> In Peters's poem, earth bleeds and "ferments in agony" as "success goes up in smoke," returning a deluge of ruin. One hears in the poem the sound of "Cannonade of wings in motion" as these instruments of death drill "tongues of fire" which "strike the heart/of life cold dead."<sup>136</sup> The skyflood

of locusts are, of course, fighter bombers, and their "tongues of fire" are bombs. Peters has no specific war in mind, and therefore no specific land in view in this powerful evocation of scenes of rubble. He is castigating all forms of war by projecting their terrible effect on landscape and the human life that animates it. Peters's role as a poet is sometimes prophetic. In this poem he affirms his resolve to cry out against all forms of injustice. His voice is the sole emblem of light in the poem's darkened landscape. He insists, "I will hold a light/to fight against the night," and "I should be ashamed/to hang up my/rags as I do/on the wall."<sup>137</sup>

"Skyflood of Locusts" is the first poem in Peters's first book of verse Satellites. In the last poem in this volume (Poem 55) he reasserts the messianic role of his art. He will forever "knock on the locked/Gates of hell."<sup>138</sup> His role as an artist is "To release my inner power/Against false barriers and strife."<sup>139</sup> Peters's strategy is to make constant incursions into the human heart. He intends his art as a light that will illumine the darkness of the heart and, by implication, the darkness of human landscape. Poem 15 of Satellites is a personal appeal for universal brotherhood and human understanding among people of all races. He urges humanity in the poem to open wide the gates of the heart:

Open the gates  
 To East and West  
 Bring in all  
 That's good and best  
 Lay bare the breast  
 To the unmothered child  
 Give nipple-comfort  
 To the doubting guest

Wider still the uninfarcted heart  
 Large and throbbing as the Universe  
 Let all come in  
 With candles burning.<sup>140</sup>

The "candle" is the symbol of that light which Peters hopes to usher into the darkened heart of man as well as the darkened land of man. Its implication is continued in the poem's subsequent stanzas with the image of "bush-fires," "star," and "moon":

Light the bush-fires  
 When the stars have fallen  
 When the moon tires  
 Of paying homage to heaven.

Peters exhorts all bearers of the torch to remind the agents of darkness ("those who come/To ravage") of "a new world/Of harmony with nature/and strength and good will."<sup>141</sup> There is a special appeal for universal harmony in Poem 38. He says in the poem that integration is necessary if universal harmony must be attained. But to attain it man must indeed be born again: "We need the eagerness/of children to listen,/hear, reflect as/well as for milk."<sup>142</sup> Man understands the futility of disintegration but he persists in engendering forces that perpetuate disruption of values:

Flesh and red clay  
 alike comprehend  
 the futility of  
 dissociation

Yet all dissociates  
 disintegrates like  
 autumn leaves  
 People too and love and sunlight.<sup>143</sup>

Social disharmony breeds war, and war lays waste land and life. Its horrors are evoked in the poem "On Exploding the Chinese Bomb." Outraged by the test of nuclear warheads in China, Peters warns that an era of reckoning will surely follow this occasion of nuclear jubilation:

The agony of despair  
 will come after the hand shaking  
 kissing, the oasis of aid  
 when clouds rise in the Eastern sky  
 to shut out the sun.<sup>144</sup>

The explosion itself Peters calls

one devastating seed  
 sown in the wilderness of hate  
 poisoning the flesh of earth.<sup>145</sup>

In Poem 35 of Katchikali Peters comes out openly against the "savagery of war." The war in Indonesia, Korea, and South East Asia was born of the "violence of the human heart." Hearts should give "water" and "food," and not "a severed limb," nor "acres of dust and ashes under fire." This point is emphasized in the second stanza of the poem:

Water, water, give food please  
 a severed limb, the conscience not at ease  
 acres of dust and ashes under fire  
 acrid smell of burning hatreds cloaked in power.

The appeal for love and the castigation of hatred recall Clark, Soyinka, and Yeats. The reference to China in Poem 48 of Satellites, and to Indonesia, Korea, and South East

Asia in Poem 35 of Katchikali is illustrative of Peters' cosmopolitan outlook.

Africa, however, is part of that universe which Peters surveys as a poet. In Poem 45 of Katchikali he remembers the Congo Civil War of 1960, of which Okigbo has also written. In this poem entitled "Plea to Mobutu," Peters pleads with Mobutu, the current Head of State of that country, to mellow his politics of hatred with "compassion, justice, effect," for

Congo bleeds and every drop  
lights a grim fire across the continent.

Vacant clap of thunder and rifle butts pointed on human skulls, Peters says in the poem, have transformed the country into an ocean of blood:

the vacant clap of thunder, rifle butt on skull  
from feud to feud assail on bloody oceans,  
where violence annihilates the good.

"Plea to Mobutu" is one of Peters' political poems. Most of these poems reflect the political climate on the African continent. They reveal their author's innate humanity, his concern for justice and for the good of the common man, and his constant appeal to the holiness of the heart's affection. These basic concerns render the political poems singularly pertinent to the subject of landscape, for whenever justice is travestied Peters delineates its effects on land. Political irresponsibility, he contends, exposes the land to disaster even as it does in some of the poems of Okigbo, Clark, Soyinka, and Yeats already examined. Poem 45 in

Satellites, which plots the graph of political awakening in Africa from the time of imperialism up to the present moment of political autonomy, terminates in an evocation of a scene of moral and spiritual cul-de-sac. Social oppression has been intensified with the achievement of Independence. The new leaders of the land have only substituted one dictatorship for another. The impact of social injustice is reflected on the land, for with the emergence of what Soyinka calls "modern necromancers," the land becomes immersed in a seething cauldron of hate:

There is hunger and sickness in the land  
 I say there is a cauldron burning on that plain  
 red earth, red vengeance all aflame  
 must it be born in vain?  
 I carry a ball of fire on my head  
 I pray for rain, for vital floods to come again.<sup>146</sup>

The vital flood is the apocalyptic deluge of the Bible. It destroys in order to recreate. This kind of destructive-regenerative cycle Peters hopes would wipe out the present sickness on the African continent. That sickness is also lamented in Poem 50. Independence has been fought for and won, but its hopes have been belied by the bloody events in so many countries in Africa. Peters regrets that

The slogans we threw about like fireworks  
 Which disfigured the alien face  
 Are reflected from outer space  
 And have landed like meteorites  
 In the crowded squares  
 The children are cut in pieces  
 And their cries will still be heard tomorrow.<sup>147</sup>

Since there is no competent spiritual leadership on the land, death takes over the affairs of state:

Is there death in the land  
 That the flags do not fly high  
 And free for all to see?<sup>148</sup>

Notice, however, that this land which is ruled by death is Mother Africa; it is not any geographically defined nation. Okigbo, Clark, Soyinka, and Yeats wrote about their respective countries; Peters, about Mother Africa. As an African his sympathies with Mother Africa are understandable. Satellites, from which the poem under discussion is taken, was written in England. Is Peters looking back from across the seas on the countries of the African continent as one indistinguishable entity? It appears that this indeed is the case. What is not so clear is whether this situation is intended deliberately to indulge the common European misconception of Africa as one country. It may be argued in Peters's favour, however, that there is a sense in which one tragic event in a given locality in Africa may be considered symptomatic of a common universal disease on the entire continent. The spread of military coups is a case in point. In 1963, it happened in the West African state of Togo and in 1966 Nigeria picked up the fashion. Within a few years "coup d'état" became a common phenomenon in most countries of black Africa.

If Mother Africa is Peters's country, one may justifiably affirm that the land that suffers in most of the poems discussed in this chapter is their author's homeland, his beloved landscape. The elegiac note hints that the African poets may have caught this feeling from Yeats, a

poet much dedicated to his land and life. Yeats's poem "The Second Coming" was written in 1919. This date is an important milestone in Irish history. The civil war was only three years away; the Easter Rising had happened three years earlier. In 1919 the Black and Tans were at the height of their terrorist activities. In the poem "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" Yeats noted that the years around this date were "dragon-ridden." It is in 1919 too that he imagined in excited revery

That the future years had come,  
Dancing to a frenzied drum.  
Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.<sup>149</sup>

Yeats's fear of the "murderous innocence of the sea" is most emphatically articulated in the image of the "blood-dimmed tide" in "The Second Coming." The "blood-dimmed tide" is not the only symbol by which an apocalyptic landscape is mirrored in the work of the poets discussed in this chapter. The persistence of the symbol in all of them is, however, significant. Okigbo struck the first apocalyptic signature note with the image of "deluge" in the first poem discussed in this chapter. The symbol recurs in various guises in Clark, Soyinka, and Peters. Yeats's murderous sea might drown the entire cosmos, but he first saw it as an image that was most immediately relevant to the events in his country. It is in such analogous context that the African poets have used the deluge symbol.

Soyinka claims that the Nigerian tragedy bears a certain relationship with the events described in his long

poem "Idanre." In the Preface to this poem he reminds the reader that the civil war in his country echoed the "bloody origin of Ogun's pilgrimage" to Idanre rockhills.<sup>150</sup>

"Idanre" is an epic poem, and so is Yeats's narrative verse "The Wanderings of Oisín." The contrasting features of the landscape of these two epic narratives are the concern of the chapter that follows.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>J. P. Clark, Casualties (London: Longmans, 1970), p. viii. Hereafter cited as Casualties.

<sup>2</sup>Christopher Okigbo, Labyrinths (London: Heinemann, 1971), p. xi. Hereafter cited as Labyrinths.

<sup>3</sup>Labyrinths, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 33. (Where the asterisk [\*] appears after an ellipsis or a dash in a quotation, the mark is the poet's own, not the editor's.)

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Robert Scholes and Richard M. Kain, eds., The Workshop of Daedalus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p. 100.

<sup>14</sup>W. B. Yeats, The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 79. Hereafter cited as Collected Poems.

<sup>15</sup>Labyrinths, p. 35.

<sup>16</sup>Frank Kermode, "The New Apocalyptists," Kenyon Review, 33 (1966), 340.

<sup>17</sup>Domenico Porzio and Marco Valsecchi, Picasso: His Life and Art (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1974), p. 42.

- <sup>18</sup>Sunday Anozie, Christopher Okigbo: Creative Rhetoric (London: Evans, 1972), p. 95.
- <sup>19</sup>Labyrinths, p. 28.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 39.
- <sup>22</sup>Collected Poems, p. 156.
- <sup>23</sup>W. B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 87. Hereafter cited as Essays.
- <sup>24</sup>T. S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," The Dial, 75 (1923), 483.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup>Labyrinths, p. xii.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. xiii.
- <sup>29</sup>Essays, p. 50.
- <sup>30</sup>W. B. Yeats, Autobiographies (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 109. Hereafter cited as Autobiographies.
- <sup>31</sup>Labyrinths, p. 39.
- <sup>32</sup>Okigbo, "Lament of the Silent Sisters," Transition, 3 (December 1962), 15. Hereafter cited as "Lament."
- <sup>33</sup>Labyrinths, p. 41.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 40.
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 45.
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 71.
- <sup>38</sup>Collected Poems, p. 208.
- <sup>39</sup>"Lament," p. 14.
- <sup>40</sup>Labyrinths, p. 41.
- <sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. xiii.

- <sup>42</sup>Labyrinths, p. 42.
- <sup>43</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 44.
- <sup>45</sup>Essays, p. 409.
- <sup>46</sup>Collected Poems, pp. 323-24.
- <sup>47</sup>A. Norman Jeffares, A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 388. Hereafter cited as Commentary.
- <sup>48</sup>F. A. C. Wilson, W. B. Yeats And Tradition (London: Methuen, 1958), p. 221.
- <sup>49</sup>W. B. Yeats, Explorations (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 378. Hereafter cited as Explorations.
- <sup>50</sup>James Joyce, Ulysses (1922; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguins, 1973), p. 11. Hereafter cited as Ulysses.
- <sup>51</sup>Collected Poems, p. 267.
- <sup>52</sup>Labyrinths, p. 47.
- <sup>53</sup>Christopher Okigbo, "Lament of the Drums," Transition, 4 (1965), 17.
- <sup>54</sup>Labyrinths, p. xiii.
- <sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 47.
- <sup>56</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>57</sup>Philip Mayerson, Classical Mythology in Literature, Arts, and Music (Lexington: Xerox College, 1971), p. 28.
- <sup>58</sup>Labyrinths, p. 47.
- <sup>59</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 48.
- <sup>61</sup>Ulysses, p. 27.
- <sup>62</sup>Collected Poems, p. 276.
- <sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 275.
- <sup>64</sup>Commentary, p. 402.

<sup>65</sup>Commentary, p. 402.

<sup>66</sup>Peter Allt and Russel K. Alspach, The Variorum Edition Of The Poem of W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 738. Hereafter cited as Variorum.

<sup>67</sup>In Autobiographies, Yeats implied that hatred was the legacy of the "hysterica passio" of Ireland (Autobiographies, p. 489). In the poem "A Bronze Head," the image symbolizes Maud Gonne's political fanaticism (Collected Poems, p. 328).

<sup>68</sup>Collected Poems, p. 204.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>70</sup>Stephen Langdon, Tammuz and Ishtar (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1919), pp. 10-11.

<sup>71</sup>Labyrinths, p. 50.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Casualties, p. 54.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>86</sup>Allan Wade, Letters of W. B. Yeats (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p. 693. Hereafter cited as Letters.

- <sup>87</sup>Collected Poems, p. 202.
- <sup>88</sup>Casualties, p. 22.
- <sup>89</sup>Collected Poems, p. 234.
- <sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 203.
- <sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 323.
- <sup>92</sup>Casualties, p. 28.
- <sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 29.
- <sup>94</sup>Collected Poems, p. 205.
- <sup>95</sup>Casualties, p. 31.
- <sup>96</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>97</sup>Collected Poems, p. 206.
- <sup>98</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>99</sup>Labyrinths, p. 66.
- <sup>100</sup>Wole Soyinka, A Shuttle in the Crypt (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), pp. 62-63. Hereafter cited as A Shuttle.
- <sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 62.
- <sup>102</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>103</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>104</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 63.
- <sup>106</sup>Collected Poems, p. 199.
- <sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 201.
- <sup>108</sup>Wole Soyinka, Idanre and Other Poems (London: Methuen, 1967), p. 52. Hereafter cited as Idanre.
- <sup>109</sup>Explorations, p. 293.
- <sup>110</sup>Idanre, p. 51.
- <sup>111</sup>Ibid.

- 112 Autobiographies, p. 486.
- 113 Ibid.
- 114 Collected Poems, p. 187.
- 115 Ibid., p. 203.
- 116 Idanre, p. 50.
- 117 Ibid.
- 118 Ibid.
- 119 Ibid.
- 120 Ibid.
- 121 A Shuttle, pp. 12-13.
- 122 Ibid., p. 11.
- 123 Wole Soyinka, The Man Died (London: Rex Collins, 1972), p. 147.
- 124 A Shuttle, p. 6.
- 125 Ibid., p. 5.
- 126 Ibid., p. 7.
- 127 Ibid., p. 5.
- 128 Ibid., p. 7.
- 129 Ibid.
- 130 Ibid.
- 131 Ibid., p. 11.
- 132 Ibid.
- 133 Lenrie Peters, Katchikali (London: Heinemann, 1971), n.p. Poems in Katchikali are numbered; there is no pagination. Poem numbers will stand for references in the volume. These references will not be footnoted in subsequent allusions to this collection.
- 134 Collected Poems, p. 205.
- 135 Letters, p. 86.

- 136 Lenrie Peters, Satellites (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 1.
- 137 Ibid., p. 3.
- 138 Ibid., p. 103.
- 139 Ibid.
- 140 Ibid., p. 30.
- 141 Ibid., p. 31.
- 142 Ibid., p. 68.
- 143 Ibid.
- 144 Ibid., p. 94.
- 145 Ibid.
- 146 Ibid., p. 89.
- 147 Ibid., p. 97.
- 148 Ibid.
- 149 Collected Poems, p. 185.
- 150 Idanre, p. 58.

## CHAPTER IV

### OGUN AND OISIN: CONTRASTING FACES OF MYTHOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE

Until the publication of Soyinka's "Idanre" in 1967, modern Nigerian poetry had nothing of note to show in the form of epic poetry. Celebrating the labours of the Yoruba god of war, Ogun, on the night of transition, and originating from folk mythology which is for Yeats the "soil where all great art is rooted,"<sup>1</sup> "Idanre" is of peculiar interest in light of Yeats's literary theories in the early nineties. In an inaugural lecture delivered to the National Literary Society of Dublin in 1893, Yeats informed his audience that there were three marked periods in the development of the literature of a nation. The first is the period of epic or narrative poetry; the second, that of the dramatic; and the third, the period of the lyric.<sup>2</sup> In the early nineties, Ireland was still in its epic phase. "Alone, perhaps, among the nations of Europe we are in our ballad or epic age," Yeats reminded the same audience.<sup>3</sup> But Ireland had no Homer until the time of Sir Samuel Ferguson (1810-1886). Ferguson, Yeats noted in another early lecture, "was the one Homeric poet of our time" because he had "restored to our hills and rivers their epic interest."<sup>4</sup>

In keeping with his division of the development of a literature into three evolutionary phases, and partly to supplement Ferguson's effort to provide Ireland with heroic poetry, Yeats began his poetic career with the epic narrative, "The Wanderings of Oisín" (1888). Through his early contact with Monihí Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore,<sup>5</sup> Yeats became familiar with the literature of India. It seems that Indian literature became for him a typical example of the literature of the third world to which Africa belongs. This literature, like the literature of the Greeks in its epic phase, had its foundation in "the legend lore of the people and in the national history."<sup>6</sup> Soyinka's narrative poem, "Idanre," is the major product of Nigerian poetry in its epic stage. Yeats offered "The Wanderings of Oisín" to the public as an Irish example of an epic literature.<sup>7</sup>

Although "Idanre" and "The Wanderings of Oisín" (hereafter cited as "Oisín") are epic narratives, their claim to that status needs to be qualified. They are not epic poems in the Homeric sense of the word. Yeats anticipated this problem when he said of the stories of the Fenian cycle of legends out of which he quarried material for "Oisín" that "We must not expect in these stories the epic lineaments, the many incidents, woven into one great event."<sup>8</sup> This remark is also true of the Ogun lore from which Soyinka selected materials for his poem. In neither of the two works has the author followed strictly the

traditional structure of the epic. "Oisín" has three parts, rather than the usual twelve, and "Idanre" seven. Yeats modified his sources considerably to suit his own poetic objective. In a letter to Katharine Tynan he indicated that he had said so many things in "Oisín" to which "I only have the key."<sup>9</sup> In Michael Comyn's Gaelic poem, "The Lay of Oisín on the Land of Youth," which was his principle source material, Oisín visited two islands, but Yeats made him visit three in his own version of the myth.<sup>10</sup> Soyinka's Ogun is a septuple god; for this reason, "Idanre" is subdivided into seven parts. Soyinka's poem has the muscular energy of Milton's Paradise Lost, while Yeats's "Oisín" shows influences of Spenser's "Faerie Queene," as he himself acknowledged. He probably had "Oisín" in mind when he said of his early works that "I had begun to write poetry in imitation of Shelley and of Edmund Spenser . . . and I invented fantastic and incoherent plots."<sup>11</sup> "Idanre" is an epic of war; "Oisín" one of romance. There are epic idioms and dictions in both poems. In "Oisín," for instance, the epic phraseology "thrice" is imitated in the use of the phrase "three times." In Book I, Niamh's horse "shook himself and neighed three times."<sup>12</sup> "Idanre" imitates epic mannerisms by addressing the principal actors in the drama by their attributes rather than by their proper names. Ogun, the central hero of the story, is the "Iron One," and Sango, the god of lightning and thunder, is "the axe-handed one."<sup>13</sup> However, the immediate concern of the present study is

setting.

Originating as they both do from the folk mythology of two separate countries, Ireland and Nigeria, how does "Oisín" compare with "Idanre" in matters relating to setting? In other words, what kind of landscape emerges in the two poems? To answer these questions, it may be necessary to examine first the identity and attributes of the heroes of the two epic narratives. In his Notes on "Idanre," Soyinka introduced Ogun as "God of Iron and Metallurgy, Explorer, Artisan, Hunter, God of war, Guardian of the Road, the Creative Essence." He added that Ogun's season is "harvest and the rains."<sup>14</sup> In his own Notes to "Oisín," Yeats informed the reader that the hero of his story was "The poet of the Fenian cycle of legend."<sup>15</sup> The "Fenians," Yeats explained, "were the great military order of which Finn was chief."<sup>16</sup> In his Preface to Lady Gregory's mythological masterpiece, Gods and Fighting Men (1904), Yeats admitted that the Fenian era had no precise historical dating, but he noted that the stories of the Fianna, from which the Fenian cycle originated, preceded those of Cuchulain, "who lived about the time of the birth of Christ."<sup>17</sup> Yeats insisted on the kinship between the Fenian era and antiquity itself. The events described in his narrative, he wrote, took place "in the indefinite periods made up of many periods."<sup>18</sup> Heroes were endowed with superhuman energies during the ancient world of the Fenian ascendancy. About Oisín's father, Finn, and his band of heroes Yeats wrote:

We think of him and of his people as great-bodied men with large movements . . . men that have broad brows and quiet eyes full of confidence in a good luck that proved every day afresh that they are a portion of the strength of things. They are hardly so much individual men as portions of universal nature.<sup>19</sup>

But Oisín was a mortal and Ogun, a god. Not even the spiritual essence of Oisín's companion, Niamh, can match the solidity of Ogun's personality as an immortal; for, as a faery, Niamh is of a lower status in the mythological hierarchy. Oisín enters the story as an old man worn out by age and toil. He is "bent," and "bald," and "blind."<sup>20</sup> Ogun, on the other hand, is at the height of his powers as god of war at the beginning of "Idanre." As poet, and as hunter-warrior, Oisín has certain qualities in common with Ogun, who is a "Hunter god"<sup>21</sup> as well as the "primogenitor of the artist as the creative human."<sup>22</sup> Beyond this point, the comparative scale, in so far as the character of the two heroes is concerned, begins to tilt in favour of Ogun; for there cannot be an even balance on a scale where a mortal is weighed against a god. Some of Ogun's qualities ring as hard on the ear as the iron and steel over which he rules. Iron and boulder, with which he is consistently associated, symbolize the fierce, masculine vitality of the god.

Both heroes are, however, engaged in a kind of epic journey. Ogun's journey is a "pilgrimage" to earth. Pilgrimage suggests that the journey has a definite purpose, for Ogun is visiting earth to fertilize it as god of harvest (an extension of his role as creative essence), and

to atone for a previous error by confronting the purgatorial forces of darkness. Oisín's travels are a "wandering" adventure. "Wandering," in spite of its reminiscence of the purposeful missions of Homer's Odysseus or Joyce's Bloom, has serious connotations, in the case of Oisín, of an idle itinerary. Perhaps the leisured tone of Oisín's travels is reinforced by the very nature of his destination. Islands are the supreme objective of his mission. Islands are associated in some of Yeats's poems with resignation and indolent retreat from the commitments of life in its real, fierce aspect. In "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" the protagonist sought peace, not action, in the glimmering landscape of the islanded lake of Innisfree. Also the lover in the poem "The White Birds," is "haunted by numberless islands, and many a Danaan shore, / Where time would surely forget us."<sup>23</sup> If island offers Oisín an escapist resort from the labours of life, the scene of Ogun's sphere of operation, land, may be linked in Yeats's imagination with vigorous, active engagement. Indeed, Yeats goes out specifically to associate water--an extension of the image of island--with lascivious living and dreaming:

The people of the waters have been in all ages beautiful and changeable, or beautiful and wise and lonely, for water is everywhere the signature of the fruitfulness of the body and of the fruitfulness of dreams.<sup>24</sup>

Yeats recalled in Autobiographies that he was instructed by "a certain symbolic personality" to "live near water and avoid woods 'because they concentrate the solar rays.'"<sup>25</sup>

Water then is associated with the feminine principles of the moon ("beautiful and changeable"), and land or woods with the masculine principles of the sun, which are principles of engagement and action.

Soyinka's terminology for engagement is daring; and daring is associated with tragedy, for to dare is the inescapable lot of the tragic man. To dare is to act. Both are in turn associated in Soyinka's mind with hubris, and hubris is for him a necessary and even a mechanistically moral device by which the tragic actor can apply a shock to an established order. For this reason, Soyinka believes that although to act may be satanic or Promethean, it has its own virtues. In his aesthetic of acting, engagement is shown to be a more honourable attitude to life than withdrawal; for engagement offers man an unlimited scope for self-fulfillment. He who engages, Soyinka implies, will find that there is more enterprise in action than in withdrawal:

To act, the Promethean instinct of rebellion, channels anguish into creative purpose which releases man from a totally destructive despair, releasing from within him the most energetic, deeply combative inventions.<sup>26</sup>

However, Ogun's actions are neither all aggression nor all rebellion. He embodies within him what Soyinka calls "the Dionysian-Apollonian-Promethean essence."<sup>27</sup>

Ogun's activities are as diverse as his multiple attributes. They include creation and destruction, fusion and disintegration, flint-work and smith-work. He is also in control of the levers that regulate the rhythm of the

seasons. Yoruba mythology celebrates him as a pioneer-god, the deity who cleared a path for man by bridging what Soyinka calls the "gulf of transition."<sup>28</sup> In "Idanre" he is addressed as "path-maker," and as "he who goes fore where other gods/Have turned."<sup>29</sup> As the god that "ventures first," Soyinka situates Ogun in a landscape of action. On the other hand, Yeats, in keeping with Oisín's escapist tendencies, locates him in what he judged in a later assessment of "The Wanderings of Oisín" as a landscape of "vain repose."<sup>30</sup>

The hill of Idanre where much of the action of Soyinka's epic took place is "a god-suffused grazing of primal giants and mastodons . . . suckled by mists and clouds."<sup>31</sup> In the first stanza of the poem's opening section "Deluge," imagery, diction, and rhythm aspire towards the evocation of an atmosphere of marmorean loftiness:

Gone, and except for horsemen briefly  
Thawed, lit in deep cloud mirrors, lost  
The Skymen of Void's regenerate Wastes  
Striding vast across  
My still inchoate earth.<sup>32</sup>

The motive force of this stanza is concentrated on the active participles "Gone," "lit," and "lost." They compel attention by their emphatic position in the stanza (at the beginning, middle, or end of the lines in which they occur), and they suggest action. The actors are "primal giants and mastodons," heroic personages whom Soyinka addresses in the poem as "the skymen of Void's regenerate Wastes." Their gigantic limbs traverse the cosmos. The skymen are still

"striding vast across/My . . . inchoate earth." In Yeats's "Oisín" this kind of epic grandeur occurs in at least two descriptions. The first is in the portrait of the two giants in Book II. These giants are "portions of universal nature," like Soyinka's "skymen." The "vast foot" of one "lay/Half in the unvesselled sea," while his "long arm" is indistinguishable from the marine topography of his environment; it stretched "to where . . . /The stream churned, churned, and churned."<sup>33</sup> Between the eyelids of the other giant "the imaged meteors had flashed and run/And had disported in the stilly jet."<sup>34</sup> Action is suggested in the image of the meteor, but it is an action that had happened, that is merely being recalled. Even if one situates that action in the present, it will be discovered that there is no more energy in the meteor. It had "flashed" and "run" and "disported." In a poem contemporaneous with "The Wanderings of Oisín," "The White Birds," the meteor still retained its energy. The lovers are tired of "the flame of the meteor, before it can fade and flee."<sup>35</sup> In the passage from "Oisín," the giants that Oisín has presented are statues. As such they remain images of sculptured grandeur. Stasis rather than motion is the overall impression. The stars around them are "fixed," the jets around them are "stilly," and the waters in which they appear are "unvesselled"--there is no marine action. The meteors on the face of one of the giants are "imaged" representations of the real thing. Book II of "Oisín" is the Island of

Battle. The immobility of the statues is all the more striking for this reason. It is to counter this impression of stasis that the stanza in which the statues were introduced opens with a brief evocation of tidal action:

A foaming tide  
Whitened afar with surge, fan-formed and wide,  
Burst from a great door marred by many a blow  
From mace and sword and pole-axe, long ago  
When gods and giants warred.<sup>36</sup>

Still, action is on a low key here for the horse-like tides have no rider; they gallop at a time when gods and giants no longer warred.

The passage on the statues precedes the section in which Oisín encounters the demon whose threatening aspects did not intimidate his "angry king-remembering soul." This battle will be discussed later but, first, the other passage in the poem where a sublime intention may have been aimed at. This occurs in Book III. Each of the "monstrous slumbering folk" of the Island of Sleep was

huger than fourscore men;  
The tops of their ears were feathered, their hands  
were the claws of birds,  
And, shaking the plumes of the grass and the leaves  
of the mural glen,  
The breathing came from those bodies long warless,  
grown whiter than curds.<sup>37</sup>

Yeats may be aiming at marmorean loftiness here, but what is achieved is a marmorean stillness. The final impression of this description is no less static than the still posture of the sculptured giants of the Island of Battle. The only action in the passage is the pulsation of the giant nostrils of the sleepers. Their bodies are "long warless." The

fixed statues of Book II, and the sleeping monsters of Book III establish "Oisín" as an epic which operates in a landscape where men and gods have abdicated from action.

On the other hand, action is the keynote of Soyinka's "Idanre." The landscape is still reeking with spoils of war. There is only a brief "thaw" in the gelded rage of the warring horsemen, and the sky warriors are still "striding vast" across the yet inchoate matrix of the earth. Nature also participates in the rage for action; she is in a state of "fevered distillations," for Ogun's descent to earth is preceded by a cosmic deluge. This deluge is unleashed on earth only when the instrument that has sealed up the bottled energies of the sky has been unscrewed. The instrument itself, the "corkscrew," etches sharp affinities with the combatant giants, for it is "flaming" even as they themselves are still flaming out with the anger of war. With the release of the rain-suffused energies of the cosmos, "roaring vats of an unstoppered heaven deluge/ Earth in fevered distillations":

The flaming corkscrew etches sharp affinities  
 .....  
 When roaring vats of an unstoppered heaven deluge  
 Earth in fevered distillations, potent with  
 The fire of the axe-handed one.<sup>38</sup>

The "axe-handed one" is Sango, the Yoruba god of lightning and electricity. His presence phases out in the first section of the poem, for the narrative is primarily an epic of Ogun. Soyinka indicates in the Notes to the poem that Sango's essence is absorbed into the personality of Ogun

and that the poem is in its early sections a celebration of the fusion in Ogun of two separate essences, those of Ogun himself, and those of Sango:

Today Ogun of the metallic lore conducts Sango's electricity. The ritual dance of the union is seen sometimes during an electric storm when from high-tension wires leap figures of ecstatic flames.<sup>39</sup>

The "ecstatic flames" are the "fire of the axe-handed one." Still, in conformity with Ogun's active energies, it is "potent."

Rain reeds are no less potent with energy, for they are "violent" and "tremulous in fire tracings/On detonating peaks":

And greys are violent now, laced with  
Whiteburns, tremulous in fire tracings  
On detonating peaks. Ogun is still in such  
Combatant angles, poised to a fresh descent  
Fiery axe-heads fly about his feet.<sup>40</sup>

Ogun is entrenched firmly, then, in the opening stanzas of the poem in a landscape of epic action. Sango is the first victim in this section of Ogun's heroic energies:

He catches Sango in his three-fingered hand  
And runs him down to earth.<sup>41</sup>

Earth is the beneficiary of the benevolent aspect (creativity) of those energies:

And no one speaks of secrets in this land  
Only, that the skin be bared to welcome rain  
And earth prepare, that seeds may swell  
And roots take flesh within her, and men  
Wake naked into harvest-tide.<sup>42</sup>

The Nigerian critic, Udoeyop, errs signally in associating the white colour on Ogun's cheeks in the fourth stanza of "Deluge" with "infancy and innocence."<sup>43</sup> No one

is sure of the pigmentation of the gods, but it may be presumed that the African gods are dark. However, Soyinka has followed the European tradition in associating blanched cheeks with indignation. In the case of Ogun, white is a symbol of heroic indignation:

In these white moments of my god, plucking  
Light from the day's effacement, the last ember  
Glows in his large creative hand, savage round  
The rebel mane, ribbed on ridges, crowded in corridors  
Low on his spiked symbols.<sup>44</sup>

The "spiked symbols" are Ogun's artifacts, known in Yoruba as the "opa Ogun." They are an important instrument in Ogun's weaponry, and symbolic too of his labours "through the night of transition."<sup>45</sup> In the passage just cited, Ogun is depicted as an equestrian warrior whose "rebel mane" is illumined by savage embers of light. The image recalls dimly the horse-like tide in Book II of "Oisín." That tide is as daring and as enraged as Ogun's rebel mane; but it is one of the few images of action in the poem:

A foaming tide  
Whitened afar with surge, fan-formed and wide,  
Burst from a great door marred by many a blow.

Yeats's image of the "foaming tide" is a consciously calculated metaphor. At about the same time that his "The Wanderings of Oisín" was published, he used the same image to suggest the superhuman strength of the Fenian heroes. In his Preface to Lady Gregory's modernized version of Irish mythology, Gods and Fighting Men, he wrote:

These gods are indeed more wise and beautiful than men; but men, when they are great men, are stronger than they are, for men are, as it were, the foaming tide-line of their sea.<sup>46</sup>

More significant, however, is the unconscious rhythmic affinity between Soyinka's "harvest-tide" and Yeats's "foaming tide." At the end of "Deluge," Ogun unleashed a "harvest-tide" on earth; and at the beginning of Book II of Yeats's poem, Oisín is ushered into the domed tower where he will do battle with a demon by a "foaming tide."

In section two of "Idanre," entitled "And After," earth, the beneficiary of the harvest-tide, is symbolized in the maternal image of Oya. As such, Oya functions as the symbolic receptacle of the harvest-tide:

At pilgrims' rest beneath Idanre Hill  
The wine-girl, dazed from divine dallying  
Felt wine-skeins race in fire-patterns within her.<sup>47</sup>

Oya is not only a symbolic representation of mother Earth; she is also a bar-tender ("wine-girl"), the victim of a motor accident, a one-time wife of Ogun, and later of Sango.<sup>48</sup> Thus, Soyinka loads every vein of her being with symbolic ore. As an ex-wife of Ogun and Sango, Oya shares the attributes of both deities. Ogun's sperms of life ("wine-skeins") are electric currents (Sango's essence) racing through her veins in "fire-patterns." Thus, Oya is possessed by a kind of internal tide and internal action. Physically, she is not wholly purged of the will for motion inherited from Ogun. In stanza three of "And After," she is an eel meandering effortlessly in the waters: "She swam an eel into the shadows."<sup>49</sup> But the human side of her

personality (she is half human, half divine) was fated to taste the ashes of death in a motor accident. In one lightning instant of elemental action ("The sky cracked halfway") Oya became "a greying skull/On blooded highways."<sup>50</sup> Combining his newly inherited agency over thunder and lightning with his traditional role as the guardian of the road, Ogun acted and Oya suffered.

In her relationship to Ogun as lover (she became "dazed from divine dallying"), Oya recalls Niamh; also the Oya-Ogun relationship seems to have been anticipated by the Niamh-Oisín partnership. However, "blooded highways" and stormy skies are the antithesis of the bower of bliss inhabited by Niamh and Oisín in the Island of Dancing. The presiding deity of that Island is Aengus, the god of love and poetry. In the Island of Dancing nature participates in the act of dance. The peculiar idiom of that Island is the language of dance. Recalling his experience in Aengus's domain Oisín said:

We danced to where in the winding thicket  
 The damask roses, bloom on bloom,  
 Like crimson meteors hang in the gloom  
 And bending over them softly said,  
 Bending over them in the dance,  
 With a swift and friendly glance  
 From dewy eyes: 'Upon the dead  
 Fall the leaves of other roses,  
 On the dead dim earth enclose:  
 But never, never on our graves,  
 Heaped beside the glimmering waves,  
 Shall fall the leaves of damask roses.'<sup>51</sup>

Unlike Niamh, who is a faery, Oya is vulnerable to the ills that bedevil the life of mortals. As the victim of a motor

accident she is enclosed by dim earth and wrapped up in those leaves of lethal roses, which the dancing faeries of Aengus's island abhor. Even in her role as Ogun's wife, Oya lived in a serpent's mouth. Ordeal rather than love was her lot. "Worn out by Ogun's fearsome nature," explains Soyinka, "she deserted him for Sango."<sup>52</sup> Oya's destiny as a tragic figure, both in her capacity as human and as an erstwhile bride of Ogun, is suggested with the image of a snake:

vapours rose  
From sudden bitumen and snaked within  
Her wrap of indigo.<sup>53</sup>

The snake image has a special relevance to Ogun, for the snake is an important totemic element in his worship; it signifies the "doom of repetition."<sup>54</sup> In this particular instance, the image evokes intimations of eternal torment which culminates in death. The idea of death is further suggested with the image of darkness. In the passage under discussion, darkness is suggested in "bitumen" and in "indigo." In the stanza that immediately follows, it strikes an immediate key.

Darkness veiled her little hills poised  
Twin nights against the night, pensive points  
In the leer of lightning, and sadness filled  
The lone face of the wine-girl.<sup>55</sup>

Darkness, then, in Oya's tragic landscape; and light, laughter, and dancing in Niamh's island of joy. There is a kind of dancing in "Idanre," but it is the whirl of atoms and electrons expressing their individual unique

energies, and not the dance of bliss in Book I of "Oisín."

In section II of "Idanre" Soyinka writes:

Through aeons of darkness rode the stone  
Of whirling incandescence, and cables danced  
In writhing ecstasies, point to point, wart to wart  
Of electric coils.<sup>56</sup>

And at the end of the entire section, Ogun is said to have taught all nature the art of dance:

[He]taught the veins to dance, of earth of rock  
Of tree, sky, of fire and rain, of flesh of man  
And woman.<sup>57</sup>

The first dance is the dance of fusion, the ritual dance of the symbolic integration of the essences of Ogun and Sango, observable, as Soyinka has indicated, "during an electric storm when from high-tension wires leap figures of ecstatic flames." The dance in the second passage is a self-individualizing exercise. Soyinka has used dance here as a symbol of self-expression, the assertion, that is, of the uniqueness of each individual species. Hopkins's inscape might explain better what Soyinka has in mind in the second dance image, for Ogun is a god who believes in the inscape of the self. After he had heroically resisted all forces inimical to the assertion of his own individuality on the night of transition, Ogun could now teach all species to express their own individual selves. "The significant creative truth of Ogun," wrote Soyinka in the essay "The Fourth Stage," "is the affirmation of the re-creative will."<sup>58</sup>

This tendency in Ogun is transmitted to nature as the second dance passage shows. It is indeed as if nature has not

merely been taught the art of motion or dance by the god, but is bound to catch the fever of dance from the mere presence of Ogun, the supreme essence of motion, in its midst. In the two passages under discussion, nature is animated by Ogun's physical presence in its midst; the stimulation results in a rhythm of dance.

Mobility in Ogun is then suggested with the image of "whirl." In Soyinka, this image is not always applicable to Ogun. It may simply convey Soyinka's own perception of eternal flux in nature. Such is the case in the poem "Prisoner," where an imprisoned soul caught intimations of death "In the whorled centre of the storm,"<sup>59</sup> or in the poem "In Paths of Rain" in which the mounting tempo of a rain-storm became "windpools in the ash of palm."<sup>60</sup> Soyinka's "whirl" and "whorl" are of particular interest because of their association with Yeats. "Whorl," "whirl," and "gyre" are terms which Yeats used interchangeably in his writings. In his Notes to certain poems in The Tower (1928) Yeats claims that the winding stair of his Thoor Ballylee has the same symbolic meaning which has traditionally been attributed to "gyre or whorl."<sup>61</sup> This meaning is not far removed from the connotations of flux and of cyclical repetition inherent in Soyinka's images of "whorl" and "whirl." In A Vision Yeats writes:

All the involuntary acts and facts of life are the effects of the whirring and interlocking of the gyres.<sup>62</sup>

In Yeats's own teaching, all things are doomed to pass and re-pass the paths of an "unfashionable gyre."<sup>63</sup> In A Vision the idea is given a more emphatic utterance. Life, Yeats says, is "no orderly descent from level to level, no waterfall but a whirlpool, a gyre."<sup>64</sup> The view in "Idanre" that "Through aeons of darkness rode the stone/Of whirling incandescence" repeats the same thought. So increasingly does Soyinka's thought lean towards Yeats that the parallel lines of thought between the two poets cannot pass unnoticed. For instance, Soyinka writes in the essay, "And After the Narcissist," that "Every creative act breeds and destroys fear, contains within itself both the salvation and the damnation."<sup>65</sup> He is here endorsing the cyclical theory of which Yeats had written:

every civilisation carries with it from the first what shall bring it to an end.<sup>66</sup>

The two poets' ideas on war are also identical. In his prison notes, The Man Died (1972), Soyinka writes:

A war, with its attendant human suffering, must, when that evil is unavoidable, be made to fragment more than buildings: it must shatter the foundations of thought and re-create.<sup>67</sup>

Yeats had said of war that it was necessary so that "belief may be changed, civilization renewed."<sup>68</sup> These passages from Soyinka and Yeats hinge essentially on cyclical repetition or, in Soyinka's own terminology, on the "doom of repetition." The doom of repetition is most conspicuously symbolized in "Idanre" by what Soyinka calls the "Mobius Strip." He defines the term as

A mathe-magical ring, infinite in self-recreation into independent but linked rings.<sup>69</sup>

The image is suggested to Soyinka by the loops or coils which a tail-devouring snake is bound to make before its mouth can reach the tail. Soyinka reminds the reader that the "Möbius Strip" is "the symbol of Ogun."<sup>70</sup> It is not surprising that Soyinka should link this image of recurrence with Ogun. Ogun is the Yoruba god of seasons, and alternations in the seasonal cycles are perennial. Tragedy is also Ogun's destiny; the tragic side of experience which fate bequeaths to Ogun is war, and from a historical point of view war is always recurring. In "Idanre," as will shortly be shown, there are two kinds of battle: the cosmic and the human. Ogun plays a major role in these two conflicts.

Soyinka's "mathe-magical ring" bears a certain resemblance to another mathe-magical object, the "Sephhiroth" which Yeats knew. Yeats defined the "Sephhiroth" or "Tree of Life" as "a geometrical figure made up of ten circles or spheres . . . joined by straight lines."<sup>71</sup> Like Soyinka's "mathe-magical ring," the cabbalistic tree has an association with serpent. According to Yeats, it is equipped with a "green serpent winding through it which represents the winding path of nature or of instinct."<sup>72</sup> The spirals of whorl culminate for Soyinka in the "Möbius" symbolism. The circles of the "Sephhiroth" confirm the validity of Yeats's gyre symbolism. The gyre and the "Möbius" are symbols by

which the two poets seek to represent their concept of flux in nature, and their belief in the cyclical evolution of things.

The concept of repetition is central to certain passages in section two of "Idanre" which are devoted to what Soyinka calls "Apocalyptic visions of childhood and other deliriums." In these visions of delirium, warfare is the dominant legacy of the whirling incandescent stone. The apocalyptic insight in Soyinka's poem reveals, in its opening lines, a panorama of cosmic engagement:

Vast grows the counterpane of night since innocence  
 Of apocalyptic skies, when thunderous shields clashed  
 Across the heights, when bulls leapt cloud humps and  
 Thunders opened chasms end to end of fire:  
 The sky a slate of scoured lettering

Of widening wounds eclipsed in smoke.<sup>73</sup>

Before going into the metaphysical implication of this passage, one may observe that the special keynote of the apocalyptic passages is the description of action. Notice that in this passage the cosmic bull pierces the clouds with its hump as it galvanizes itself into action. The apocalyptic impact is enhanced by precision in visual and auditory images. The thunderous shields still re-echo; and the bulls with mountain humps are vividly realized, a rare achievement, at least by Soyinka's standards, in visual description. The auditory and the visual converge in line four where the cosmic chasm yawns open as thunderous cannonades of fire ignite the skies. The entire section on childhood vision retains all through its self-conscious

apocalyptic intonation. A stanza after this passage it is resumed in further catalogues of tumultuous action.

There are

Nozzles of flames, tails of restive gristles  
 Banners of saints, cavalcades of awesome hosts  
 Festival of firevales, crush of starlode  
 And exploding planets.<sup>74</sup>

The battle here is primarily cosmic, although the phrase "Banners of saints" suggests human conflict. Still, the entire description is invested with true epic colouring. Oisín's encounter with the protean demon of Book II is only an approximation, not the exact equivalent of the epic energy displayed in Soyinka's poem. Ogun warred with the monster for a hundred years but that battle has scarcely any roars or tumult. In spite of Oisín's vision of the "exultant faces" of the steeds of Manannan he and his combatant are "clothed in a misty ray." Their battle-field changes from one "dim" arena to another. Those battle scenes are rooted, in Oisín's words, in "foam and clouds."<sup>75</sup> One encounter has clear outlines:

We trampled up and down with blows  
 Of sword and brazen battle-axe, while day  
 Gave to high noon and noon to night gave way;  
 And when he knew the sword of Manannan  
 Amid the shades of night, he changed and ran  
 Through many shapes: I lunged at the smooth throat  
 Of a great eel; it changed, and I but smote  
 A fir-tree roaring in its leafless top.<sup>76</sup>

But the impact of this action is overshadowed by the shadowy landscape of the entire Island of Battle. When Oisín recalls the actual battle scene of the Fenian heroes, the description is less shadowy. At the beginning of the narrative,

the Fenian heroes were gloomy because they were grieved by the burial-mounds of heroes slain "On Gabhra's raven-covered plain." The memory of this and other previous wars of the Fenian heroes reached Oisín as he engaged in what must have seemed to him a mock imitation of their high seriousness in the Island of Battle:

I hear amid the thunder  
The Fenian horses; armour torn asunder;  
Laughter and cries. The armies clash and shock,  
And now the daylight-darkening ravens flock.  
Cease, cease, O mournful, laughing Fenian horn!<sup>77</sup>

Oisín seems here to be intentionally contrasting his battle with the dream demon with this description of a real life encounter. Yeats's definition of heroic poetry hinges on its evocation of action. Heroic poetry, he wrote in the essay, "The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson," is "a poetry of action for such alone can arouse the whole nature of man."<sup>78</sup> Ferguson's epics exemplify this description. About Ferguson Yeats wrote:

He was a little like Homer in his delight in savage strength, in tumultuous action in overshadowing doom.<sup>79</sup>

Yeats has not shown in "The Wanderings of Oisín" the qualities he admires in Ferguson. In this regard he is his own best critic, for he is aware of the tapestried weaknesses of his poem. Writing to Katharine Tynan in 1888 he complained that his imagination was rooted in foam and cloud:

Nothing anywhere has clear outline. Everything is cloud and foam. 'Oisín' and the 'Seeker' are the only readable result.<sup>80</sup>

And again in Autobiographies:

Years afterwards when I had finished The Wanderings of Oisín, dissatisfied with its yellow and its dull green, with all that overcharged colour inherited from the romantic movement, I deliberately reshaped my style.<sup>81</sup>

Soyinka, on the other hand, is more like Ferguson in his evocation of "savage strength," his delight in "tumultuous action," and his intimations of "overshadowing doom." The apocalyptic passages in "Idanre" are pregnant with intimations of "overshadowing doom." The doom, it seems, is symbolized in the earlier image of "stone/Of whirling incandescence." It is as if the doom-heralding stone travels in a spiral motion from heaven to earth. Broadly speaking, the apocalyptic sections of "Idanre" etch a graph of conflict stretching from the cosmos to earth. The internal topography of the apocalyptic passages indicates that Soyinka imagines the stone as beginning its whirling, downward journey from the whorl's area of widest expansion (the cosmos) to its point of narrowest expansion (the earth--he deliberately avoids the mention of Yeats's "gyre").

The idea that Soyinka wishes to put across in "Idanre" is that there had been a cosmic conflict (or war between the gods) before man began to engage in human conflict. For instance, Soyinka writes in the essay already mentioned, "The Fourth State," that "Yoruba tragic drama is the re-enactment of the cosmic conflict."<sup>82</sup> It would not be too far off the mark indeed to suggest that Soyinka believes that man learnt the art of war from the gods. "Idanre" itself opens with a primaeval battle fought between the gods before the world was created. The title that

Soyinka gave to the apocalyptic passages deserves close examination. The apocalyptic conflict already examined was a conflict that took place when the world was young.

"Childhood" in Soyinka's expression is therefore the infancy of the world when the gods warred among themselves. "Other deliriums" would be applicable to the art of self-destruction inherited by man from the gods. Therefore, the first two lines of stanza twenty in the second section of "Idanre," where the apocalyptic visions begin, would refer to primal conflict between the gods themselves:

Vast grows the counterpane of nights since innocence  
Of apocalyptic skies.

These lines echo the opening lines of "Idanre." Here, however, the conflict is archetypal. It is symbolic of the primal war in all mythology. In the classical mythology of the Greeks (and such a comparison is encouraged by Soyinka himself),<sup>83</sup> it is the war of the Olympian gods; in the biblical mythology, it is the war in which Lucifer featured as an archvillain and the Archangel Michael as a hero. Coming nearer home to the beliefs of the Yoruba on which "Idanre" is founded, one realizes that the primal war resulted in the fragmentation of the godhead essence of Orisa-nla, the first deity, by a jealous slave-god, Atunda, an action that gave birth to the Yoruba pantheon.

The broadest base of Soyinka's inverted whorl is sunk into the heavens, from where conflict began. Human conflict, in its various ramifications, is the re-enactment of the war of the gods. For this reason, Soyinka begins his

evocation of an apocalyptic landscape of epic action with the gods. As the spirals of the inverted whorl narrow down towards earth, towards mankind, the fever of the frenzied delirium begun in the cosmos is caught by man. The human side of the cosmic battle is heavily emphasized towards the closing stanzas of the apocalyptic passages:

Whorls of intemperate steel, triangles of cabal  
 In rabid spheres, iron bellows at volcanic tunnels  
 Easters in convulsions, urged by energies  
 Of light millenniums, crusades, empires and revolution  
 Damnations and savage salvations.<sup>84</sup>

If the scene of the conflict that is evoked here is a human rather than a cosmic landscape, it anticipates the battle section of "Idanre," in which a war was fought on human plains; and the "whorls of intemperate steel" in this passage recall Ogun's sword seen in that section as a crescent-shaped weapon wheeling itself into full circle in the heat of battle from a lethal angle.

In the passage just cited the gyre seems to have come full circle, for all is chaos and anarchy ("Damnations and savage salvations"). Soyinka weaves into "Idanre" his notion of the cyclical evolution of things. The image of whorl suggests it, and its kinship with Yeats's gyre has been noted. For this reason "Idanre" compels comparison in parts with Yeats's poem "The Second Coming." The climactic evocation in this passage of the vortex of destructive energies in nature recalls the whirling motion of the gyres in "The Second Coming." And with true Yeatsian logic, a second coming was indeed expected at this particular point

in "Idanre," for "The world was choked in wet embrace/Of serpent spawn, waiting Ajantala's rebel birth."<sup>85</sup> Ajantala is "Idanre's" "rough beast." Soyinka calls him "monster child, wrestling pachyderms of myth."<sup>86</sup> In the Notes to "Idanre" he is described as

Archetype of rebel child, iconoclast, anarchic, anti-clan, anti-matriarch, virile essence in opposition to womb-domination.<sup>87</sup>

Ajantala's double in the poem is the traitor-god, Atunda, who introduced the Diversity principle in Yoruba mythology. About Atunda Soyinka writes in "The Fourth Stage":

Myth informs us that a jealous slave rolled a stone down the back of the first and only deity and shattered him in a thousand and sixty-four fragments. From this first act of revolution was born the Yoruba pantheon.<sup>88</sup>

In section three of "Idanre," "Pilgrimage," the lone deity is presented as an unblemished "kernel" enthroned on Idanre's columns; and the iconoclast Atunda is called a "Boulder." The upper case "B" of "Boulder" suggests the supremacy of the rebel slave over an erstwhile master-god; for this reason, "kernel" is printed with a lower case "k." The tragic fragmentation of the godhead essence is narrated in "Pilgrimage":

Union they had known until the Boulder  
Rolling down the hill of the Beginning  
Shred the kernel to a million lights.  
A traitor's heart rejoiced, the gods' own slave  
Dirt-covered from the deed.<sup>89</sup>

Like Ogun, Atunda has acted, and in so doing he has laid the foundation for all revolutionary actions, from the

Yoruba mythological point of view. It is noteworthy that the first god Orisa-nla is hurled down to the bottom of an abyss. In Yeats's "Oisín" there is no incident that matches the iconoclastic fury of the boulder-wielding Atunda.

However, it is indicated at the end of Book III that the Fenian heroes are hurled down like Orisa-nla to "the burning stones of wide Hell."<sup>90</sup> But the action here seems to have been brought about by the concerted effort of an angelic fraternity. Saint Patrick reminds Oisín that "None war on the masters of Hell, who could break up the world in their rage."<sup>91</sup> He also insinuated that the fate of the pagan Fenian heroes parallels the destiny of the brood of fallen angels in Milton's Paradise Lost:

Where the flesh of the footsole clingeth on the burning  
stones is their place;  
Where the demons whip them with wires on the burning  
stones of wide Hell,  
Watching the blessed ones move far off, and the smile  
on God's face,  
Between them a gateway of brass, and the howl of the  
angels who fell.<sup>92</sup>

Oisín rises to a truly heroic stature in his determination to assault hell, and to re-enact his valorous deeds of old for which he had won renown as a Fenian hero. He boasts that

We will tear out the flaming stones and batter the  
gateways of brass  
And enter, and none sayeth 'No' when there enters  
the strongly armed guest.<sup>93</sup>

The book ends with Oisín imagining himself in hell not as a victim but as a conqueror:

Put the staff in my hands; for I go to the Fenians,  
 O cleric, to chaunt  
 The war-songs that roused them of old; they will  
 rise, making clouds with their breath.<sup>94</sup>

This heroic endeavour restores to Oisín the military dignity of his past as a Fenian hero. It tends also to redeem him from the ignominy of his three-hundred years of daydreams in the islands of his own fantasy. As the book winds to a close, Oisín reaffirms his will to engage.

I will go to Caoilte, and Conan, and Bran, Sceolan,  
 Lomair,  
 And dwell in the house of the Fenians, be they in  
 flames or at feast.<sup>95</sup>

Daniel Albright considers this passage Oisín's "point of maximum wisdom in the poem," but he seems to have arrived at this conclusion from a premise totally different from what is being advanced here. For Albright, Oisín has "Pared away everything unessential, the exultation of war, the images and pomp of victory, and wishes to keep only those things which he loved on earth."<sup>96</sup> Those things that Oisín loves include feasting obviously; but Oisín has not separated feasting from the labours of war. He will "dwell in the house of Fenians," he says, "be they in flame or at feast." It is his choice for "feast" as well as for "flames" which would link Oisín just at this tail-end of the book with Atunda, but more remarkably with Ogun, for this god combines pleasure with labour:

Ogun is a lascivious god who takes  
 Seven gourdlets to war. One for gunpowder,  
 One for charms, two for palm wine and three  
 Air-sealed in polished bronze make  
 Storage for his sperms.<sup>97</sup>

It is significant also that the urge for battle came to Oisín only after he had returned to earth: "And my years three hundred fell on me, and I rose, and walked on the earth."<sup>98</sup> At this point, the "foam-flakes" had fled, and "Remembrance," Oisín laments, has "keened in the gates of my heart."<sup>99</sup> The Oisín of the three islands operated then on a landscape devoid of substantiated action.

Cuchulain is perhaps a more active man, a more vigorous warrior than Oisín. Yeats did not create an epic out of the stories which are associated with him, but in some of his poems Cuchulain is always involved in action. In "The Circus Animals' Desertion," Yeats uses Cuchulain's active life as a metaphor for his own involvement in his mid-career in theatre management:

And when the Fool and Blind Man stole the bread  
Cuchulain fought the ungovernable sea.<sup>100</sup>

The "ungovernable sea" is a mythological landscape, but it is also Yeats's metaphor for the ungovernable passion of the Irish mobs on whom he strove to apply control in his lifetime.

At the end of Yeats's epic, the Ireland of orthodox Christianity, the Ireland of prayer and fasting, is perceived by Oisín as a hell. Ogun explored a hell of different order in part four of "Idanre." This hell is the "seething cauldron of the dark world will."<sup>101</sup> "Idanre," it will be recalled, is founded on Yoruba mythology even as Yeats's "Oisín" is inspired by the heroic tales of ancient Ireland. The particular version of Yoruba legend which

Soyinka has utilized is the myth of "the primal severance in transitional ether."<sup>102</sup> The ether is the metaphysical abyss that separated man from the gods. The existence of the gulf creates a vacuum in the spiritual life of man. Such a vacuum plunges man into what Soyinka calls "a deep abyss of a-spirituality and cosmic rejection."<sup>103</sup> Contact with the divine is restored by the redemptive "act" of Ogun. Of all the gods in the Yoruba Pantheon, it is he alone who mustered the courage to descend to earth to do battle with the "immense chaotic growth which had sealed off reunion with man."<sup>104</sup> For this reason Soyinka extols Ogun as

The first actor . . . first suffering deity, first creative energy, the first darer and conqueror of transition.<sup>105</sup>

This side of the Ogun legend is briefly touched on in two side-comments in section four, "The Beginning":

To think, a mere plague of finite chaos  
Stood between the gods and man

And this pledge he gave the heavens  
I will clear a path for man.<sup>106</sup>

The legend is most positively suggested in the line "His fingers touched earth-core, and it yielded."<sup>107</sup> The embrace with earth-core may have been intended as a parallel to the epic hero's traditional descent into the underworld of hell. If this is so, Soyinka's example is a miniature representation of the tradition. There is no equivalent of this motif in "Oisín," except the brief mention of an underworld landscape at the end of Book III. "Oisín" and "Idanre" are not

strictly structured on the traditional form of the epic as has been noted; but in "Idanre" it may be assumed that Soyinka has hurried over this major episode in the Ogun lore in order to situate the god in a landscape seething with the interactions of god and man.

Such appears to be the case in section five of the poem, "The Battle," the longest episode in the narrative. In this section, Ogun is in his elements for he is the god of war. All the apocalyptic trends that have been building through the poem come to a climax in "The Battle." The quiet, casual tone of the opening stanzas is the more ironical because of the havoc they foreshadow:

A rust-red swarm of locusts  
Dine off grains

Quick proboscis  
Find the coolers  
Soon the wells are dry.<sup>108</sup>

In the second of these two passages, Ogun is a thirsty elephant with a giant proboscis eager to suck dry the wells of human life. Rust, which appears in the first, is frequently associated in Soyinka's poetry with death. "Rust is ripeness," writes Soyinka in "Season,"<sup>109</sup> a poem largely devoted to the gyre-like interrelationship in human life between the cones of death ("rust") and those of life ("ripeness"). As a decaying crust of iron, rust recalls Ogun's status as the god of the "metallic lore." In his role as the god of iron or metal, Ogun is "The Iron One" and "the first . . . technician of the forge."<sup>110</sup> Iron is his symbol of destruction. In "The Battle" it is

immediately recalled in the image of sword and axe. In stanza eleven of this section, Ogun's sword is "an outer crescent of the sun" which no eye can follow.<sup>111</sup> In stanza fifteen, his "butcher's axe" hacks men to pieces. The first stanza of the passage under discussion establishes a parallel between Ogun and a horde of locusts. The reader is intended to see the god as a combatant in the legion of iron-winged locusts swooping deadly on men and things. Apocalyptic action is, therefore, the keynote of the opening stanza.

Ogun emerges in the entire section as a possessed deity tuned to the dance of death: "his hands cleave frenetic/To the jig!"<sup>112</sup> As "His sword possesses all," a host of butchered humanity fell:

There are falling ears of corn  
And ripe melons tumble from the heads  
Of noisy women.<sup>113</sup>

The death harvest here is a continuation of the grain image in the first stanza of "The Battle," and the falling crops are hosts of massacred humanity. In section four of "Idanre," Soyinka indicated that "the children of Ogun/Reaped red earth that harvest."<sup>114</sup> The "whorls of intemperate steel" suggested, as already noted, in the image of the crescent-shaped sword have come full circle in this battle scene:

A lethal arc  
Completes full circle

Unsheathed  
The other half  
Of fire

Incinerates  
All subterfuge  
Enthrones  
The fatal variant.<sup>115</sup>

The carnage unleashed by Ogun on land and life is a "fatal variant" of the tragic cycle inaugurated by Atunda. Only after his destructive frenzy had attained a lull did Ogun recognize "the pattern of the spinning rock" in his own action:

He recognized the pattern of the spinning rock  
And Passion slowly yielded to remorse.<sup>116</sup>

Soyinka has a special battle in mind as the title of this section implies. The story of this battle is told in "The Fourth Stage":

as a reward and acknowledgement of his leadership of the divinities, gods and humans joined to offer him a crown. The first he declined but later he consented to the throne of Ire. At the first battle the same demonic energies were aroused but this was no world womb, no chthonic lair, no playground of cosmic monsters, nor could the division between man and man, between I and you, friend and foe, be perceived by the erstwhile hero of the transitional abyss. Enemy and subject fell alike until Ogun alone was left, sole survivor of the narrowness of human separation.<sup>117</sup>

The scene of this battle is then the habitations of men. As such it represents a symbolic version of the cosmic conflict already examined. Ogun is re-enacting the action of the boulder-wielding Atunda. Since Atunda had dared to smash the kernel of the original godhead essence with a Boulder,

men's lives are fated to be "split again/On recurrent boulders."<sup>118</sup> In section six, "Recession," Soyinka relates Ogun's moral response to the havoc he had wreaked on humanity:

He who had sought heights inaccessible to safeguard  
The vital flint, heard, not voices whom the hour  
Of death had made all one, nor futile flight  
But the assertive act of Atunda, and he was shamed  
In recognition of the grim particular.<sup>119</sup>

In Yeats's poem, Oisín warred with a monster, but Ogun battled in section five of "Idanre" with men. If his encounter with the monsters of the "chthonic lair" had been included in the poem, it would have corresponded to Oisín's battle with the demon of Book II.

"Idanre" comes to a close with a "postscript image of dawn." Dawn is functionally relevant to the poem, for dawn is Ogun's hour. Soyinka is fascinated with the image even as Yeats himself had been. The volume, Idanre and Other Poems, in which "Idanre" appears, opens with a poem entitled "Dawn":

O celebration of the rite of dawn  
Night-spread in tatters and a god  
Received, aflame with kernels.<sup>120</sup>

"Dawn" is the first poem in the section entitled "Of the Road." Since Ogun is the god of the road, he is the god who is received at dawn. In the poem "Seed," which appears in Soyinka's second book of verse, A Shuttle in the Crypt (1972), "dawn's embassy" was eagerly awaited after the poet's resurrection from a symbolic death:

Roll away the stone to echoes  
 Of silver reins retreating. Wash ears <sup>121</sup>  
 Of corn in rain to await dawn's embassy.

Dawn is here an image of rebirth; it is used in the same sense in which the image is used at the end of "Idanre." In Autobiographies, Yeats testifies to his own passion for dawn: "I persuaded myself that I had a passion for the dawn."<sup>122</sup> In the poem "The Fisherman," he aspires towards an art as "cold/And passionate as the dawn."<sup>123</sup> In "Oisín," dawn's passionate appeal for Yeats is usurped by his interest in the dim lights of a twilight landscape:

Then in that hall, lit by the dim sea-shine  
 We lay on skins of otter, and drank wine.<sup>124</sup>

At the end of "Idanre," dawn inaugurates a new era, a new cycle--the cycle of harvest:

A dawn of bright procession, the sun peacocked  
 Loud, a new mint of coins.<sup>125</sup>

Positioned at the humane axis of Soyinka's cyclic wheel, dawn is symbolic, in this section of the poem, of life, of regeneration. It returns the poem's shattered landscape to a regenerative phase, for it heralds harvest to console earth for the injury it had suffered from cosmic and human conflicts. As dawn replaces night, and life succeeds death, the harvest that is invoked in the final section of "Idanre" succeeds havoc and carnage. It is in this section of the poem that "earth's broken rings" are healed by dawn's restorative sympathies.<sup>126</sup> The pattern of fevered distillation is repeated, for nature is activated.

Harvest is Ogun's season, and Ogun's spirit broods over the entire poem ("The Septuple god was groom and king").<sup>127</sup> Ogun, the god "who had dire reaped/ . . . in wrong season,"<sup>128</sup> left mankind with harvest at his exit from the scene. This is so because Ogun embodies within his being what Soyinka calls a "destructive-creative unity."<sup>129</sup> It was noted earlier that the god is neither all aggression nor all rebellion. Harvest is his reparation for the injuries done to man, and symbolic of the creative aspect of his "destructive-creative" totality:

Harvest came, responsive

The first fruits rose from subterranean hoards  
 First in our vision, corn sheaves rose over hill  
 Long before the bearers, domes of eggs and flesh  
 Of palm fruit, red, oil black, froth flew in sun bubbles  
 Burst over throngs of golden gourds.<sup>130</sup>

"Harvest" is here personified, and it is poised in a gesture of action. The motive energy of the verse hinges on "came" in the first line, and on "Burst" in the last.

Certain images in this final section of "Idanre" lend the poem a structure that is cyclical. The coda image of dawn contributes to this effect. The poem begins in the night hours and comes to a close in the morning. The night-dawn axis completes one half, at least, of a normal diurnal cycle. Also the pilgrim lodge and the wine-girl who featured at the beginning reappear. The poet returns to the lodge and to the wine-girl at the end of his pilgrimage with Ogun:

At pilgrim lodge  
 The wine-girl kept lone vigil, fused still  
 In her hour of charity.<sup>131</sup>

Harvest is probably the most important of these recurring images. At the beginning of the poem "men/Wake naked into harvest-tide." At its conclusion "Harvest came, responsive" to the biddings of dawn. This cyclical structure is not decorative. A road leading from one harvest milestone to the other with patches of drought in between completes the full arc of that "Möbius" orbit which is Ogun's road.<sup>132</sup> The "Möbius" symbol signifies the "doom of repetition." The repetitive concept is vindicated by the poem's structure. It begins with harvest, then shifts to carnage, and returns once more to harvest. The cyclical structure is related to Ogun's destiny as a god who must re-enact annually a redemptive pilgrimage to earth in atonement for his deed of error in the massacre of the men of Ire in section five of "Idanre." Soyinka has this redemptive pilgrimage in mind when he says of Ogun that he "sought the season's absolution, on the rocks of genesis."<sup>133</sup> Paradoxically, however, Ogun's seasonal absolution has become indistinguishable from the seasons. It is itself the essence of the rhythm of the seasons. When Soyinka says of Ogun, in connection with this seasonal absolution, that "Annually he re-enacts his deed of shame,"<sup>134</sup> he means, in reality, that the alternating cycles of the seasons are perennial. Ogun's descent is preceded by harvest; his presence on earth implies havoc; and his departure restores harvest to man.

As the cyclical theme becomes important, certain images which had earlier been associated with mobility in Ogun become correspondingly significant from a cyclical perspective. After his massacre of his own men in the battle section of "Idanre," Ogun recognized in his own action "the pattern of the spinning rock." The "rock" that spins is an image of recurrence as well as of action. This double entendre in the use of "rock" is implied in section six of the poem, "Recession," in which the theme of revolution is celebrated:

Cannonisation of the strong hand of a slave who set  
The rock in revolution--and the Boulder cannot  
Up the hill in time's unwind.<sup>135</sup>

What Atunda had done will never be undone. Rather his action will motivate others to engage in a revolutionary dare. "Revolution" in this passage has the connotation of turning, an action which in its own turn could initiate a new era, a new dispensation. Rock is, therefore, a cyclical as well as a mobile symbol. In the final stanza of "Recession," "revolution" acquires the sense of evolution; and both have connotations of motion and action. Evolution and action, and revolution and motion tend, indeed, to converge into one semantic unit. The stanza acclaims the "doom of repetition" as well as the virtue of unity in diversity, both of which are symbolized in the image of the "Mobius Strip":

Evolution of the self-devouring snake to spatial  
 New in symbol, banked loop of the "Möbius Strip"  
 And interlock of re-creative rings, one surface  
 Yet full comb of angles, uni-plane, yet sensuous with  
 Complexities of mind and motion.<sup>136</sup>

The structure of "Oisín" is also cyclical, for Oisín's journey is a circular errand. After going the rounds of his islands, Oisín returns to Ireland, from where he was enticed away into the enclave of the faeries. As in "Idanre," "Oisín's" cyclical structure is not a meretricious design. As early as 1888 Yeats had begun to perceive the course of human destiny as a winding path. Harold Bloom observed that the whole of Yeats is there in germ in this early poem.<sup>137</sup> In later life Yeats saw in Oisín's shuttle movement from one island to another a confirmation of his belief that "all life rose and fell."<sup>138</sup> Yeats had serious reservations as to whether any one landscape would ever serve Oisín as a dear perpetual place:

How hard it was to refrain from pointing out that Oisín after old age, its illumination half accepted, half-rejected, would pass in death over another sea to another island.<sup>139</sup>

In "News for the Delphic Oracle," Oisín reappears after the resurrection predicted by Yeats as one of the "codgers":

There all the golden codgers lay,  
 There the silver dew,  
 And the great water sighed for love,  
 And the wind sighed too.  
 Man-picker Niamh leant and sighed  
 By Oisín on the grass;  
 There sighed amid his choir of love  
 Tall Pythagoras.<sup>140</sup>

Oisín is still in a state of repose, but not necessarily one

of vanity, for he has joined such notable immortals as Pythagoras and Plotinus, all of whom are members of the "choir of love." The "choir of love" resides in a heavenly paradise, a kind of "locus amoenus." The next chapter is devoted to the various manifestations of this kind of landscape in Okigbo, Clark, Soyinka, Peters, and Yeats.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>W. B. Yeats, Mythologies (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 139.

<sup>2</sup>W. B. Yeats, "Nationality and Literature," in Uncollected Prose By W. B. Yeats. ed. John Frayne (London: Macmillan, 1970), I, 269.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>4</sup>W. B. Yeats, "The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson--II," in Frayne, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup>Yeats met Monihi Chatterjee for the first time in 1885 or 1886, and Rabindranath Tagore in 1912. For his meeting with the first-named Indian, see A. Norman Jeffares, A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 351; for his meeting with the second, see Krishna Kripalani, Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 218.

<sup>6</sup>Frayne, pp. 273-74.

<sup>7</sup>Yeats implied this notion when he said that the only measure appropriate for his poem is an "epic and epic lyric measures." See Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach, ed., The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 845. Hereafter cited as Variorum.

<sup>8</sup>Augusta Gregory, Gods and Fighting Men (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1970), p. 14. Hereafter cited as Gods.

<sup>9</sup>Alan Wade, The Letters of W. B. Yeats (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p. 88. Hereafter cited as Letters.

<sup>10</sup>Russell K. Alspach, "Some Sources of Yeats's "The Wanderings of Oisín," PMLA, 58 (1943), 851.

<sup>11</sup>W. B. Yeats, Autobiographies (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 66. Hereafter cited as Autobiographies.

<sup>12</sup>W. B. Yeats, The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 354. Hereafter cited as Collected Poems.

- <sup>13</sup>Wole Soyinka, Idanre and Other Poems (London: Methuen, 1967), p. 61. Hereafter cited as Idanre.
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 86.
- <sup>15</sup>Variorum, p. 796.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 795.
- <sup>17</sup>Gods, p. 12.
- <sup>18</sup>Variorum, p. 793.
- <sup>19</sup>Gods, p. 13.
- <sup>20</sup>Collected Poems, p. 351.
- <sup>21</sup>Idanre, p. 69.
- <sup>22</sup>Wole Soyinka, "And After the Narcissist?" African Forum, 1 (Spring 1966), 59. Hereafter cited as "Narcissist?"
- <sup>23</sup>Collected Poems, p. 41.
- <sup>24</sup>Variorum, p. 802.
- <sup>25</sup>Autobiographies, p. 371.
- <sup>26</sup>Wole Soyinka, "The Fourth Stage," in The Morality of Art, ed., D. W. Jefferson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 123. Hereafter cited as "The Fourth Stage."
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 132.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 126.
- <sup>29</sup>Idanre, p. 72.
- <sup>30</sup>Collected Poems, p. 336.
- <sup>31</sup>Idanre, p. 57.
- <sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 61.
- <sup>33</sup>Collected Poems, p. 364.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 41.
- <sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 363.
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 372.

- <sup>38</sup>Idanre, p. 61.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 86.
- <sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 61.
- <sup>41</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 62.
- <sup>43</sup>N. J. Udoeyop, Three Nigerian Poets (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1973), p. 38.
- <sup>44</sup>Idanre, p. 61.
- <sup>45</sup>"The Fourth State," p. 133.
- <sup>46</sup>Gods, p. 16.
- <sup>47</sup>Idanre, p. 62.
- <sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 86.
- <sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 63.
- <sup>50</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup>Collected Poems, p. 359.
- <sup>52</sup>Idanre, p. 86.
- <sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 63.
- <sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 88.
- <sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 63.
- <sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 64.
- <sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 68.
- <sup>58</sup>"The Fourth Stage," p. 126.
- <sup>59</sup>Idanre, p. 44.
- <sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 40.
- <sup>61</sup>Variorum, p. 803.
- <sup>62</sup>W. B. Yeats, A Vision (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 237. Hereafter cited as A Vision.
- <sup>63</sup>Collected Poems, p. 291.

- <sup>64</sup>A Vision, p. 40.
- <sup>65</sup>"Narcissist?" p. 60.
- <sup>66</sup>W. B. Yeats, Explorations (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 314. Hereafter cited as Explorations.
- <sup>67</sup>Wole Soyinka, The Man Died (London: Rex Collins, 1972), p. 183.
- <sup>68</sup>Explorations, p. 425.
- <sup>69</sup>Idanre, p. 87.
- <sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 88.
- <sup>71</sup>Autobiographies, p. 375.
- <sup>72</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>73</sup>Idanre, p. 66.
- <sup>74</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>75</sup>Collected Poems, p. 366.
- <sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 367.
- <sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 368.
- <sup>78</sup>"The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson--I," in Frayne, p. 84.
- <sup>79</sup>W. B. Yeats, "Irish National Literature, 1: From Callanan to Carleton," in Frayne, p. 363.
- <sup>80</sup>Letters, p. 88.
- <sup>81</sup>Autobiographies, p. 73.
- <sup>82</sup>"The Fourth Stage," p. 126.
- <sup>83</sup>He frequently implies in his writings that a common ground of comparison exists between Yoruba mythology and that of the Greeks. See Idanre, p. 87; and "The Fourth Stage," pp. 119-34.
- <sup>84</sup>Idanre, p. 67.
- <sup>85</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>86</sup>Ibid.

- <sup>87</sup>Idanre, p. 67.
- <sup>88</sup>"The Fourth Stage," p. 127.
- <sup>89</sup>Idanre, p. 68.
- <sup>90</sup>Collected Poems, p. 380.
- <sup>91</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>92</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>93</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>94</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 381.
- <sup>96</sup>Daniel Allbright, The Myth against Myth: A Study of Yeats's Imagination in Old Age (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 115-16.
- <sup>97</sup>Idanre, p. 72.
- <sup>98</sup>Collected Poems, p. 379.
- <sup>99</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 336.
- <sup>101</sup>"The Fourth Stage," pp. 120-21.
- <sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 122.
- <sup>103</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>104</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 123.
- <sup>106</sup>Idanre, pp. 70-71.
- <sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 70.
- <sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 73.
- <sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 45.
- <sup>110</sup>"The Fourth Stage," p. 120.
- <sup>111</sup>Idanre, p. 75.
- <sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

- 113 Idanre, p. 75.
- 114 Ibid., p. 71.
- 115 Ibid., p. 77.
- 116 Ibid., p. 80.
- 117 "The Fourth Stage," pp. 131-32.
- 118 Idanre, p. 69.
- 119 Ibid., p. 81.
- 120 Ibid., p. 9.
- 121 Wole Soyinka, A Shuttle in the Crypt (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 56.
- 122 Autobiographies, p. 74.
- 123 Collected Poems, p. 146.
- 124 Ibid., p. 368.
- 125 Idanre, p. 84.
- 126 Ibid., p. 68.
- 127 Ibid., p. 84.
- 128 Ibid.
- 129 "The Fourth Stage," p. 131.
- 130 Idanre, pp. 84-85.
- 131 Ibid., p. 84.
- 132 Ibid., p. 85.
- 133 Ibid., p. 69.
- 134 Ibid., p. 87.
- 135 Ibid., p. 82.
- 136 Ibid., p. 83.
- 137 Harold Bloom, Yeats (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 87.

138 Explorations, p. 393.

139 Ibid.

140 Collected Poems, p. 323.

## CHAPTER V

### THE QUEST FOR "LOCUS AMOENUS"

The German critic Ernst Robert Curtius has used "locus amoenus" (pleasant place) as a technical terminology for ideal landscape in classical literature.<sup>1</sup> The ideal landscape is a landscape of heart's desire. The poets of classical antiquity were attracted to it, and so are the moderns. The pleasant place can appeal to the imagination of modern poets because the human mind will always respond favourably to scenes of natural beauty, real or imaginary. In this respect, the mind is like a child flattered by dreams of a world of an unending happiness. So judged Yeats of the poet William Morris, who was eternally enchanted by green fields and green wells:

All he writes seems to me like the make-believe of a child who is remaking the world, not always in the same way, but always after its own heart; and so unlike all other modern writers, he makes his poetry out of unending pictures of a happiness that sets mind and body at ease.<sup>2</sup>

In so far as remaking the world in the poet's own image is concerned, Yeats was like William Morris despite the sardonic tone of his passage. "He too was in Arcadia," wrote Edward Engelberg in a recent centenary tribute to Yeats.<sup>3</sup> In "Poetry and Tradition," Yeats spoke of his intention to recover what he called the "old, confident,

joyous world."<sup>4</sup> To him "joyous world" meant the world of pastoral simplicity. Writing to Katharine Tynan in the fall of 1890, he confessed that "nothing in the world can make amends for the loss of green fields and mountain slope and for the tranquil hours of one's own countryside."<sup>5</sup> In "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," Yeats wished to retreat to a quiet world of natural beauty. His poem, writes Monroe K. Spears in Dionysus and the City, has become the "model for innumerable genteel pastorals confessing a yearning to fly urban complexities for country simplicities."<sup>6</sup>

Yeats's "Innisfree" (short for the poem's title) is now an anthology piece. To say that Okigbo was aware of it is merely conjectural; but he too has his own "Innisfree" in the poem "Song of the Forest." Like Yeats's poem, Okigbo's "Song of the Forest" was written in a city. Okigbo's poem is the first in a group of lyrics entitled "Four Canzones." The canzones might be considered variations in the mode of "genteel pastoral." "Song of the Forest" is modelled on Vergil's first eclogue. But it is remarkable that the title itself recalls the first poem in Yeats's definitive edition of his poems, "The Song of the Happy Shepherd." In both poems, a shepherd persona is the central figure. In Okigbo's poem, the speaker laments his physical displacement from a landscape of "locus amoenus":

YOU LOAF, child of the forest,  
 beneath a village umbrella,  
 plucking from tender string a  
                     Song of the forest.  
 Me, away from home, run-  
 away, must leave the borders of our  
 land, fruitful fields,  
                     must leave our homeland.

But you, child of the forest,  
 loaf beneath an umbrella,  
 teaching the woods to sing a  
                     song of the forest.<sup>7</sup>

The aspects of landscape that appeal to Okigbo's persona in this passage include the "village umbrella," "borders of our land," "fruitful fields, and the "woods" that sing. In Yeats's "The Song of the Happy Shepherd," these features of landscape are matched by the "humming sea," the "echo-harboured shell," the waving "daffodil," the "lawn," and the "dew."<sup>8</sup> The shepherd in Yeats's poem is in the same state of mind as the persona in Okigbo's verse. He laments the death of the "woods of Arcady" just as Okigbo's persona laments his exile from "the borders of our/land, fruitful fields." In Yeats's, the lament is not as elegiac as it is in Okigbo. Yeats's poem is the song of a happy shepherd. Arcadia may be dead, but the happy shepherd will remake it through art. "Rewording," the word used by Yeats's shepherd, has the sense of remaking:

Go gather by the humming sea  
 Some twisted, echo-harboured shell,  
 And to its lips thy story tell,  
 And they thy comforters will be,  
 Rewording in melodious guile  
 Thy fretful words.<sup>9</sup>

Arcadia is displaced in Yeats's poem by "Grey Truth" and "the optic glass." In Okigbo's poem, one is not exactly sure of what has caused the shepherd-figure to flee his own "arcadia."

In the second canzone, "Debtors' Lane," Okigbo's "locus amoenus" is a "new haven." New haven is probably a pun on new heaven. Okigbo's "new haven" is remote from the "blasts" and "buffets" of "a mad generation":

THIS is debtors' lane, this is  
 the new haven, where wrinkled faces  
 watch the wall clock strike each hour  
 in a dry cellar.  
 NO heavenly transports now  
 of youthful passion  
 and the endless succession  
 of tempers and moods  
 in high societies;  
 NO blasts no buffets  
 of a mad generation.<sup>10</sup>

The first four lines of this passage focus attention on the "new haven." The remaining part of the stanza contrasts the "new haven" with the landscape of "a mad generation." The internal structure relies on the contrast between the pastoral and the urban. In "Song of the Forest" such a contrast is merely implied. In Yeats's "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" it is strongly suggested, for "Grey Truth" and "the optic glass" can only have their abode in the city. In "Debtors' Lane" the division is the primary thematic concern. In the landscape of "a mad generation," "repose" is said to be "a dreamy unreal."<sup>11</sup> The implication is that peace is attainable in the "new haven." "Debtors' Lane" was written at Fiditi, described by Sunday Anozie as "a rural

hideout."<sup>12</sup> Okigbo, he said, has moved to Fiditi from the capital city of Nigeria, Lagos, where "Song of the Forest" was written. At Fiditi he could look back at the city which appeared to him as the "hangman's lane":

THERE was the tenement  
 in hangman's lane  
 where repose was a dream  
 unreal  
 and a knock at the door  
 at dawn  
 hushed the tenant humped  
 beneath the bed:  
 was it the postman  
 or the bailiff with a writ?  
 And if the telephone rang  
 alas, if the telephone rang . . .<sup>13</sup>

Although Fiditi is "a rural hideout," it is several hundred miles away from Okigbo's homeland in Ojoto, which is located in Eastern Nigeria. Beneath his quest for a "new haven" is the desire to return to the fruitful fields of the homeland mentioned in "Song of the Forest." Thus, Fiditi is partially a landscape of exile for the poet. It appears that his homeland is the only location that can serve Okigbo as his true "locus amoenus." More important, however, is the parallel between his reaction to the city and Yeats's own reaction to London. In "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," Yeats longed for Sligo as a landscape of "locus amoenus." The "repose" which Okigbo hoped to attain in his "new haven" is the "peace" which Yeats heard in the "deep heart's core" while in London. Where Okigbo used the "hangman's lane" to symbolize the city, Yeats denoted it with "pavements grey." The grey pavements of London recall

the "Grey Truth" of the city in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd." In this respect, the early poem anticipated the latter. Similarly, Okigbo's "Song of the Forest" anticipated "Debtors' Lane" both in its implied contrast between two different kinds of landscape as well as in the earlier foreshadowing of "new haven" in the image of fruitful "homeland."

In the third canzone, "Lament of the Flutes," Okigbo has returned to the fruitful "homeland." The first stanza is a spontaneous impression of its physical condition:

TIDEWASH . . . Memories  
 fold-over-fold free-furrow,  
 mingling old tunes with new.  
 Tidewash . . . ride me  
 memories, astride on firm  
 saddle, wreathed with white  
 lilies and roses of blood . . . \*<sup>14</sup>

"Tidewash" captures his consciousness of change; and memory is a bobbin which unwinds itself within the poet's mind into folds and folds of reminiscences. Okigbo imagines himself in this stanza as a poet wreathed with a garland woven of lilies and roses. His garland is smeared with blood; blood is suggestive of suffering and of the travail of art. It apparently foreshadows Okigbo's future role as a tragic poet. He tends to use the cluster of rose and lily as an image of suffering. In Section VII of "Fragments out of the Deluge," where suffering is the central theme, Okigbo wrote that "lilies/Sprouted from rosebeds,/Canalilies,/Like tombstones from pavements."<sup>15</sup> Yeats noted that as poetic

images the rose and the lily could be married to "love and purity."<sup>16</sup> In some of his poems, however, they are married rather to passion. In "Travail of Passion," for instance, rose and lily suggest the scourge of that passion which a mortal heart cannot endure. Writes Yeats in the poem:

We will bend down and loosen our hair over you  
That it may drop faint perfume, and be heavy with dew,  
Lilies of death-pale hope, roses of passionate dream.<sup>17</sup>

Yeats says of course that his rose is essentially a symbol of passion: "I have imagined it as suffering with man."<sup>18</sup> Thus, Okigbo's rose and lily seem to have inherited the same symbolic destiny as those of Yeats. Taken together, rose, lily, and blood suggest in Okigbo's poem under discussion the ordeal of art.

In stanza three of the poem, Okigbo's hopes for a pastoral repose in his homeland appear to be a "dream/unreal," and the "watermaid" which had featured in his poetry as a muse-like figure is here a tragic woman:

Where are the Maytime flowers,  
where the roses? what will the  
Watermaid bring at sundown,  
a garland? A handful of tears?  
Sing to the rustic flute:  
Sing a new note . . .<sup>19</sup>

Although this stanza is prophetic of Okigbo's future role as a tragic poet, one might relate its elegiac tone to Okigbo's sense of regret at the change that had come upon a homeland which he had imagined to be "fruitful fields." The poem is essentially a lament, as the title implies.

The poet is lamenting the loss of the "rustic flute" and of the "Maytime flowers." The entire landscape of his homeland has been affected by the impact of urbanization. Green fields are available only at the sacred enclave of his ancestral deity, Mother Idoto. The sacred grove becomes in this case the desired pleasant spot. In a letter to me dated June 1, 1975, the poet Donald Davie remarked that modern poets are "seeking out and establishing sacred places, in the full sense of sacred." This observation is true of Okigbo as it is of Yeats, for Yeats shared with Maud Gonne the conviction that the land of Ireland is invisibly peopled.<sup>20</sup> Ireland's sacred spots offer spiritual solace to an "Out-worn heart, in a time out-worn." In the poem "Into the Twilight," from which the last quote is taken, Yeats summoned his "outworn heart" to a sacred landscape

where hill is heaped upon hill:  
 For there the mystical brotherhood  
 Of sun and moon and hollow and wood  
 And river and stream work out their will.<sup>21</sup>

In stanza seven of Okigbo's "Lament of the Flutes," a mystic deity beckons the poet through "talkative pines," "night birds," and "woodnymphs." The appeal is aesthetic as well as sacramental, for Idoto is Okigbo's muse as well as his family goddess:

We hear them, the talkative pines,  
And nightbirds and woodnymphs afar off . . .

Shall I answer their call  
creep on my snug hole, out of my shell  
to the rocks and the fringe for cleansing?  
Shall I offer to Idoto  
my sandhouse and bones,  
then write no more on snow-patch?\*"22

The evidence of the first two lines of the above quote shows that Okigbo has not yet purged his imagination of the influence of his readings in the Classics, for the "pines" and the "woodnymphs" are probably Vergil's. Yeats, too, was unable for some time to free himself from Shelley's Italian light.<sup>23</sup> In "Heavensgate," however, the "pines" are replaced by the "oilbean" and the orange grove which enclose Idoto's sanctuary:

BEFORE YOU, mother Idoto,  
naked I stand;  
before your watery presence,  
a prodigal

leaning on an oilbean  
lost in your legend.<sup>24</sup>

In the final canzone, "Lament of the Lavender Mist," Okigbo returns to a purely romantic landscape which is made to function as a background setting for youthful love. Two adolescent lovers are dolls "Returning from the foam:/Two faces of a coin/That meet afar off . . .!"<sup>25</sup> Behind them is a vista of gentle sea:

Sea smiles at a distance  
with lips of foam  
Sea walks like a rainbow<sup>26</sup>  
beyond them.

The lover's smiling sea and their amiable foam are landscapes that can appeal to the imagination of a child. The beauty of their world is further re-inforced by the image of a sunny island. Such a scene appears to the lovers as a suitable environment for an amorous rendezvous:

TAKE HER to an island in the sun,  
 Wrap her round your loin and run,  
 Stolen from her prison.  
 TAKE HER to a mountain waterfall,  
 Strike her with the wind beneath starfall,  
 Stolen from her prison.<sup>27</sup>

To the poet, however, their sunny island is a dream land evoked by the mind's eye to "pleasure soul."<sup>28</sup> To this effect, "dolls" suggests the childlike as well as that which is unreal and imaginary:

DOLLS . . .  
 Forms  
 Of memory  
 To be worshipped  
 Adored  
 By innocence:  
 Creatures of the mind's eye  
 Barren--  
 Of memory--  
 Remembrance of things past.<sup>29</sup>

"Mind's eye" in the seventh line is a favourite Yeatsian metaphor, for Yeats is a poet who also perceives through the eye of the mind. In the poem "The People" Yeats writes:

'But I, whose virtues are the definitions  
 Of the analytic mind, can neither close  
 The eye of the mind nor keep my tongue from speech.'<sup>30</sup>

But the most important reminder of Yeats in Okigbo's poem is his images of sea and foam. In Yeats's poem "The White Birds," a lover wished that he and his beloved were "white birds on the foam of the sea!"<sup>31</sup> Yeats's lovers are island

dreamers like those of Okigbo, for they are "haunted by numberless islands, and many a Danaan shore, /Where time would surely forget us."<sup>32</sup> In another poem of Yeats, "The Indian to His Love," islands feature as a landscape of "locus amoenus" for devoted lovers. In the island of their heart's desire the lovers declare:

we will moor our lonely ship  
And wander ever with woven hands,  
Murmuring softly lip to lip,  
Along the grass, along the sands,  
Murmuring how far away are the unquiet lands.<sup>33</sup>

In J. P. Clark, "locus amoenus" is not necessarily a trysting place for lovers. Clark visualizes the pleasant place as the home of those who are close to nature. Those who are close to nature are individuals that have answered the "communal call." In the poem "Agbor Dancer," a peasant dancing girl appears to Clark as an unparalleled example of human intimacy between land and life. The dancer performs in a "fresh foliage in the sun;" above this scene are "green clouds of the forest." Nature refreshes and renews, and the youth of nature is evoked to suggest indirectly the youth of body and mind:

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

See how entangled in the magic  
Maze of music  
In trance she treads the intricate  
Pattern rippling crest after crest  
To meet the green clouds of the forest.<sup>34</sup>

Landscape symbols are strategically positioned; they occur at the last line of each of the above stanzas. They immediately suggest high moments in the art of body movement. But behind the obvious is that which is only implied: the mutual harmony between dancer and land. The dancer is to the poet a symbol of innocence. Her "toes" revive "virginal habits long/Too atrophied."<sup>35</sup> Clark implies that "virginal habits" (that is, innocent or virtuous) are alive only in places where life is led according to nature. Yeats held the same opinion. "Wherever men have tried to imagine a perfect life," he wrote, "they have imagined a place where men plow and sow, and reap."<sup>36</sup> Clark's alienation from the dancer's pastoral environment is the subject of the final stanza of "Agbor Dancer." The poet writes:

Could I, early sequester'd from my tribe,  
Free a lead-tether'd scribe  
I should answer her communal call  
Lose myself in her warm caress  
Intervolving earth, sky and flesh.<sup>37</sup>

As a slave of intellect, Clark is aware of his own personal deprivations. He cannot attain the same degree of symbolic unity with nature like the girl. To Clark's dancer, body, mind, and landscape are one indivisible unity. By evoking the scene imaginatively, and by capturing it in words, Clark has indeed shared vicariously the girl's landscape of "locus amoenus."

The girl appears to have "outdanced thought" as Yeats would say.<sup>38</sup> Thought is suggested by Clark's image of himself as a "lead-tether'd scribe." "Lead-tether'd" has

a certain symbolic association with Yeats's image of "Grey Truth" and "the optic glass." To Yeats, they are "abstractions";<sup>39</sup> and abstractions are fathered by what he calls the "calculating faculty."<sup>40</sup> On a broad premise, these images--abstractions, "calculating faculty" or intellect--are linked to the city. Opposed to them in Yeats's canon are imagination and the form of life that is delightful to it. In the essay "Literature and the Living Voice," Yeats hinted that the form of life that is delightful to the imagination is "the life of the villages, with its songs, its dances and its pious greetings."<sup>41</sup> In "Celtic Element in Literature," dancing features as a form of country pursuit. Those who worship nature, Yeats writes, have as "a supreme ritual that tumultuous dance among the hills or in the depths of the woods, where unearthly ecstasy fell upon the dancers."<sup>42</sup> The "unearthly ecstasy" is what Clark calls the art of entangling oneself in "the magic/maze of music."

As Clark's country opinions recall Yeats's, so does his poem compel comparison with Yeats's poem "To a Child Dancing in the Wind." The dancer in this poem is Iseult Gonne, and she is probably the dancer who had "outdanced thought" in the poem "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes." Iseult Gonne's dancing scene is a landscape as amiable, warm, and simple as the dancing site of the dancer in Clark's poem. Yeats's poem begins:

Dance there upon the shore;  
 What need have you to care  
 For wind or water's roar?<sup>43</sup>

The "water's roar" is symbolic of the landscape of experience, while the "shore" is an image of the landscape of innocence. In this regard, it carries certain thematic association with Okigbo's "island in the sun," Clark's "fresh foliage in the sun," and Yeats's earlier image of the "Danaan shore." Norman Jeffares has traced the shore where Iseult was supposed to have danced to a seaside resort in Normandy. Yeats, he said, spoke in A Vision of an encounter with Iseult Gonne which had inspired the poem in which she danced:

I remember a beautiful young girl singing at the edge of the sea in Normandy words and music of her own composition. She thought herself alone, stood barefooted between sea and sand.<sup>44</sup>

To return to Clark, it was noted earlier that in spite of his physical separation from the Agbor dancer's pleasant environment, he has experienced a spiritual affinity with her landscape by recreating it in art. It appears that this same strategy operates in the poem "Girl Bathing," which immediately follows "Agbor Dancer" in A Reed in the Tide. The bathing girl is standing on a "beach" where the "sands are golden at your feet."<sup>45</sup> The scenery recalls Iseult Gonne on the beach of Normandy. Yeats had pictured in that poem a romantic landscape which appeals to the heart. Clark is aiming at a similar scenery in "Girl Bathing." As in "Agbor Dancer" where body

"intervolves" with "earth, sky, and flesh," so does body embrace the elements in "Girl Bathing." The girl's immersion of her body in water is a token of her kinship with earth as well as a ritual of renewal: the waters are "A tonic to the core of your bones."<sup>46</sup> But the poem becomes naively sentimental at the very moment where it is intended to be climactic. Clark writes:

O girl of the erect and rearing breast,  
 So ripe with joy for the blest,  
 Splash, splash, your teeth flashing pearls, in  
     the whirlpool  
 You have made.<sup>47</sup>

The cliché, "rearing breast," and the badly managed opening couplet ("breast" is forced to rhyme with "blest") draw the reader's attention to Clark's technical difficulties at this particular point in the poem. Nevertheless, the simplicity of the scene is impressive.

Clark's imaginative sympathy with rural scenery in "Agbor Dancer" and in "Girl Bathing" anticipates his impatience with urban landscapes in some of his American poems. The American poems record Clark's impressions of America on the occasion of his brief visit to the United States in 1961. He was astonished by the impact of technology on the life of the average American. The press-button ethic is extended to the eating habits of the people, to the poet's surprise. In the poem "Service" he says, with tongue in cheek, that a dime in the slot can serve a hungry individual with a variety of food:

A dime  
     in the slot,  
 And anything  
     from cake to coffee  
 Spews down your throat  
     from crackers to candy.<sup>48</sup>

The average American city appears to Clark as a jungle of "steel and glass structures."<sup>49</sup> This opinion echoes Yeats's view that the modern age is an epoch in which nature is "steel-bound or stone-built."<sup>50</sup> In the book America, Their America in which Clark recorded his disgust with America, he presented that country as an industrial "Empire State":

Steel, stone, glass boxes! Not one  
 A carton  
 To handle with care!  
 Castellated, crowd  
 Miles on end, fall one  
 Over the other, and Empire State, the proud  
 Peak flying a pennon  
 Above his nightmare  
 Of ladders, beams, bolts, fumes, refuse . . .<sup>51</sup>

The significant point about Clark's American experience is that the city-country contrast which was mildly suggested in such poems as "Agbor Dancer" and "Girl Bathing" resolves itself into an open conflict between urban complexities and country simplicities. In this environmental conflict, Africa emerges as Clark's landscape of heart's desire. Indeed, Africa is made to exchange roles with America, for it is not Africa that is now the jungle but the America that is supposed to represent the achievement of Western civilization. In the book already mentioned Clark wrote: "My first impressions of America

as seen through the city of New York were overlush and typical of the jungles from which I understood I had just emerged."<sup>52</sup> Images that suggest the primordial and the primitive appeal to Clark because of their implied intimacy with nature. On the other hand, he strove ardently to deflate the values of American civilization. The apartment blocks are to him "extra-convenient and well-cushioned caves quarried out of square blocks of mountains of steel."<sup>53</sup> In the poem in which America is presented as a "steel and glass structure," Clark first depicted the castellated heights of the American skyscrapers only to invite the reader a few lines later to take a look at the human and material debris that lies below; the skyscrapers point toward heaven but their base is rooted in hell. It is this hell, Clark implies, which is the real America:

And below!  
 America, Broadway, Madison  
 Park, Lexington  
 And all the other streets  
 And avenues, east and west,  
 In a blue splash of steel  
 Cascade over channels, drop tubes past  
 Collisions of shafts, are  
 Sparking conveyor belts, turning,  
 Churning, carrying like rapids  
 The boil and market of a continent  
 Incontinent . . .<sup>54</sup>

To represent the city with the image of hell is a tendency that is common among modern poets.<sup>55</sup> In the poem "Cave Call," Manhattan is a cave, and cave is intended as an extension of the symbolism of hell. In the poem Clark writes:

The caves of Manhattan call out to me  
 In Time's neutral Square, at noon  
 Emerged from running colours that clash  
 By night.<sup>56</sup>

Cave is literally represented in the poem by the Manhattan subways, but the symbolic cave is Manhattan itself. In the literal cave, the subway train is imaged as a monster equipped with multiple, yawning doors, and whose "bowels/Of night"<sup>57</sup> feed on human passengers:

Multiple doors of their own slide  
 Open all at once down the platform,  
 Each the magnetic yawn  
 Of a monster. And already eaten  
 Up, I squash past the mass  
 Of flesh issuing forth.<sup>58</sup>

Clark's flight from the "meandering incubus caves of Manhattan"<sup>59</sup> is proof of his quest for a landscape of "locus amoenus" represented by the woods and meadows of Africa. Africa and what it represents (nature) holds for the poet promises of spiritual sanctuary from the overwhelming pressures of a technological culture. The appeal of Africa manifests itself subtly in the poet's subconscious mind. The effect of such a call is evident from what Clark wrote about the way his mind was working on his first arrival at New York:

At first, it was hard for me to place and breathe, perhaps because strange, primitive pictures were at that time stirring in my mind. For example, I had for quite some time the uncanny vague feeling of being borne in a boat into the heart of some heavily wooded group of islands, each singing out its special charms.<sup>60</sup>

Perhaps the primitive island in this passage is also a symbol of the maternal womb to which the poet wished to

retreat at a time when he felt himself to be emotionally insecure.

Yeats too had some feelings of psychological unease while he was in another city, London; and he longed for Sligo as a landscape of his heart's desire. He called his prose work John Sherman "a story in which I pour out all my grievances against this melancholy London."<sup>61</sup> Clark's prose work America, Their America is not quite as melancholy, but it too is a story in which the author poured out all his grievances against America. What Yeats and Clark advocated indirectly through their respective criticism of London and America is a return to existence in its natural simplicity.

In some of the works of Soyinka, nature is a force from which man can seek replenishment from the "cyclic drain in his fragile individual potency."<sup>62</sup> As early as his first novel The Interpreters (1965), groves, shrines, and sacred spots feature as a place for spiritual pilgrimage for some of Soyinka's characters. Of the grove of the Yoruba river goddess, Oshun, a character called Egbo in The Interpreters said:

I remember when I was in Oshogbo  
I loved Oshun grove and would  
lie there for hours listening at the  
edge of the water. It has a quality.<sup>63</sup>

It is to the Oshun grove that Egbo, as an orphan boy living with a tyrannical guardian, had to retreat whenever things went awry with him. What he was seeking was more than a

chance encounter with the ghosts of his dead parents whom he believed to have been transformed into waterman and wife. He sought at the Oshun grove a spiritual solace from the whips of his cruel guardian. Later in the novel when Egbo felt his energies to have been drained by an unrelenting sexual encounter with a female character named Simbi, he again felt the need to regain what had been lost both physically and spiritually after his sexual initiation. This time, it was to the Ogun river and the surrounding rocky enclaves of the god, Olumo, that Egbo retreated for the spiritual replenishment he needed. He dipped himself naked into the river, the immersion itself being a ritual of cleansing. After this symbolic ablution, Egbo stretched himself on the rocks of the god Olumo for further revitalization of his lost essence:

Egbo was left alone among the rocks, and the closing forest, naked in the coming dark.<sup>64</sup>

Left alone among the rocks and the enclosing forest, Egbo called out aloud: "In darkness let me lie."<sup>65</sup> Egbo was aware of the purifying impact of his rituals; they were necessary for his spiritual rebirth:

Egbo rose and looked around him, bathing and wondering at life, for it seemed to him that he was born again.<sup>66</sup>

Egbo, a lover of groves and secluded spots, has a temperamental affinity with the hero of Yeats's pastoral novel already mentioned. Sherman frequented gardens and islands whenever he became emotionally perturbed. "In my story,"

wrote Yeats about the book, "I make one of the characters whenever he is in trouble long to go away and live alone on that Island."<sup>67</sup> The situation that was later lyricized in "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" was foreshadowed therefore in John Sherman. About Sherman and his dream of islands and of quiet hours in secluded spots Yeats writes:

Often when life and its difficulties had seemed to him like the lessons of some elder boy given to a younger by mistake, it had seemed good to dream of going away to that islet and building a wooden hut there and burning a few years out, rowing to and fro, fishing, or lying on the island slopes by day, and listening to the ripple of the water and the quivering of the bushes.<sup>68</sup>

Egbo's night of pilgrimage to the Oshun river recalls Soyinka's own night of pilgrimage to the rockhills of Idanre, also for the same purpose. The poem named after these rockhills, "Idanre," is a record of the poet's visit to the hills. True enough, it is a celebration of Ogun's bravery for daring to bridge what Soyinka calls, in the context of Yoruba mythology, the "gulf of transition,"<sup>69</sup> but this mythological aspect of the poem should not obscure the purely personal significance for the poet of that important ascent up the hills. Ascent up the mountains has been traditionally associated with rites of purification. Okigbo with this in view writes in "Heavensgate":

So would I  
thro' moonmist to hilltop  
there for the cleansing.<sup>70</sup>

In Celtic Twilight, Yeats remarked that the Irish missionary Saint Columba climbed Ben Bulbin in order to "get near

Heaven with his prayers."<sup>71</sup> The initial impulse behind Soyinka's pilgrimage to the hills of Idanre was the urge to free himself from "a sediment of disquiet which linked me to lingering."<sup>72</sup> In section VI of the poem, the appeal of the mountain is lyricized:

The hills of Idanre beckoned me  
As who would yield her secrets, locked  
In sepulchral granite.<sup>73</sup>

After the ascent, the poet returned home at dawn "wet from overladen boughs, brittle as the herald lightning to a storm."<sup>74</sup> The poet's reward is both spiritual and aesthetic. His sensations of unease had been assuaged, and the creative inspiration which the pilgrimage afforded quickened the pace of creative process. "By nightfall that same day," writes Soyinka, "'Idanre' was completed."<sup>75</sup>

What emerges from what has been said so far about "sacred spots" is the dimension that is purely mystical or, if one wishes, sacramental which it imposed on "locus amoenus." The pleasant place is a spot where the poet can achieve communion with the divine. Yeats never indeed separated the mystical from the pleasant. In Celtic Twilight, for instance, Drumcliffe and Rosses are "places of unearthly resort";<sup>76</sup> but these pleasant places are also "ready short-cuts" to the "dim kingdom."<sup>77</sup> To the country people around them, Yeats affirmed, they are "full of never-fading mystery."<sup>78</sup>

In Soyinka's prison poems, A Shuttle in the Crypt, the landscape of heart's desire is metaphorically

represented as free space. Soyinka depicts in some of the poems in this volume the physical and spiritual agonies of a soul shut out in an enclosed world. Walls feature in the poems of the section entitled "Chimes of Silence" as images of enclosure; and walls are in this regard functionally related to the "steel and glass structures" which enclose the human spirit in the city. Soyinka sees the prison walls as tombs in which the prison inmates are buried alive. "Walls/Are the tomb of longing," he writes in the poem "Wall of Mists."<sup>79</sup> In the Preface to the volume he noted that the landscape of the poems is the "landscape of the loss of human contact."<sup>80</sup> In the poem "Hunt of the Stone," this landscape is alluded to as "landscapes of the banished heart."<sup>81</sup> What the shuttle must do in its role as an image of the resilience of the human will is to replace the landscape of spiritual deprivation (tomb or wall) with the landscape of self-realization (space or open air). The landscape of self-fulfillment is the landscape of freedom, and that landscape is Soyinka's metaphor for the landscape of the heart's desire for the shuttle.

In the poem "Vault Centre" the shuttle is situated in a landscape of the loss of human contact. It is immobilized in the vault centre of night from where it could contemplate the freedom and self-realization of the creatures of free space such as the wood-pigeons which were able to "soar to fountains of the sun":

Corpse of Vault Centre and the lone  
 Wood-pigeons breast my ghostly thoughts  
 On swelling prows of down, plunge  
 To grass-roots, soar to fountains of the sun.<sup>82</sup>

The image "sun" represents for the shuttle the landscape of self-realization. Sun and bird are subconscious embodiments of the shuttle's wistful longing. It envies the freedom of the birds, and wishes it were an inhabitant of their sunny landscape. It addresses the birds as

League of sun-gleaners, coursers  
 On golden chutes, air-gliders feather-vain  
 On wind-currents.<sup>83</sup>

In "Amber Wall," another creature of the sun is the boy addressed in the poem as "Breath of the sun."<sup>84</sup> The boy's world of free space is "an open/Noon above the door that closed" on the shuttle.<sup>85</sup> It is in the poem "Space" that the shuttle has managed to come into contact with that free world. As the boy was "Breath of the sun" in "Amber Wall" so is the shuttle addressed as "Breath of light" in "Space." The similarity in phrasing suggests the similarity in environmental condition between two creatures of the sun. In "Space," the shuttle is uninhibited in the loom of immeasurable space:

Breath of light, weaver-wings in loom  
 Of immeasurable, from the cusp  
 Of praying hands parted to redeem  
 Pledges of the first, unbroken Fiat.<sup>86</sup>

The "Fiat" is the creative logos which, by divine injunction, enabled light to supersede over darkness. The image is perhaps appropriate in the light of the shuttle's new-won status as a creature of sunlight. But the transition, in the

third stanza of the poem, from the shuttle to Noah's messenger bird, the dove, imposes some strain on the reader's imagination; for the connection that Soyinka seeks to establish between the shuttle and the dove is not immediately apparent. In the stanza in question he writes:

He flies to test the deluge for a straw  
 Forging the shrouded estuary of wrath  
 Courier from caulk and roof of the favoured  
 Flotsam, one among the perished all.<sup>87</sup>

The shuttle chained to the abyss of the crypt is supposed, from Soyinka's conclusion, to recall Noah's dove confined (for good though) to the ark.

The contrast between the landscape of experience and that of the heart's desire is re-enacted on a symbolic level in A Shuttle in the distinction between the environments of walls and those of free space. This dichotomy is what is implied, by extension, in the contrast between the urban and the rural, and between technology and nature.

These trends manifest themselves very strongly in the work of Lenrie Peters. In his first novel, The Second Round, which was published in 1965, Peters traced the origin of the fear which he believed to be deeply embedded in the human mind to the divorce between man and nature. Equilibrium had eluded the human psyche because of man's breach of the bonds that had once linked him to nature. On this subject Peters wrote:

Was it that man no longer felt the need to keep his feet warm in the milky bosom of the earth? Was it in his isolation from the harmony that held the earth to the sun and yet prevented the moon crashing into it?<sup>88</sup>

The divorce began, Peters felt, when man decided to throw in his lot with progress. Progress is almost an anathema in Peters. He saw it as a new religion which was destined to convert the next species of human race into mechanical robots:

With luck we might bounce on to the next stage of evolution without memory of the past, not as men, but as morons perhaps. Something capable of living by the dictates of machines. Progress!<sup>89</sup>

In a word, Peters is saying that technological progress has been achieved at the expense of the intuitive life. Man's spiritual essence, he wrote in an unpublished manuscript, has been strangled on "the isthmus of progress."<sup>90</sup>

Peters's views on progress have apparent Yeatsian echoes. In his Introduction to The Words upon the Window-pane Yeats saw progress as the "sole religious myth of modern man."<sup>91</sup> Progress is almost synonymous with England in Yeats, just as nature is for him the badge of Ireland. In "Ireland and the Arts" he wrote:

An Englishman, with his belief in progress, and with his instinctive preference for the cosmopolitan literature of the last century, may think arts like these parochial, but they are the arts we have begun the making of.<sup>92</sup>

The arts in question are those nurtured on "country spiritism."<sup>93</sup> The philosophy of "country spiritism" would revive the ancient religion of nature. Yeats thought of

this philosophy as a cultural ideology that would replace "Victorian Science," which he hated with a "monkish hate."<sup>94</sup> In the essay "Bishop Berkeley," Yeats revealed that the religion of nature meant no more than the revival of life of natural simplicity which often prevailed in the retreat of solitaries and of individuals who have escaped from "machinery":

The sense for what is permanent, as distinct from what is useful, for what is unique and different, for the truth that shall prevail, for what antiquity called the sphere as distinct from the gyre, comes from solitaries or from communities where the solitaries flourish, Indians with a begging-bowl, monks where their occupation is an adventure, men escaped from machinery.<sup>95</sup>

Machinery was for Yeats a legacy bequeathed to man by such rationalist thinkers as Locke; for machinery heralded the era of progress which had displaced the ancient religion of nature: "Descartes, Locke, and Newton took away the world and gave us its excrement instead."<sup>96</sup> This sentiment is lyricized in the first part of the poem "Fragments":

Locke sank into a swoon  
The Garden died;  
God took the spinning-jenny  
Out of his side.<sup>97</sup>

There is an echo of it in the song of the Irish solitary, Tom O'Roughley:

'THOUGH logic-choppers rule the town,  
And every man and maid and boy  
Has marked a distant object down,  
An aimless joy is a pure joy.'<sup>98</sup>

Since the garden is dead, what is left to man is this "foul world and its decline and fall."<sup>99</sup> Yeats's dream of a "joyous world" appeared unattainable to him in a world occupied by "logic-choppers." To regain the garden, man must journey back to the retreat of solitaries or of those who are close to nature.

Wordsworth made the same point in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads; and Lenrie Peters shares the same conviction. At the root of his anti-technology sentiments is the yearning for a more rural way of life. In his novel The Second Round, the hero, who was returning from Europe, welcomed the gentle tempo of life in a pastoral community which is symbolized by Africa:

The leisurely meandering life of the tropics struck him as the right tempo for the human body and the endless gyrations of human pursuits in colder climates as artificial and contrary to the law of nature.<sup>100</sup>

The voice one hears in the poems is the voice of a persona who would recoil from the "endless gyrations of human pursuits" in an urban community. It is very often the voice of Peters himself. In an unpublished manuscript he writes:

I fear you  
all large cities  
with your magnetic charms  
you will not leave me  
among my rustic palms  
and the gentle tempo  
of the woodman's dance.<sup>101</sup>

In the passage cited from Yeats's essay on Bishop Berkeley, Yeats used the image of "gyre" for what Peters would call

the "endless gyrations of human pursuits," and "sphere" for what Peters saw as the harmony of the rustic dance. If one might return to "The Song of the Happy Shepherd," "gyre" is replaced by the image "whirl," for in the poem Yeats reminds the "sick children of the world" to abhor the "many changing things/In dreary dancing past us whirled." "Grey Truth," which is mentioned in the poem, resurrects in Peters in various disguises. In Poem 11 of Katchikali, for instance, Peters is "perplexed" by the "thingness" of things. I quote the third and fifth stanzas:

THINGS annoy me  
when others worship them  
THINGS that approximate I  
to me and are  
put in my place

I prefer people  
laughter and comfort  
the use and pleasure of science  
But my head aches when all I hear is  
THINGS, THINGS, THINGS.<sup>102</sup>

One will recall that the hero of Yeats's pastoral novel, John Sherman, was usually perplexed by the slightest reminder of reality which was represented to him by London. "Things" in the passage just cited from Peters is suggestive of that which is material and concrete as opposed to that which is spiritual and human. In this sense, the image retains some symbolic relationship with Soyinka's "walls," Clark's "steel and glass structures," Okigbo's "blasts" and "buffets," "a mad generation," and Yeats's "pavements grey" in the poem "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." These images are related to the city for they give it its

unique identity. Peters's sympathies remain with the warmth of love and understanding which is available in a rural community, symbolized by people (not things), and by laughter. Thus Peters can say for himself and for those who share his feelings about nature that

We have come home  
 To the green foothills  
 To drink from the cup  
 Of warm and mellow bird song  
 To the hot beaches  
 Where boats go out to see  
 Threshing the ocean's harvest  
 And the hovering, plunging  
 Gliding gulls shower kiss on the ocean.<sup>103</sup>

On the other hand, the city is associated with dizziness. Yeats's image of "whirl" carries the same connotations. Dizziness is already implied in the word "perplexed." In Poem 11 of Satellites Peters concentrates specifically on the dizzy spells generated by the cosmic atmosphere of the city:

Round and round  
 the cosmic atmosphere of city  
 lights, hallucinations  
 doorbells like sirens, telephones.

In the same poem the reader is reminded that he must "watch the lights/eternal dazzle of stars/head whirling/like the merry-go-round." Equilibrium can only be restored to a mind afflicted by the dizzy atmosphere of the city only when that mind is sheltered by the tender landscape of the country. In Poem 8 of his unpublished collection, Peters is beckoned by this kind of landscape:

The tender landscape,  
 the harshly simple lives there,  
 virgin breasts at dawn.  
 The glistening toad aboard a floating lily  
 creaking, creaking into the breathless air.  
 The sudden eclipse, and rain  
 the earth changed sweet as pain  
 and the heat swelled,  
 spilling, spilling into the garden of my love.

The whirl and perplexities of city environment justify Peters's perception of existence as the "tiered complexities/of modern life."<sup>104</sup> Yeats's "foul world" of "decline and fall" carries an analagous implication. But he too writes specifically of the complexities of existence. In "Poetry and Tradition" the philosophy of country spiritism is said to be capable of liberating man from "a thousand obediences and complexities."<sup>105</sup> Yeats speaks of the complexities of life in metaphysical terms in "Byzantium." He refers to them as "The fury and the mire of human veins."<sup>106</sup> In Poem 34 of Satellites, Peters presents a panorama of humanity fleeing the world of complexities. The reader is urged to

Listen! the agony of the voice  
 seeking escape whispers  
 Not only the poet's voice  
 philosopher or priest.  
 Listen! The average human voice  
 in the domed skyscraper  
 with every corpuscle in his  
 veins worth a dollar or more.

All these voices, Peters says, are

Speaking of a simple life  
 in halo of scented flowers  
 gentle things and sunsets  
 Spirits, earthly things.

Peters sometimes thinks of himself as an artist whose role is to thrill the imagination with pictures of tender landscape. In Poem 9 of Satellites he writes:

I want to  
 drag you out  
 shake your eyes  
 open with picture  
 sounds and words  
 compel your imagination

thrill you  
 with sunsets  
 mornings; lies  
 behind the truth  
 with infinite clarity

The "you" is addressed to those who spend their lives with "Figures."<sup>107</sup> To Yeats, such men are still married to "our thoughts of weight and measure."<sup>108</sup> In his writings, Yeats frequently alludes to men of "weight and measure" as the slaves of "the counting house."<sup>109</sup> Their preoccupation with figures is criticized in the poem "Statistics." According to John Unterecker, the poem is directed against the "modern man's 'rational sort of mind'."<sup>110</sup> The invitation in Poem 3 of Katchikali appears to have been issued with such men in mind. The statisticians and the rationalists are invited to share the poet's excitement over the beauties of nature:

Come let us listen together  
 sounds, blue, black, golden  
 the sea tossing the sky  
 yonder round an island.  
 Dolphin wings afloat  
 showers of ripe harvest  
 on groundnut hills  
 brown and white sands  
 in sunsets; magenta seas.



Peters and Yeats. Peters's barricade of summer was infiltrated in later life by the world of "system."<sup>114</sup> In Yeats, the beams of imagination have suffered a decline as the opening lines of "The Tower" illustrate. The two poets can recognize the irony of this tragic situation because of their intimacy with that area of experience which belongs to what Yeats calls the "Wilderness" and the "Dry Tree."<sup>115</sup> In this regard, they are unlike William Morris who is of the "kin of the Well and of the Green Tree."<sup>116</sup> Morris is castigated for pursuing an "indolent Muse";<sup>117</sup> for he did not reckon or refused to reckon with the bitter taste that accompanies "Eve's apple after the first mouthful."<sup>118</sup> To experience this bitterness is in itself an irrevocable destiny of human condition. Thus, the vista of green pasture in Morris is boring to Yeats because the picture is not interrupted with patches of dry land. To complete the picture, there must be an oasis as well as a desert:

His poetry often wearies us as the unbroken green of July wearies us, for there is something in us, some bitterness because of the Fall, it may be, that takes a little from the sweetness of Eve's apple after the first mouthful.<sup>119</sup>

This sentiment sounds typical, on the surface, of the antithetical Yeats--the poet who insists on an image as well as its opposite. But Yeats is saying that a comprehensive view of reality must comprise, in Soyinka's words, the "salvation" as well as the "damnation."<sup>120</sup> In other words, the poet who has courted the "pleasant place" can

desert it at will in order to plunge into the mind's abyss. The apple is in the garden, but the apple has been tainted by innumerable vicissitudes that plague human existence. Not the least of these is creative unease for an individual with an artistic bent of mind, and the agony of composition even when the imagination is passionate. Yeats declared that to "be a singer born and lack a theme" is to be caught in "Lethean foliage."<sup>121</sup> There are, of course, other aspects of the miseries of existence. Yeats alludes to them collectively as the "labour of life."<sup>122</sup> The "labour of life" is reflected in the work of Okigbo, Clark, Soyinka, Peters, and Yeats. The landscape occasioned by the tribulations arising from the "labour of life" is sometimes the interior world of the soul, or its external correlatives such as cave, tomb, and hell. The chapter that follows takes a closer look at this development.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>This idea is propounded in his masterly monograph, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. Willard R. Trask (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), pp. 183-202.

<sup>2</sup>W. B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 60-61. Hereafter cited as Essays.

<sup>3</sup>Edward Engelberg, "He Too Was in Arcadia: Yeats and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall," in In Excited Reverie, eds. A. Norman Jeffares and K. G. W. Cross (London: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 69-92.

<sup>4</sup>Essays, p. 249.

<sup>5</sup>Allan Wade, The Letters of W. B. Yeats (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p. 158. Hereafter cited as Letters.

<sup>6</sup>Monroe K. Spears, Dionysus and the City (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 75. Hereafter cited as Dionysus.

<sup>7</sup>Christopher Okigbo, "Four Canzones (1957-1961)," Black Orpheus, 11 (1963), 5. Hereafter cited as "Four Canzones."

<sup>8</sup>W. B. Yeats, The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 9. Hereafter cited as Collected Poems.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>10</sup>"Four Canzones," p. 6.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Sunday Anozie, "Christopher Okigbo: Creative Itinerary 1957-1961," Présence Africaine, 64 (1967), 159.

<sup>13</sup>"Four Canzones," p. 6. Where the asterisk [\*] appears after an ellipsis at the end of a quotation, the mark is the poet's own, not the editor's.

- <sup>14</sup>"Four Canzones," p. 7.
- <sup>15</sup>Christopher Okigbo, Labyrinths (London: Heinemann, 1971), p. 30. Hereafter cited as Labyrinths.
- <sup>16</sup>Essays, p. 147.
- <sup>17</sup>Collected Poems, p. 68.
- <sup>18</sup>Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach, eds. The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 842. Hereafter cited as Variorum.
- <sup>19</sup>"Four Canzones," p. 7.
- <sup>20</sup>Maud Gonne, "Yeats and Ireland," in Scattering Branches, ed. Stephen Gwynn (London: Macmillan, 1940), p. 23.
- <sup>21</sup>Collected Poems, p. 57.
- <sup>22</sup>"Four Canzones," p. 7.
- <sup>23</sup>Essays, p. 208.
- <sup>24</sup>Labyrinths, p. 3.
- <sup>25</sup>"Four Canzones," p. 8.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 9.
- <sup>28</sup>Collected Poems, p. 214.
- <sup>29</sup>"Four Canzones," p. 8.
- <sup>30</sup>Collected Poems, p. 149.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 41.
- <sup>32</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 14.
- <sup>34</sup>J. P. Clark, A Reed in the Tide (London: Longmans, 1965), p. 7. Hereafter cited as A Reed.
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup>Richard Ellmann, Yeats: The Man and the Mask (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1948), p. 113.

- <sup>37</sup> A Reed, p. 7.
- <sup>38</sup> Collected Poems, p. 168.
- <sup>39</sup> W. B. Yeats, Autobiographies (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 188. Hereafter cited as Autobiographies.
- <sup>40</sup> Essays, p. 68.
- <sup>41</sup> W. B. Yeats, Explorations (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 205. Hereafter cited as Explorations.
- <sup>42</sup> Essays, p. 178.
- <sup>43</sup> Collected Poems, p. 120.
- <sup>44</sup> A. Norman Jeffares, A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 142. Hereafter cited as Commentary.
- <sup>45</sup> A Reed, p. 8.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 33.
- <sup>49</sup> J. P. Clark, America, Their America (London: Heinemann, 1968), p. 18. Hereafter cited as America.
- <sup>50</sup> W. B. Yeats, The Oxford Book of Modern Verse (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. xxviii.
- <sup>51</sup> America, pp. 19-20.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 19.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 24.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 20.
- <sup>55</sup> Dionysus, p. 74.
- <sup>56</sup> A Reed, p. 36.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>60</sup> America, p. 18.

- <sup>61</sup>Letters, p. 81.
- <sup>62</sup>Wole Soyinka, The Bacchae of Euripides (London: Methuen, 1973), p. xii.
- <sup>63</sup>Wole Soyinka, The Interpreters (London: Heinemann, 1970), p. 8.
- <sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 126.
- <sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 127.
- <sup>66</sup>Ibid. In his book Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel (California: California University Press, 1975), p. 52, Emmanuel Obiechina came to a conclusion similar to mine in relation to the role of nature in The Interpreters.
- <sup>67</sup>Letters, p. 99.
- <sup>68</sup>W. B. Yeats, John Sherman and Dhoya (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), p. 92.
- <sup>69</sup>Wole Soyinka, "The Fourth Stage," in The Morality of Art, ed. D. W. Jefferson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 133.
- <sup>70</sup>Labyrinths, p. 14.
- <sup>71</sup>W. B. Yeats, Mythologies (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 88. Hereafter cited as Mythologies.
- <sup>72</sup>Wole Soyinka, Idanre and Other Poems (London: Methuen, 1967), p. 57.
- <sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 81.
- <sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 57.
- <sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 57-62.
- <sup>76</sup>Mythologies, p. 88.
- <sup>77</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 90.
- <sup>79</sup>Wole Soyinka, A Shuttle in the Crypt (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 35. Hereafter cited as A Shuttle.
- <sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. viii.
- <sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

- <sup>82</sup>A Shuttle, pp. 39-40.
- <sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 40.
- <sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 37.
- <sup>85</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 54.
- <sup>87</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>88</sup>Lenrie Peters, The Second Round (London: Heinemann, 1965), p. 17. Hereafter cited as The Second Round.
- <sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 18.
- <sup>90</sup>Lenrie Peters, "Unpublished Mss.," poem 8.
- <sup>91</sup>Explorations, p. 355.
- <sup>92</sup>Essays, p. 206.
- <sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 248.
- <sup>94</sup>Autobiographies, p. 82.
- <sup>95</sup>Essays, pp. 401-2.
- <sup>96</sup>Explorations, p. 325.
- <sup>97</sup>Collected Poems, p. 211.
- <sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 139.
- <sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 329.
- <sup>100</sup>The Second Round, p. 13.
- <sup>101</sup>"Unpublished Mss.," poem 20.
- <sup>102</sup>Lenrie Peters, Katchikali (London: Heinemann, 1971), Poem 11. In Peters's verse collections, poems are denoted by arabic numerals rather than by titles. Subsequent allusions to poems in Peters's published volume will in most cases be denoted in the text by the number ascribed to them by the poet. Hereafter cited as Katchikali.
- <sup>103</sup>Lenrie Peters, Satellites (London: Macmillan, 1967), Poem 16. Hereafter cited as Satellites.
- <sup>104</sup>Katchikali, Poem 44.

- 105 Essays, p. 249.
- 106 Collected Poems, p. 243.
- 107 Satellites, Poem 9.
- 108 Essays, p. 178.
- 109 Ibid., p. 11.
- 110 John Unterecker, A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1959), p. 209.
- 111 W. B. Yeats, "Clarence Mangan," in Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats, ed. John Frayne (London: Macmillan, 1970), 1, p. 115.
- 112 Autobiographies, p. 28.
- 113 Collected Poems, p. 192.
- 114 Satellites, Poem 20.
- 115 Essays, p. 63.
- 116 Ibid.
- 117 Mythologies, p. 328.
- 118 Essays, p. 61.
- 119 Ibid.
- 120 Wole Soyinka, "And After the Narcissist?" African Forum, 1 (Spring 1966), 60.
- 121 Collected Poems, pp. 247 and 245.
- 122 Essays, p. 191.

## CHAPTER VI

### LANDSCAPE OF SUBJECTIVE REALITY: TOWARDS THE DIMENSIONS OF THE INTERIOR

In an early essay, "The Autumn of the Body" (1898), Yeats welcomed an art which would draw the poet's "inner world"<sup>1</sup> into the sphere of his imaginative expression. Such an art, Yeats thought, would earn for the voice which cries within the artist the right of audience. By the time he wrote "Discoveries" (1906), he had become so increasingly concerned with the reality within that he talked of the act of going into himself as an important poetic gesture:

Presently I found that I entered into myself and pictured myself and not some essence when I was not seeking beauty at all, but merely to lighten the mind of some burden of love or bitterness thrown upon it by the events of life.<sup>2</sup>

Several decades later, Okigbo's poetic thoughts ran along the same line. In an interview with Marjory Whitelaw published in 1965, he made a distinction between what he called "platform poetry," and the lyric mode he referred to as the poetry of "inward exploration." Platform poetry, he felt, is declamatory and rhetorical; but it deserves, nevertheless, the labour of the poets who write it. Still, it is a less difficult kind of poetry to write than the poetry of inward exploration:

Much more difficult . . . of course is inward exploration. I hope that ultimately people will start doing that sort of thing in Africa. They haven't started doing it yet.<sup>3</sup>

Okigbo believed, on the other hand, that his poetic career began with a poetry that is inwardly oriented. As he says, "the turning point came in 1958, when I found myself wanting to know myself better, and I had to turn around and look at myself from inside."<sup>4</sup> Without doubt, Okigbo has the question of his own identity as an African poet in mind in this declaration; but the confession has a relevance that is applicable too to his inner world. In his first published work Heavensgate (1962), the assertion of his own identity is very much in evidence. But in such pieces as "Siren Limits" and "Distances" the poet journeyed inwards.

The self that Okigbo wished to explore is Yeatsian in the sense that it is susceptible to forces that fragment:

When I talk of the self, I mean my various selves, because the self itself is made up of various elements which do not always combine happily. And when I talk of looking inward to myself, I mean turning inward to examine myself.<sup>5</sup>

The tragic tone of this passage may account for the mood of despair that pervades much of Okigbo's poetry. The various elements of which the self is made up do not always combine "happily." There is here an echo of the Yeatsian theory of the divided self, and the consequent search for unity of being.

The conflict within is for Yeats the human inheritance of the Fall. He refers to it in the poem "Vacillation" as "those antinomies/Of day and night."<sup>6</sup> Okigbo seems to subscribe to this opinion when he says that the poetry of inward exploration is written "to bring out a sense of inner disturbance."<sup>7</sup> Such a poetry explores the poet's inner world, which is a world of conflict and tension. Thus, Okigbo can talk of the "self that suffers, that experiences."<sup>8</sup> The suffering self is, in his case, the creative self; and its agony is of a dimension that amounts almost to a physical dissolution of the self. Equilibrium may be regained when the poet is exorcised of the demon that lacerates his inner being. Okigbo's knowledge of the terrors of the demon is further evidence of the imaginative kinship he shares with Yeats; for demon is a common enough image in Yeats's iconography. An instance of Yeats's acquaintance with the demon may suffice. In a letter dated May 20, 1916, Yeats read the following notes from his father:

The poet's seriousness is his quest for what I may call the poetic omniscience; a continual progress in identifying himself with everything that lives, and that does not live, not merely men and women or animals and birds but even trees and plants and rocks and stones. This adventurous thirst and appetite for more life, sought through the power of poetical omniscience, is the poet's demon which he will follow into hell itself.<sup>9</sup>

In his introductory remark to "Siren Limits" Okigbo reveals that the poem

presents a protagonist in pursuit of the white elephant. In his progression to a sacred waterfront he falls victim to his own demonic obsessions, becomes disembodied or loses his second self.<sup>10</sup>

The creative artist's constant warfare with the demon within may explain Okigbo's admiration for legendary heroes. His favourite mythological figures are epic heroes such as Aeneas and Gilgamesh. Okigbo admires their heroic exploits as much as Yeats was fascinated by the feats of Cuchulain and Oisín; but what Okigbo seems to have valued more urgently is their courage to dare the abyss within. That confrontation with the dark forces of the self is mythologized in the motif of descent into the underworld of death. Witness Maud Bodkin in Archetypal Patterns in Poetry:

Before any great task that begins a new life and calls upon untried resources of character, the need seems to arise for some introversion of the mind upon itself and upon its past--a plunging into the depths, to gain knowledge and power over self and destiny. It is, I think, of such an introversion that the underworld journey of Aeneas is symbolic.<sup>11</sup>

The literary counterpart of the epic heroes is Orpheus. Okigbo mentions him twice in the Introduction to Labyrinths. The poet-protagonist in the volume is an Orphic figure, a personage with a "load of destiny on his head," and one who "is about to begin a [creative] journey."<sup>12</sup> In his study, Descent and Return, Walter Strauss sees Orpheus as the traditional image of the agony of poetry. That agony is linked up with Orpheus's descent into the underworld of death. The descent is for

Strauss a metaphor for the creative artist's journey into the world of his own interior:

Orpheus is not only poetry; he has become, in modern times, the agony of poetry. . . . He is the figure, the myth, entrusted with the burden of poetry and myth. His metamorphosis is the change in poetic climate itself, placed against an ever-darkening sky in which poetry recedes more and more toward secret and unexplored spaces, spaces that are obscure and must be illuminated by constellations of the mind ever threatened by disaster and extinction.<sup>13</sup>

In the companion poems, "Siren Limits" and "Distances," Okigbo descends into the spaces of the mind in the effort to reconcile the discordant elements of the self. The inner disturbance that plagues the poet originates from a sense of his own creative sterility. Okigbo believes that the creative thoroughfare can be opened to the questing poet only when he has annihilated his being. The annihilation is a prelude to rebirth. Therein lies the paradox of what he calls the "live-die proposition":

"Limits" and "Distances" are man's outer and inner world projected--the phenomenal and the imaginative, not in terms of their separateness but of their relationship--an attempt to reconcile the universal opposites of life and death in a live-die proposition: one is the other and either is both.<sup>14</sup>

Okigbo's statement here has far reaching implications. Opposites, he implies, are mutually interdependent: the inner world, reminiscent too of Yeats's inner cone, is related to the outer; and life recalls death. The reconciliation of these opposites is the synthesis from which the cycle begins again. The idea sounds Hegelian, but it is Yeats's or, rather, that of his master, Blake. Blake's

aphorism that "Without Contraries is no Progression"<sup>15</sup> has its Yeatsian variant: "Everything calls up its contrary, unreality calls up reality."<sup>16</sup> Thus, although "Siren Limits" and "Distances" explore Okigbo's inner world, the surfacing from the depths of the poet's own interior brings him into contact with the world of physical reality. The surfacing may take the form of an awakening from dream, or it may imply that consciousness has been regained, and that the poet is once more in contact with the material world. In the case of Okigbo, to whom physical dissolution is a metaphor for the struggles of the creative mind (Yeats calls this struggle the "daily dying of imagination in the presence of beauty"),<sup>17</sup> the awakening or the return from the journey into the interior signals the end of creative agony. Borrowing a phrase from Joyce, Okigbo calls this condition "a state of aesthetic grace":

The self that suffers, that experiences, ultimately finds fulfillment in a form of psychic union with the supreme spirit [muse] that is both destructive and creative. The process is one of sensual anaesthesia, of total liberation from all physical and emotional tension; the end result, a state of aesthetic grace.<sup>18</sup>

Dream and trance prepared the way for Okigbo's entry into the interior landscape of creative tension. Yeats refers to this landscape as the imagination's dim kingdom, and he holds that all visionaries have entered into it in a state of trance.<sup>19</sup> In Okigbo's "Siren Limits I," the poet-protagonist is "Summoned at offside of/dream remembered."<sup>20</sup> The subsequent stanzas insist on the

importance of dream-condition as a necessary prelude for the poet's exploration of his inner world:

Between sleep and waking  
I hang up my egg-shells  
To you of palm grove.<sup>21</sup>

The first line rings an echo that is Yeatsian. In his adolescent fictional prose, John Sherman, Yeats said that inspiration is born in the twilight moment between waking and sleeping.<sup>22</sup> Later, in "Discoveries," he returns to this same conviction:

I cannot explain it, but I am certain that every high thing was invented in this way, between sleeping and waking.<sup>23</sup>

The Nigerian critic, Donatus Nwoga, has noted that the function of "Siren Limits 1" is "prefatory." It creates, in his own words, "a pervading atmosphere of time and setting, describing a state of half-dream, half-reality."<sup>24</sup> The atmosphere evoked in the verse in question is predominantly oneiric. The "you" of the last line is the personage addressed later in the poem as "Queen of the damp half-light." She is the poet's muse, or mother Idoto. In the Introduction to Labyrinths Okigbo associates her with Robert Graves's "White Goddess." The image of "half light" locates the poet further in the twilight zone between night and day, and between dream and reality. To enter into this zone of experience, the poet must be "disembodied," that is, go out of the body. The elimination of the body is what Okigbo talks of as hanging up "my egg-shells." Significant is the fact that the Yeatsian

scholar F. A. C. Wilson has observed in W. B. Yeats and Tradition that the "physical body is a mere shell."<sup>25</sup>

One will recall that Okigbo said earlier that his protagonist would become "disembodied" in his pursuit of the white elephant. To Yeats too, the contemplative moment which is also an aesthetic moment is a moment when "body's laid asleep."<sup>26</sup> It is at such moments that the soul can familiarize itself with "things discovered in the deep."<sup>27</sup> The deep is the soul's inner world. That inner world is accessible to the creative artist when he is in a state of trance. The shift in emphasis in modern art from that which is external to an experience which is related to the artist's inner world is symptomatic of what Yeats calls the "autumn of the body."<sup>28</sup> In Okigbo's "Siren Limits," the exploration of the landscape of the poet's inner world begins in section II:

Into the soul  
The selves extended their branches,  
Into the moments of each living hour  
Feeling for audience

Straining thin among the echoes.<sup>29</sup>

Poetry such as this, wrote Soyinka in an indirect homage to Okigbo, is the work of a poet who can confront the "world beneath the matter, the realities of the mystic kingdom in which other black writers are wont to explore lineaments of body or soul."<sup>30</sup> Other critics have associated this stanza with Okigbo's need for a literary audience at one time in his career. This view is not being contested. But

important too is the fact that Okigbo must have been convinced that the kind of work which would rank him among the great authors of the past (those referred to as "poplars" in a preceding stanza) must be of a quality that is born out of the anguish of the soul. For, did not Yeats say that "all the great poems of the world have their foundations fixed in agony."<sup>31</sup> This sentiment is lyricized in Yeats's poem "The Choice," where the artist is compelled by the exigencies of his art to prefer hell to "a heavenly mansion":

The intellect of man is forced to choose  
Perfection of the life, or of the work,  
And if it take the second must refuse  
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.<sup>32</sup>

In the first stanza of "Siren Limits II," Okigbo is "a shrub among the poplars." In order to attain to light (to grow to the size and stature of the "poplars") his plant-roots must seek the "sap" of life from the soil of his own soul:

FOR HE WAS a shrub among the poplars,  
Needing more roots  
More sap to grow to sunlight,  
Thirsting for sunlight,  
A low growth among the forest.<sup>33</sup>

The line "Thirsting for sunlight" in the above quote, and "straining thin among the echoes" in the previous, are metaphorical expressions of the agony of composition. They tend to confirm Yeats's remark that "he who half lives in eternity endures a rendering of the structures of the mind, a crucifixion of the intellectual body."<sup>34</sup>

The "rendering" and the "crucifixion" epitomize the paradox of bruising the body to pleasure soul. Caught up in similar creative throes in "Heavensgate," Okigbo lamented "Stretch, Stretch, O antennae."<sup>35</sup> In "Siren Limits II," the agony of the dance is no longer stated but dramatized. The self descends into the soul's abyss in order to fulfill "each moment in a/broken monody."<sup>36</sup> "Straining," "thirsting," and "stretching" are metaphors for the artist's battle with himself. Okigbo wrote in the Introduction to Labyrinths that such battles can be as fierce as the "swell of the silent sea, the great heaving dream at its highest, the thunder of splitting pods."<sup>37</sup> The high moments of this interior battle he calls the "crisis point" in "Siren Limits III":

And this is the crisis point,  
The twilight moment between  
sleep and waking.<sup>38</sup>

The ordeal has its own reward; for the dissolution of the self is a prelude to rebirth:

And voice that is reborn transpires,  
Not thro' pores in the flesh,<sup>39</sup>  
but the soul's back-bone.

"Transpire" may at first suggest evaporation. But Okigbo has in mind the gradual emergence of the reborn voice (the art-work itself) into light:

And out of solitude  
 voice and soul with selves unite,  
 Riding the echoes,

Horsemen of the apocalypse;

And crowned with one self  
 The name displays its foliage,  
 Hanging low

A green cloud among the forest.<sup>40</sup>

That inner turmoil out of which works of "changeless metal" are born is suggested with images of combat in "Limits IV." A poetic image rooted like a flag pole in the poet's own heart clamours for articulation, but this is denied the poet until he has done battle with the "supreme spirit that is both destructive and creative." That spirit is the muse to whose cruelty the poet surrenders himself willingly as a gesture of self-immolation:

AN IMAGE insists  
 From the flag pole of the heart;  
 Her image distracts  
 With the cruelty of the rose . . .

Oblong-headed lioness--  
 No shield is proof against her--  
 Wound me, O sea-weed  
 Face, blinded like strong-room--\*<sup>41</sup>

Creative effort is for Okigbo as difficult as the attempt to recapture the outlines of an important but elusive dream. As he puts it in the Introduction to Labyrinths:

The present dream clamoured to be born a cadenced cry: silence to appease the fever of flight beyond the iron gate.<sup>42</sup>

In the first stanza of the passage from "Siren Limits IV," the poet's clamouring voice--metaphor for his "excited,

passionate, fantastical" imagination<sup>43</sup>--is muffled by the indifference of the midwife muse who is unwilling to assist the pregnant poet at the moment of labour. Poetic images, Yeats noted, spring from man's "blood-sodden heart."<sup>44</sup> Okigbo's image is caught up in stanza one in the abyss of night just as Yeats himself, unable to evoke masterful images in "The Circus Animals' Desertion," sank back into a similar abyss which he calls the "foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart."

The images that suggest the struggles of the creative mind in stanza two include "shield," "wound," and "lioness." In a manuscript draft Okigbo has "watermaid" rather than "lioness":

Watermaid  
 (No shield is lead plate against you)  
 Look at me with your sea-weed face,  
 blinded like a strong room.<sup>45</sup>

Since the battle is not a physical one (the poet is still in a state of trance) the scene is as internalized as the soil of the heart on which the poetic flagpole is rooted. The interior struggle here is the counterpart of the descent movement in "Limits II." Here, however, the trance is prolonged. There is no surfacing as yet from the deep. The poet is still exiled to the limits of his interior world. "The LIMITS," Okigbo wrote elsewhere, "were the limits of a dream."<sup>46</sup> Thus both the poet himself and the reader await his final resurrection. "Siren Limits" comes to a close on this note of waiting:

When you have finished  
 & done up my stitches  
 Wake me near the altar  
 & this poem will be finished . . .\*<sup>47</sup>

The image of stitching recalls Yeats's concept of poetry as an act of stitching in "Adam's Curse"; it is correlative too to the spiritual wound of the suffering poet; and it may operate on a purely physical level. Okigbo may have had in mind the stitches of his first experience of surgery under general anaesthesia shortly before he wrote the "Limits" sequence. The manuscript version of this sequence pays homage to a doctor "who nursed him through a most anxious period of illness."<sup>48</sup>

The transitional links between "Siren Limits" and "Distances" are provided by Okigbo both in his Introduction to Labyrinths and the main body of "Siren Limits" itself. In the Introduction he writes:

"Distances" is . . . a poem of homecoming, but of homecoming in its spiritual and psychic aspect. The quest broken off after "Siren Limits" is resumed, this time in the unconscious.<sup>49</sup>

The poetic quest is broken off at the point when Okigbo says at the end of "Siren Limits":

When you have finished  
 & done up my stitches,  
 Wake me near the altar,  
 & this poem will be finished . . .

The elliptical periods at the end of the last line suggest that the quest has been suspended.

Okigbo says that the quest in "Distances" has taken place in the unconscious, by which he means the world of

the interior. I have argued on the evidence of the poem itself and on the evidence of Okigbo's testimony elsewhere that the experience related in "Siren Limits" took place also in a world of the interior. On the question of connection between the two poems, there is this further testimony from "Siren Limits":

Distances of her armpit-fragrance  
Turn chloroform enough for my patience--\*50

These lines occur in one of the closing stanzas of "Siren Limits." From the first word of the above verse, Okigbo borrowed the title of the poem "Distances" which is the culmination of the experience begun in "Siren Limits." The word "Distances" has a connotation that is related to "Limits." Both suggest that which is distant and far away. In both poems the poet is spiritually away, lodged in imagination's dim kingdom. The dream motif is what Okigbo calls the "spiritual and psychic aspect" of his quest.

That the transition achieved earlier in "Siren Limits" from life to death, from the physical world to the spiritual, and from the external landscape to the interior, is still in force in "Distances" is indicated by the strategic statement in the first line that "flesh" has been transformed into "phantom":

FROM FLESH into phantom on the horizontal stone  
I was the sole witness to my homecoming . . .\*51

The second line strikes the note of homecoming, of the poet's arrival at the palace of his muse. The first line is only a brief suggestion of the trials that must accompany

that final moment of spiritual illumination. Still, the motif of departure is central in "Distances 1" in its overall effect:

For in the inflorescence of the white chamber, a voice, from very far away, chanted, and the chamber descanted, the birthday of earth, paddled me home through some dark labyrinth, from laughter to the dream.<sup>52</sup>

"Laughter" is for Okigbo a feature of the waking life, while "dream" is associated with the unconscious. Okigbo's muse, whether she is "Lioness," or "Idoto," seems to have been abstracted into the single image of "white goddess" by the evocation in the above stanza of the image of "white chamber." Okigbo betrays this tendency when he says that

several presences haunt the complex of rooms and ante-rooms, of halls and corridors that lead to the palace of the White Goddess, and in which a country visitor might easily lose his way.<sup>53</sup>

The "country visitor" is the questing poet; and the "rooms and anterooms" stand for what Yeats called the "still cave of poetry."<sup>54</sup> They are the "dark/labyrinths" through which the poet is to be paddled home to the celestial palace of the muses. This palace is a place of joy and of song. Its chambers are lighted, and they resound with the song of life: "the birthday of earth." Ironically, however, the poet can reach it only after he has passed through the gates of hell symbolized by the image "anti-hill" (abyss):

Miner into my solitude,  
incarnate voice of the dream,  
you will go,  
with me as your acolyte,  
again into the anti-hill . . . \*<sup>55</sup>

Okigbo attributed the image of "labyrinth" in the second citation from "Distances 1" to Minos's labyrinthine palace at Cnossus. Nevertheless, Joyce's influence cannot be ruled out, for there are other echoes that suggest Joyce in "Distances." For instance, it is implied in section II that one of the trials that the questing poet must undergo before he can reach the "Chapel Perilous" of the muses is to try issue with Death. Death figures in the poem as a matron-deity who is paring her fingernails:

in smock of white cotton,  
 Death herself,  
 the chief celebrant,  
 Paring her fingernails . . . \*<sup>56</sup>

The allusion in the last line to Stephen's aesthetics in A Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man is apparent. Stephen's image of the artist as an omnipresent deity whose spirit pervades, and yet transcends, the art-work is sequel to his conception of him as a leisured coquette who pares her fingernails.<sup>57</sup> If Okigbo is familiar with the Joycian version of the Dedalus myth, it must have enriched his classical interest in the image of labyrinth. Still, Yeats is a much more important influence to reckon with as far as Okigbo's increasing interest in the labyrinth image is concerned. There is no straight road to beauty since the curse of Adam, Yeats is fond of saying. Since that unhappy event had happened, beauty must be born out of its own despair; and all things must move in a gyre. The idiom of gyre implies that zigzagging roads or winding paths must

serve as approaches to all glorious goals. This paradox is indeed the significance of Okigbo's "dark labyrinth" in "Distances I." For this reason, he must burrow into the depths of his own solitude, and be ambushed by Death before he can reach the palace of art:

Death lay in ambush that evening in that island,  
Voice sought its echo that evening in that island.<sup>58</sup>

Okigbo has developed in "Distances" a habit of mind that is not content merely to confront the reader with symbolic statements or situations. Those statements and situations must be enacted out almost vividly so that their symbolic import may be apprehended by the reader. "Distances II," for example, opens with the two lines just cited. They imply that the poet, in his journey through dream landscape to the home of his muse, must encounter death. Those two lines establish Death as a personified entity. Then follows the protagonist's own symbolic death:

It was an evening without flesh or skeleton;  
an evening with no silver bells to its tale;  
without lanterns, an evening without buntings;<sup>59</sup>  
and it was an evening without age or memory--\*

This passage locates the protagonist in a twilight zone of experience. Death's dark and cheerless chamber ("without lanterns" and "without buntings") is contrasted from the muse's gay chamber in "Distances I," from which a song of joy had emerged. Here in Death's domain, there are no "silver bells." Also the poet's descent into the abyss of his being ("miner into my solitude") is backed up in "Distances V" with the futile effort of a mule to ascend

the cliffs of an abyss:

SWEAT OVER hoof in ascending gesture--  
each step is the step of the mule in the abyss.<sup>60</sup>

Two sonorous refrains suggest the futility of the

"ascending gesture":

each sigh is time's stillness, in the abyss . . .  
each sigh is the stillness of the kiss . . .\*61

It is possible that the season evoked in the first stanza of "Distances VI" is a season in hell. In this stanza Okigbo exclaims:

THE SEASON the season  
the tall wood the clearing  
the season the season  
the stone steps the dream . . .\*62

In "Distances III," he arbitrarily numbered those who are not concerned with poetic quest in his song. Among the pilgrims entrapped in the underworld of hell are "vendors princes negritude/politicians in the tall wood . . ."\*63

It is these pilgrims that Okigbo is evoking in the opening verse of "Distances VI." Thereafter, there is the startling invitation in the second stanza:

Come into my cavern,  
Shake the mildew from your hair;  
Let your ear listen:  
My mouth calls from a cavern . . .\*64

This stanza is italicized, for a new voice is speaking. Okigbo frequently uses italics to mark the entry of a new voice into his verse. The identity of this voice has been the subject of a slight critical controversy. Part of the problem seems to have arisen from the fact that the voice speaks from a cavern. Cavern or abyss has consistently

been associated with hell in "Distances."

If it is Okigbo's muse that is offering him protection at this critical moment of his existence in hell, why should the muse who already had inhabited a white chamber speak from a cavern? So at least runs, by implication, the argument of one Okigbo critic, Romanus Egudu.<sup>65</sup> Okigbo, it should be noted, varies the implication of his symbols arbitrarily; and poets, as Yeats was aware, have the licence to shift at will the significance of their symbols. The image of "white chamber" appears at least twice in "Distances." In Section I, it is the chamber of the muse:

For in the inflorescence of the white  
chamber, a voice, from very far away,  
chanted.

In Section II, it is the white chamber of Death:

And in the freezing tuberose of the white  
chamber, eyes that had lost their animal  
colour, havoc of eyes of incandescent rays,  
pinned me, cold, to the marble stretcher.

The chamber is white in Section I because the muse is a "white goddess," and white in Section II because white is traditionally associated with death.

From this flexibility of poetic symbols--a virtue that Yeats appreciated: he calls such processional symbols "symbols with numberless meaning"<sup>66</sup>--the "cavern" in "Distances VI" need not connote hell. Okigbo's muse is now speaking from a cavern, although she spoke earlier from a white chamber. The muse's cavern here is a sacred undersea bower. It is possible that Okigbo may have had

Yeats's interpretation of the cavern image in Porphyro's essay on "The Cave of the Nymphs" in his mind in this new emphasis on the image of cavern in his own poem. As a poet who is learned in classical lore, Okigbo may have been aware of Homer's Cave of the Nymphs in Odyssey. Yeats associated that cave with "invisible power" and its place of abode.<sup>67</sup> In Yeats's poem "The Gyres," an invisible benevolent power speaks from a cavern: "out of a cavern comes a voice."<sup>68</sup> The voice is the voice of a wise invisible power. The injunction of Okigbo's muse--"My mouth calls from a cavern"--is so rhythmically patterned after Yeats's line that one may even conclude that Okigbo did not only read Yeats's interpretation of cave symbolism in Porphyro's "Cave of the Nymphs" but also his own poem "The Gyres." Apart from the role of cave or cavern as the home of a sacred deity, Yeats talks also of the "still cave of poetry." Each of these connotations of the cave symbolism is applicable to Okigbo's cavern image in "Distances VI"; that cavern is the home of the poet's muse, who is inviting the celebrant to enter into the still cave of poetry. Consequently, the awakening of the poet from dream, an awakening the reader may have awaited from the end of "Siren Limits"--

When you have finished  
& done up my stitches,  
Wake me near the altar,  
& this poem will be finished . . .

is accomplished with a rhythmic intensity appropriate for a moment of an illuminating creative epiphany.

In the second half of "Distances VI" the awakened poet is "darkening homeward" from dream into consciousness, from hell into outer space, from the interior landscape into the external, with the energy of a startled wolf:

And at this chaste instant of delineated anguish,  
 the same voice, importunate, aglow with the goddess--  
 unquenchable, yellow, darkening homeward  
 like a cry of wolf above crumbling houses--  
 strips the dream naked,  
 bares the entrails.<sup>69</sup>

Having been so uproarously aroused, that is, fully inspired, the poet-lover can boast of gaining entry into the muse's bridal chamber:

I have fed out of the drum  
 I have drunk out of the cymbal  
 I have entered your bridal  
 chamber; and so  
 I am the sole witness to my homecoming.<sup>70</sup>

The period at the end of the last line captures with an unequivocal note of finality the motif of homecoming.

"Siren Limits" ends on a note of suspension, reemphasized with the use of three spaced periods. Spaced periods have consistently functioned in Okigbo as a medium for technical strategy. They may imply that a sequence is incomplete, or that a poetic statement is awaiting a final conclusion. This strategy operates with a high degree of subtlety in "Distances." In "Distances I," where the poet is on the point of beginning the exploration of his interior world, the possibility of homecoming is uncertain. That uncertainty is stressed by the use of elliptical marks on the three occasions on which the note of homecoming is

sounded:

I was the sole witness to my homecoming . . .  
 At the end of "Distances VI," the arrival is guaranteed and the certainty is the implication of the pause at the end of the poem's last line. "Drum" and "cymbal" with which the statement of homecoming is prefaced define by their own attributes the nature of the poet's homecoming. They are musical instruments. Therefore, the homecoming is related to the birth of rhythm.

In its evocation of a dream landscape, and particularly in the heavy concentration of its imagery on the creative procedure of a mind in a state of trance, Okigbo's "Distances" recalls Yeats's poem "Byzantium." The dream motif, the encounter with death, the operation of a mind in a subconscious state, and the implied parallel between that mind and the working of the creative imagination are elements that Okigbo's "Distances" share with Yeats's "Byzantium." "Distances," like "Byzantium," was written to warm Okigbo back to life after his first experience of surgery under general anaesthesia. How did Okigbo come to realize that a mind in a state of near-death can stand as an adequate metaphor for the operation of the creative imagination? It is apparently safe to surmise that this insight may have come to him through his reading of Yeats. But even if this assumption is merely speculative, the similarity in mood (dreams), atmosphere (trance), concern (the operation of the creative imagination), setting

(interior landscape) between the two poems is an issue of critical interest from a comparative point of view. In this regard, the Emperor of Byzantium would correspond with Okigbo's muse, the White Goddess; and Byzantium as a palace of art would become the equivalent of the muse's white chamber. Yeats's escort to the subterranean world of Byzantium is the indistinguishable figure he hails as "man or shade." Okigbo's own escort is the voice that beckons him from the white chamber, "the incarnate voice of the dream." Several images related to hades such as "shade," "mummy," "moistureless" and "breathless mouth" suggest that Byzantium is located in this particular poem in Yeats's subconscious mind. In his progression to the "buried" world of Byzantium, Yeats is in a state which he calls "death-in-life and life-in-death."<sup>71</sup> The objective of Okigbo's mission to the subterranean world of "Distances" is to "reconcile the universal opposites of life and death in a live-die proposition." His voyage of discovery reveals that life and death are interrelated: "one is the other and either is both." Hence he has had to die in order to resurrect, and resurrect in order to die again.

In "Distances," Okigbo talks of an "everlasting fire" penetrating into the abyss of hell from the window of the muse's chamber:

and the everlasting fire from the oblong window  
forgot the taste of ash in the air's marrow.<sup>72</sup>

The second line of this passage is almost a "filler." If

the fire is everlasting, it need not have tasted ash. This fire is not strictly purgatorial as the flames of the fires of "Byzantium," nor are its flames associated with creative effort as are those that emanate from the smithies of the Emperor of Byzantium. Okigbo's fire is a symbol of hope and light, serving primarily as a beacon of light that directs the poet to the home of the muse. Its role is closer to the function of the stars that directed the three wise men to the nativity scene in Bethlehem or to Shelley's "Morning Star"<sup>73</sup> with which Yeats is familiar. In Section IV of the poem, this fire assumes the form of "pentecostal orbs" shining resplendent beyond "the intangible void."<sup>74</sup> The immediate interest of the fire lies however in its property. It is everlasting like the Byzantine flames that "no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit." As a guiding star, it is closer in function to the "holy fire" of "Sailing to Byzantium." Its flames will lead the poet to the holy city of his muse.

The relationship between "Distances" and "Byzantium" cannot be pursued in terms of a point-by-point correspondence. The limited areas of affinity have been mentioned. One more link may be noted. The imaginative topography of the two poems follows a course which leads from dream to reality. The awakening is both aesthetic and therapeutic, for both Okigbo and Yeats were warmed into life by giving expression to an emotion that overburdened the mind in the form of a poem which cries to be born. An entry in Yeats's 1930 Diary reads:

Describe Byzantium as it is in the system towards the end of the first Christian millenium. A walking mummy. Flames at the street corner where the soul is purified, birds of hammered gold singing in the golden trees, in the harbours, offering their backs to the wailing dead that they may carry them to Paradise. These subjects have been in my mind for sometime.<sup>75</sup>

Okigbo's homecoming is a realization of the vitality of the body as well as a fulfilment of a creative dream: the poem begun in "Siren Limits" was to be completed when the poet's creative stitches are properly "done up." The fulfilment seems to be the essence of the "spiritual and psychic" aspect of the homecoming. And as the culmination of Okigbo's creative journey through the winding paths of the muse's labyrinths, "Distances" is placed at the end of the collection entitled Labyrinths.

"Byzantium" is perhaps unique in the sense that its landscape is wholly given over to a dream atmosphere. Yeats frequently talks of the artist as creating under a trance, but it is not often that the finished work itself is capable of furnishing evidence of the operations of an entranced mind as is the case with "Byzantium." It is probably the onrush of images derived from the Great Memory into the mind when "body's laid asleep" that Yeats has in mind in speaking of the artist as creating under a trance.

When Yeats has not been lulled into the deep of the mind as in "Byzantium," his emotional dispositions are in sympathy with locations in the external landscape which suggest such depths. This is particularly the case in

certain of his poems in which his inner conflict is dramatized. The common poetic technique for projecting such conflicts in the later poems is to have them dramatized in dialogues between self and soul. "Self" and "Soul," or "Hic" and "Ille," are complementary facets of Yeats's split self. In "A Dialogue of Self and Soul," the landscape that is preferred by "Self" is not the eminent heights of the tower but a "fecund ditch." Ditch is an extension of the image of abyss, and so are "cave," "cavern," "dark declivities," and "Swift's dark grove."<sup>76</sup> These images haunt Yeats in his later period because he is fascinated by their "mad abstract dark."<sup>77</sup> The fascination is explainable by the capacity of those symbols to mirror adequately the condition of Yeats's soul in his dark moments.

In Autobiographies Yeats said that as a painter's son it is natural for him to seek out landscapes that are "symbolical of some spiritual condition."<sup>78</sup> In the later poems, then, caverned places became increasingly a more pleasant place for air and exercise than an acre of green grass. In "The Man and the Echo," for example, he begins the examination of his literary conscience from a tomb which he calls "the bottom of a pit/That broad noon has never lit."<sup>79</sup> Although he realizes later in the poem that in his own case the antinomies resist the resolution promised by death--"There is no release/In a bodkin or disease"--still, the images that are supposed to have recalled him to life are those that suggest death: "Up

there some hawk or owl has struck." Yeats's preference in the poem is for an existence in a tomb. In an early poem "The Hour Before Dawn," a "cursing rogue," who might have been a symbolic projection of Yeats's self, was terrified by "A dark deep hollow in the rock" called "Hell Mouth."<sup>80</sup> But in "The Man and the Echo," the hell mouth has become a "pleasant nook."<sup>81</sup> Vivienne Koch noted that in the original draft of the poem the phrase "O Rocky Voice" which occurs in the closing stanza read "O Rocky Void."<sup>82</sup> "Void" continues the symbolic implication of "tomb, and reinforces the image of night in the line that immediately follows:

O Rocky Void,  
Shall we in that great night rejoice?

The dramatic climax of "An Acre of Grass" is structured on a three-dimensional movement corresponding with ascent, descent, and a final return to earth. In this poem, Yeats can harrow hell in a frenzied rage against old age, or pierce the clouds with an old man's eagle mind to question the gods above, and yet maintain a certain degree of equilibrium internally on his final return to earth, because his temptation is quiet; but in "The Circus Animals' Desertion," he crumbles hopelessly at the bottom of a ladder rooted in the abyss of the mind.

In the interview with Whitelaw mentioned earlier, Okigbo noted that "inward exploration" is rare among many African poets. This observation is particularly true of J. P. Clark. Clark's special strength is the gift to

delineate accurately what the external eye can see. He has little introspection, few excursions into the world of the soul. Not for Clark that "speech of the soul with itself"<sup>83</sup> which Yeats calls "the spontaneous expression of interior life."<sup>84</sup> One critic, Ulli Beier, noted that Clark is primarily visual in his response to experience, the experience being the observation of external objects or scenes and situations such as those depicted in "Olumo Rock," "Girl Bathing," and "Agbor Dancer," to name but a few examples.<sup>85</sup> A. W. Thomson thinks of Clark as an occasional poet, substantiating his argument with the lyrics occasioned by the casualties of the Nigerian Civil War, which Clark entitled Casualties.<sup>86</sup> There is certainly more in Clark's poetry than what these critics have noticed. Clark's poetry is stamped with those elements that give his native environment its special characteristics such as "the smell of swamps and the echo of the sea"<sup>87</sup> (in Clark's own words). His achievement in this direction has been discussed in the chapter on Identity. However, the attractions of external nature are irresistible to Clark. During his brief stay in America his sensitivity to the external emerged in the poem entitled "Three Moods of Princeton." One of the three moods of Princeton is the face of its autumn landscape:

The leaves, so golden, shower  
 In the wind. And each tree,  
 Antlered, stands  
 A silhouette to prick the eye.<sup>88</sup>

The other two moods show Princeton as a winter-stricken city.

In order to confront the world beneath the matter, it may be necessary for the poet to achieve what the German critic Erich Heller calls "the severance of mind from world, soul from circumstance, human inwardness from external condition."<sup>89</sup> Heller noted that only a mind plagued by a sense of its own deprivations can achieve this separation. Clark does possess a tragic view of life. The tides and floods of his delta landscape represent the natural forces that threaten the continuity of human existence. But it is doubtful whether he has any views and visions concerning the soul's own tragedy. There is a poem called "Cave Call" among his American collections. The cave that beckons the poet is not the underworld of his own being, but the cavities of a supra-modern steel and glass structure called Manhattan:

The caves of Manhattan call out to me  
 In Times neutral Square, at noon  
 Emerged from running colours that clash  
 By night. Tantalized, I take the step down,  
 Descending at dead loss.<sup>90</sup>

There is hell here, and "Tantalized" has overtones of the eternal suffering of Tantalus in hell. But the hell that is depicted is the hell of human existence in a technological world symbolized by the Manhattan skyscrapers and its underground subways. It is not the hell of the poet's own mind.

On the other hand, it is Soyinka's main concern in his prison poems, A Shuttle in the Crypt, to delineate the contours of the hell of his own mind. The volume, writes Soyinka, "is a map of the course trodden by the mind."<sup>91</sup> The mind is embodied in the image of "shuttle," and its underworld cavern, otherwise known as prison, is represented as "crypt." Soyinka described the shuttle as "a unique species of the caged animal, a restless bolt of energy, a trapped weaver-bird."<sup>92</sup> Its moral qualities recall the attributes with which Soyinka's god, Ogun, is associated, for the shuttle is also a "secretive seed, shrine, kernel, phallus and well of creative mysteries."<sup>93</sup> As a "restless bolt of energy," the shuttle served Soyinka as a befitting symbol for his own restless soul. "Self-identification with this essence of innate repletion," he writes, "was a natural weapon to employ against the dangers of an inhuman isolation."<sup>94</sup>

The tragedy is that Soyinka's own soul, a kernel of energy, is entrapped in the void of a hollow dry crypt. In "Vault Centre," the shuttle was immobilized in the still centre of night, and in "Space" it overcame the abyss of the crypt. But in the poems of the section of A Shuttle in the Crypt entitled "Animystic Spells," the shuttle is caught up once more in a landscape of night. In Soyinka's prison notes, The Man Died, which is A Shuttle's prose companion, the crypt is visualized as one immense universe of void. Within his prison void, Soyinka is driven by

solitude to speculate on certain metaphysical questions. How does the mind grapple with Emptiness?<sup>95</sup> he asked in chapter thirty-three of the book. The answer is that the mind must struggle to achieve full mastery over Nothingness. To Soyinka, mastery is achieved through creative act. "In the home of death the living is sole creator."<sup>96</sup> But the mind that must so engage has its own penalty. To muster the courage to will existence out of nothing, a mind entrapped in Emptiness must "empty inwards . . . must plunge from the physical platform into primordial abyss."<sup>97</sup> All lonely minds have this propensity to retreat into the soul's indwellings in moments of crisis, argues Soyinka. God delved within and said: "Let there be light."<sup>98</sup> Therein lies his own strategy, argues Soyinka, for overcoming the terrors of his own loneliness. The same instinct for awful daring rescued Pluto from his own loneliness:

there being nothing worse to do, Pluto tried to discover tunnels even from the dead netherworld into deeper bowels of Void.<sup>99</sup>

Imagining himself as the "sole creator" in the home of death, Soyinka saw a parallel between himself and God, and between himself and Pluto. He will create from the dark interior of his own soul. "Animystic Spells" is the title given to the poems he wrote in his prison tomb. The term "animystic" seeks to define the state of the mind that gave birth to those poems. Such a mind is under the spell of "self-hypnosis," resulting in "a state of weightlessness . . . familiar enough to those who dabble in the more esoteric

religions."<sup>100</sup> Yeats was familiar with the visionary mood which Soyinka is evoking. In the essay "Magic," Yeats wrote: "I believe . . . in the visions of truth in the depths of the mind when the eyes are closed."<sup>101</sup> Soyinka's visionary mood recalls also Okigbo's twilight moment between sleeping and waking.

There is a further glossary on the operation of the animystic imagination in The Man Died:

In the muting of sounds which overtakes the senses  
the mind drifts easily into transcendental moods,  
wiping out environment, reality, fragmenting slowly  
till it becomes one with specks of dust in ether.<sup>102</sup>

In Soyinka's case, the animystic mood dawns on the poet in his moments of despair. What rescues the mind from its own terrors is words. Most of the poems of "Animystic Spells" are verbalizations of the poet's mental hallucinations. They make no pretense to meaning other than what is implied in a heroic cry whose sound reassures the poet. Soyinka calls these poems

Fragments  
We cannot hold . . .  
Parings of intuition  
Footsteps  
Passing and repassing the door of recognition.<sup>103</sup>

The poems treat of seizures of hallucinations, nightmares and dreams that invade the mind. Necessarily, their landscape is interior, appropriate for the inward orientation of the mind that created them. In part I, the poet is talking to the creatures of his own fantasy. Among these is his ghostly self, his subconscious self whom he urges to join the companions of his own entombed existence

(whom he calls "the faceless") in their journey to death's kingdom in the netherworld described in the poem as the "anterooms of night's inbirth":

First you must  
walk among the faceless  
Their feet are shod in earth  
And dung  
Caryatids in anterooms of night's inbirth.<sup>104</sup>

The "you" of the first line may have also been addressed to Soyinka's crypt. For he insists that there is a hell within a hell. The hell within a hell he calls the "inner crypt." In moments of intense agony, the shuttle may experience death more than once. Such is the case when Soyinka is driven by the increasing bombardment of his crypt by death-dealing sounds to imagine himself as a risen Lazarus who is doomed to die again: "Lazarus rises, enters the inner crypt and awaits the rolling of the stone into its night position."<sup>105</sup> The poet is focusing attention on the "inner crypt" when he says in poem III of "Animystic Spells" that

Death  
Embraces you and I  
A twilight cone is  
Meeting-place  
The silent junction of the grey abyss<sup>106</sup>

The "faceless" company of the first poem are apparitions that exist in the poet's own imagination. Soyinka knows them for what they are: "Extensions of my restless eye and mind."<sup>107</sup> But such apparitions occur so frequently to the mind that it has been conditioned by its loneliness and despair to endow them with concrete bodies. In The Man Died Soyinka has this testimony:

Locked and barred from a more direct communion, a human assertiveness has reached me through the cosmos, a proud, inextinguishable promethean sparks among dead bodies, astral wraiths, failed deities, tinsel decorations in barren space.<sup>108</sup>

As noted before, the animystic mind is susceptible to fits of fantasies. In one of such hallucinatory seizures Soyinka imagined himself to have been drowned in a lake. The lake conjured up by his mind is a subterranean chasm buried in the "opal caverns of the mind":

Buried lakes:  
My feet, satanic cleft  
Spring-divining feet have mined  
Buried lakes  
Calm in opal caverns of the mind.<sup>109</sup>

The unstraightened syntax of this stanza renders these lines complicated. The poet's satanic feet seem to have cast about for water, but there is no pure fountain except the Lethean waters of the poet's own mind described as "Calm in the opal caverns of the mind." Images such as "buried," "satanic" and "cavern" emphasize the subterranean setting as well as the poet's buried existence. In The Man Died, Soyinka wrote of a lake which he called "an underground cavern, sealed from end to end":

There is no handhold within, only a roar in the ears of the vault, a naked earth-core dementia, shrapnels of water making for pulse centres creating disruption.<sup>110</sup>

In an earlier passage, he imagined his demented consciousness as a placid lake encased in an "insulating capsule."<sup>111</sup> But the placidity did not last long. The capsule disintegrated under the impact of fear, and the poet sank back with the waves into the silt-bed of his underworld lake. It is

this experience apparently that Soyinka's mind has captured in one animystic moment.

Soyinka's image of the "caverns of the mind" has obvious Yeatsian echoes. "The caverns of the mind," Yeats wrote, quoting Shelley, "are obscure and shadowy."<sup>112</sup> Cave, it will be recalled, is Yeats's symbol for a mind retreating into its own indwellings. It is contrasted with tower, which stands for the mind looking out upon men and things. In his essay "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry" Yeats wrote:

The contrast between [tower] and the cave . . . suggests a contrast between the mind looking outward upon men and things and the mind looking inward upon itself.<sup>113</sup>

Since there are other reminiscences in Soyinka of Yeats's essay on Shelley, one wonders whether the echoes are conscious or accidental. For instance, the images "calm" and "lake" occurred in "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry" in a context similar to the circumstance in which they are used in Soyinka. Shelley's character, Witch of Atlas, Yeats said, has journeyed like Soyinka "'in the calm depths' of 'the wide lake' we journeyed over unpiloted."<sup>114</sup> Another character of Shelley's, Cythna, Yeats recalls, was imprisoned (like Soyinka) in a "cave."<sup>115</sup> Cave also is for Yeats the image of "an enclosed life."<sup>116</sup> In his prison cave, as has been noted, Soyinka experienced the terrors of "an enclosed life." In one poem of the "Animystic Spells," Soyinka's mind tried to leap out of its prison cave but the dark forces within the cave are stronger. The

attempt brought the poet only as far as the roof of his sealed world--"the skyscrapes of the mind." He realized afterwards that only through memory can he escape from the cell of the mind:

Sougs of wings  
 Moonward on night, guides  
 To skyscrapes of the mind  
 Unfettered  
 Now begins the flight on memory tides.<sup>117</sup>

With the exhaustion of the creative potentials of animystic moments, the mind can rely on memory and reminiscences for its own survival. The poems of A Shuttle entitled "Phases of Peril" and "Four Archetypes" are constructed on the framework of memory. Thoughts recollected in moments of agonized tranquillity serve the poet as ghostly companions in his prison underworld. For this reason he sees himself in the poem "Ulysses" as a "heritage of thought," haunting "the music of the mind."<sup>118</sup> The poet's own memories and thoughts are as ghostly as his entombed self. These memories and thoughts are deliberately coloured with images related to death since the poet is living a kind of life-in-death existence in his crypt. In the poem "When Seasons Change," the poet's own memories and reminiscences are "Shrouds of seasons gone," "mouse-eaten thoughts" "peeled/From time's corpses."<sup>119</sup>

The scene of the actions and events reconstructed from memory are restricted to the compass points of the mind. Since the poet is a citizen of the world of the mind, his reminiscences and recollections are necessarily referred

to that same mental arena. The just cause for which the poet is fighting is seen, for instance, as "spires, rooted in the quagmires of the human mind." From the mind's quagmire, these spires of justice will rise to "purer lights/And wing aloft a salvaged essence/Transcending death."<sup>120</sup> Soyinka seems to be predicting, through this imagery, the ultimate triumph of the cause for which he was imprisoned, and suggesting thereby his own final conquest of the abyss of the crypt. Both the cause he stands for and he himself will ultimately transcend the present legacy of death.

Reflecting on his own solitude in "Ulysses" he sees it as a "boulder" rooted in his mind. The image of boulder is intended to suggest the immensity of the poet's solitude as well as the overwhelming odds against which he is struggling:

On minds grown hoary from the quest  
Rest, rooted even in the turmoil agency  
A boulder solitude amidst wine-centred waves<sup>121</sup>

From within the abyss, the poet is occasionally catapulted into outer space on the wings of "boulder solitude," where his mind is identified with all lonely minds and with all lonely wanderers. The image of an archetypal lone wanderer that comes readily to Soyinka's mind is Bloom. In the poem "Ulysses," he sees himself as a "newcomer-wanderer." The territory of his itinerary is infinity itself:

We embrace,  
The world and I in great infinitudes.<sup>122</sup>

Soyinka is referring to the infinity of his mind when he says in the same poem:

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.<sup>123</sup>

Perhaps there is an implied parallel between Soyinka's dark abyss, the crypt, within which his mind is circling, and Bloom's night-town errand in Dublin. Soyinka's co-tenants in the prison underworld have also dared the infinite. Addressing the madmen over the prison wall, he says:

I fear  
Your minds have dared the infinite  
And journeyed back  
To speak in foreign tongues.<sup>124</sup>

Like Soyinka and Bloom, Lenrie Peters is also a lonely wanderer. In Poem 8 of Satellites, he writes:

I walk alone  
in triumphant  
irony of loneliness  
a billion bones  
round me rattle  
with my cries.<sup>125</sup>

Peters's loneliness breeds "massacre"<sup>126</sup> in his soul, and it is very often the starting point for his own exploration of the world of his own soul. In Poem 8, Peters's troubled self "dives impenetrably/inwards," trembling and burning totally alone, crying within the poet, and thirsting for sunlight like Okigbo's self in "Siren Limits":

You cry  
 within me  
 claws screaming  
 flesh and blood  
 reaching for sunlight  
 in darkness.<sup>127</sup>

Darkness is a key image in Peters's poetry of self-exploration. This poetic motif is not as systematically worked out in his poetry as it is in the poems of Okigbo or of Yeats. But Peters, like these, has known what he calls "the cold-war of the soul."<sup>128</sup> In Poem 4, which partly deals with the poet's experience of agony of doubt and unbelief, Peters opts intentionally for the darkness of doubt: "I will go alone darkly till I have done."<sup>129</sup> And as the "clouds of sunshine" retreat steadily in Poem 7, the path that leads to darkness mounts in "crescendo of circles." Darkness is here the hour of reckoning, but it has also a connotation that is relevant to the dark world of the mind:

The heart solid with remorse  
 (trifles, memories, lost affection)  
 stumbles in terror--tears of darkness  
 ask vain questions of the night.<sup>130</sup>

Such images as "edge," "border," "cliff" or "bridge" serve Peters as diving-boards for plunging into the world of his own interior. In Poem 5 of Satellites, loneliness and despair brought him to the "cutting chaotic edge of things," and the result is an unabated descent into the underworld of despair: "my youth burrows into the yearning/entrails of earth."<sup>131</sup> Peters's problem in the poem seems to be primarily aesthetic. For him, as for Yeats and for

Okigbo, the artist is an eternal sufferer. His own contribution to the cliché is the self-conscious aphorism:

The Poet's heart is in a desert place  
 But when the winds blow  
 The tears flow  
 The darkness lightens.<sup>132</sup>

In Poem 5 the darkness has not lifted, for Peters's creative soul is still lodged in the desert. Peters laments what appears to be a loss of inspiration:

I tear at toasted locks of sunlight  
 reeds, parched reeds creaking in my lungs.<sup>133</sup>  
 It takes my life to hold the moon in focus.

The yearning soul here is apparently related to the voice pleading for rehabilitation in Poem 8:

Fill my  
 broken landscape  
 with tree clusters  
 thorns, the  
 rage of life;  
 decidedly  
 not bare.<sup>134</sup>

The artist mirrors the beautiful as well as the ugly, for reality is a composite of both. Thus Peters is eager to "repeople" broken landscapes (those of his own life or of his artistic visions) with "tree clusters" as well as "thorns" or "the rage of life." His inability to focus both effectively brings him to the brinks of hell in Poem 5:

Crushing dead glass in my strong hand  
 is worthless. Nothing bleeds, nothing relieves  
 it will not melt like snow  
 this emptiness, this hell I invented.<sup>135</sup>

The creative gloom of the preceding poem is relieved by the brief moment of creative fulfilment in Poem 9

of Katchikali. The musical cadence of the sound of rain on leaves hypnotizes the poet. It transports him into a visionary state in which he sees the invisible:

Sound of rain on leaves  
Like invisible hammers  
draws me into the outside  
of things where I begin

The invisible banner streaked  
with future thoughts showers  
the dead present with ritual eloquence.<sup>136</sup>

The trance-educing rhythm invites the poet to rejoice in his "own death," for the beatific moment is a moment of unity of being when all internal contradictions are resolved:

Drowsily I am soaked through  
with sound of earthbound tears  
a temporary Q.E.D. to vain fears  
a balm to the static soul.

Peters is able to respond so ecstatically to the music of nature because of the music that is in his own soul: "my soul is music/musical to the core." It is possible that this music which "Tenderly defines the possible" for the poet may have enabled him to realize his own creative motivations.

As a medical surgeon by profession, and a poet by love, Peters has known the agony of the artist as well as that of the surgeon. For the surgeon, like the artist, has his own tense moments. Peters calls these tense moments the "horrors of anatomy,"<sup>137</sup> and they can be as vast, he maintains, as the "conflict of heaven and hell."<sup>138</sup> The tension provoked by the horrors of anatomy recede only when the surgical operation is over:

The tension eases with the last stitch  
 he forces a joke to make amends  
 he has crossed it before--this ditch<sup>139</sup>

Only the surgeon himself has knowledge of the depth of this ditch of fear. In Poem 49 of Katchikali the tension tolls "midnight" bells within the surgeon's "graveyard" heart; and in Poem 3 of Satellites it provokes an interior storm within the mind of the poet-surgeon:

Sound of the ocean  
 deep and bulging  
 with violent patterns  
 tumble in harmonies inside me.<sup>140</sup>

The oceans sound because "Mistake is easy." For the surgical hand suffers a "minor earthquake/in recreating a piece/of the world in darkness."<sup>141</sup> The poet-surgeon who gropes in his patients' dark bowels is also a part of that darkness. Peters has the humility to attribute the success of his own surgical operations, not to his own expertise in the profession, but rather to the grace and mercy of God:

There will be chaos and fumbling  
 of unconfident hands in bellies  
 and aches and pain  
 But there will be for each  
 who seeks with dedication  
 a solitary triumph of peace<sup>142</sup>

Emotionally, Peters has known like Yeats what he calls the "timeless agony" of a heart "shipwrecked on the tides of passion."<sup>143</sup> In "Presences," Yeats complained of "that monstrous thing"--"Returned and yet unrequited love."<sup>144</sup> In Poem 27 of Katchikali Peters's heart is a "Crowded granary" offered to an indifferent lady. In

despair the poet retreats into the background of night to make a love-will. The rejected granary of his heart will be offered to the grave; and when this is done, the beloved will have no peace until she has rejoined the lover in death:

This burning heart will rest  
Under a stone; washed  
By a cold transparent stream  
That with it may flow  
My blood round your bathing feet  
My tears over your lips

Never, never, will it be found there . . .  
Until in your consuming presence  
This timeless agony is lifted  
When from dead years  
Like withered leaves rejuvenated  
Love will with courage banish fears.

In Poem 39 of the same volume the poet's bleeding heart is threatened by night because the loved one will not heal the wound. For this reason the poet's life is bitter, but like a questing knight he must dare the perilous depth where love is hidden in order to conquer it:

Your inner depths  
Unfold the hidden quest  
Of things I want to comprehend

There is another depth to be plumbed in Poem 42-- but this time, the depth of the bitter waters of despair. The poet is standing on a bridge where he has half a mind to plunge into the deep and there put an end to a life that appears to him to be futile:

Looking over a bridge  
of opaque flowing years  
desire dictates:  
throw your lot  
in with the ripples  
where you belong.

Although he realizes in the poem that "all heights are scaled/to fall," memories of love and life deter him from the urge to end his own life. Peters's gesture here is not unlike Yeats's suicide hour in "The Man and the Echo." In Peters, however, the dilemma lacks the dramatic intensity of Yeats's poem.

Peters is a supremely gifted poet of nature, but he has not allowed his love of the external to overshadow the echoes of the voice of the soul. Unlike the one-dimensional poet Clark, Peters has seen "islands of horror"<sup>145</sup> through the mirror of experience. Those visions are not dramatized on as gigantic a scale as they are in Yeats or in Okigbo, nor do they occur to Peters as frequently as they threaten Yeats or Okigbo. However, his recognition of the agonies of the soul links him with introspective poets such as Okigbo, Soyinka, and Yeats.

A mind plagued by its internal contradictions has the tendency to retreat into the soul's indwellings. The gesture is aesthetic in Okigbo, and, to a certain degree, in Yeats, for it is symbolic of the artist's battle with himself. Such images as "abyss," "cave," and "tomb" operate in the work of these poets as physical representations of the landscape of the innermost soul, for they recall the mind's dark interior. Soyinka begins from a location as darkened as these in some of the poems of A Shuttle. Yeats and Peters also yearn for such locations in their dark moments. As Yeats said, soul has no bodily

furniture "at the stroke of midnight."<sup>146</sup>

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>W. B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 189. Hereafter cited as Essays.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 272-3.

<sup>3</sup>Marjory Whitelaw, "Interview with Christopher Okigbo, 1965," Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 9 (July 1970), 33. Hereafter cited as "Christopher Okigbo."

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>W. B. Yeats, The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 245. Hereafter cited as Collected Poems.

<sup>7</sup>"Christopher Okigbo," p. 29.

<sup>8</sup>Christopher Okigbo, Labyrinths (London: Heinemann, 1971), p. xi. Hereafter cited as Labyrinths.

<sup>9</sup>Further Letters of John Butler Yeats, ed. Lennox Robinson (Dundrum: The Cuala Press, 1920), p. 25.

<sup>10</sup>Labyrinths, p. xi.

<sup>11</sup>Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 124-5.

<sup>12</sup>Labyrinths, pp. xiv and xi respectively for the two short quotes.

<sup>13</sup>Walter A. Strauss, Descent and Return: The Orphic Theme in Modern Literature (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 17.

<sup>14</sup>Labyrinths, p. xi.

<sup>15</sup>William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, in The Complete Writings of William Blake, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 149.

<sup>16</sup>W. B. Yeats, Explorations (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 147. Hereafter cited as Explorations.

<sup>17</sup>Essays, p. 351.

<sup>18</sup>Labyrinths, pp. xi-xiii.

<sup>19</sup>Essays, pp. 293-4.

<sup>20</sup>Labyrinths, p. 23.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>W. B. Yeats, John Sherman and Dhoya (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), p. 85.

<sup>23</sup>Essays, p. 277.

<sup>24</sup>Donatus Nwoga, "Okigbo's Limits: An Approach to Meaning," Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 7 (June 1972), 93. Hereafter cited as "Okigbo's Limits."

<sup>25</sup>F. A. C. Wilson, W. B. Yeats and Tradition (London: Methuen, 1968), p. 85.

<sup>26</sup>Collected Poems, p. 50.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Essays, p. 191.

<sup>29</sup>Labyrinths, p. 24.

<sup>30</sup>Wole Soyinka, "And After the Narcissist?" African Forum 1 (Spring 1966), 58.

<sup>31</sup>W. B. Yeats, "Clarence Mangan," in Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats, ed. John P. Frayne (London: Macmillan, 1970), 1, p. 118.

<sup>32</sup>Collected Poems, p. 242.

<sup>33</sup>Labyrinths, p. 24.

<sup>34</sup>Essays, p. 128.

<sup>35</sup>Labyrinths, p. 13.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. xiv.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

- <sup>39</sup>Labyrinths, p. 25.
- <sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 24.
- <sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 27. Where the asterisk [\*] appears after an ellipsis or a dash at the end of a quotation, the mark is the poet's own, not the editor's.
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. xiv.
- <sup>43</sup>Collected Poems, p. 192.
- <sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 247.
- <sup>45</sup>"Limits," "Manuscript Draft," p. 17.
- <sup>46</sup>"Transition Conference Questionnaire," Transition, 5 (1962), 12.
- <sup>47</sup>Labyrinths, p. 27.
- <sup>48</sup>"Okigbo's Limits," p. 95.
- <sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. xi.
- <sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 27.
- <sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 53.
- <sup>52</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. xiv.
- <sup>54</sup>Essays, p. 86.
- <sup>55</sup>Labyrinths, p. 53.
- <sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 55.
- <sup>57</sup>James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man (1916, rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguins, 1960), p. 215.
- <sup>58</sup>Labyrinths, p. 54.
- <sup>59</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 58.
- <sup>61</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 59.
- <sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

- <sup>64</sup>Labyrinths, p. 59.
- <sup>65</sup>Romanus Egudu, "Okigbo's 'Distances': A Retreat from Christ to Idoto," Conch. v (1973), 38-39.
- <sup>66</sup>Essays, p. 87.
- <sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 82.
- <sup>68</sup>Collected Poems, p. 291
- <sup>69</sup>Labyrinths, p. 60.
- <sup>70</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>71</sup>Collected Poems, p. 243.
- <sup>72</sup>Labyrinths, p. 54.
- <sup>73</sup>Essays, pp. 53 and 88.
- <sup>74</sup>Labyrinths, p. 57.
- <sup>75</sup>Explorations, p. 290.
- <sup>76</sup>For "dark declivities," and "Swift's dark grove," see Collected Poems, pp. 269 and 276.
- <sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 212.
- <sup>78</sup>W. B. Yeats, Autobiographies (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 74.
- <sup>79</sup>Collected Poems, p. 337.
- <sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 114.
- <sup>81</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>82</sup>Vivienne Koch, W. B. Yeats: The Tragic Phase (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1951), p. 119.
- <sup>83</sup>Essays, p. 333.
- <sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 192.
- <sup>85</sup>Ulli Beier, "Three Mbari Poets," Black Orpheus 12 (1963), 48.
- <sup>86</sup>A. W. Thomson, "The Political Occasion: A Note on the Poetry of John Pepper Clark," Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 7 (June 1972), 83-91.

<sup>87</sup>J. P. Clark, The Example of Shakespeare (London: Longmans, 1970), p. 23.

<sup>88</sup>J. P. Clark, A Reed in the Tide (London: Longmans, 1965), p. 29. Hereafter cited as A Reed.

<sup>89</sup>Erich Heller, The Artist Journey into the Interior and Other Essays (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 103. Heller noted that Hegel was the first to notice this trend of introversion in the literature of his time.

<sup>90</sup>A Reed, p. 36.

<sup>91</sup>Wole Soyinka, A Shuttle in the Crypt (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. vii. Hereafter cited as A Shuttle.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Wole Soyinka, The Man Died (London: Rex Collins, 1972), p. 255. Hereafter cited as The Man Died.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>A Shuttle, p. 59.

<sup>101</sup>Essays, p. 28.

<sup>102</sup>The Man Died, p. 251.

<sup>103</sup>A Shuttle, p. 68. See also The Man Died, p. 187.

<sup>104</sup>A Shuttle, p. 66.

<sup>105</sup>The Man Died, p. 268.

<sup>106</sup>A Shuttle, p. 67.

<sup>107</sup>The Man Died, p. 252.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

<sup>109</sup>A Shuttle, pp. 69-70.

- <sup>110</sup>The Man Died, p. 185.
- <sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 184.
- <sup>112</sup>Essays, p. 85.
- <sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 87.
- <sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 85.
- <sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 86.
- <sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>117</sup>A Shuttle, p. 70.
- <sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 27.
- <sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 17.
- <sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.
- <sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 29.
- <sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 27.
- <sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.
- <sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 18.
- <sup>125</sup>Lenrie Peters, Satellites (London: Heinemann, 1967), p. 18. Hereafter cited as Satellites.
- <sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 17.
- <sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16.
- <sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 9.
- <sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 10.
- <sup>130</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15.
- <sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 12.
- <sup>132</sup>Lenrie Peters, Katchikali (London: Heinemann, 1971), Poem 22. No page. Hereafter cited as Katchikali.
- <sup>133</sup>Satellites, p. 12.
- <sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 17.
- <sup>135</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>136</sup>Katchikali, Poem 9. Poems in Katchikali are numbered; there is no pagination. Poem numbers when they are given in the text will stand for references in this volume. These references will not be footnoted in subsequent allusions to this collection.

<sup>137</sup>Katchikali, Poem 48.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid.

<sup>140</sup>Satellites, p. 5.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>143</sup>Katchikali, Poem 4.

<sup>144</sup>Collected Poems, p. 152.

<sup>145</sup>Satellites, p. 74.

<sup>146</sup>Collected Poems, p. 285.

## CONCLUSION: REFLECTIONS

In the Introduction to their anthology of African poetry, Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier classified Okigbo, Clark, Soyinka, and Peters as "modern," in the sense that language was given a new approach in the work of these poets; and this approach was made possible, they argued, because of these writers' contact with foreign "literary culture."<sup>1</sup> It is not only in their sensitivity to language, to their consciousness of subtle nuances of meaning in poetic imagery, that Yeats was important. A knowledge of themselves, in so far as this knowledge can be related to a literary contact with their land and life, appears to have been the most manifestable evidence of Yeats's presence in their work. Professor Mahood, who was Clark's teacher as well as Soyinka's, and who was familiar with the poetry of Okigbo, has written of the appeal of Yeats's nationalism to the Nigerian poets. Yeats's nationalism was essentially literary, not sentimental. "Imaginative nationalism," as Yeats saw it, could best be translated into an immediate poetic act through setting. Thus, he felt it his duty to sing of Cuchulain, St. Patrick, Oisín, and all those sacred mountains of his native land which, before his time, had been left unsung. With Yeats's initiative in mind, Okigbo might have felt it his duty to sing of Idoto, Soyinka of

Ogun, and Clark of the reeds in the tides of his homeland. Despite Peters's claim that the universe was his book, the atavistic instinct manifested itself in his ultimate recognition of the truth in Poem 59 of Katchikali that "home is this clod of watery sudden earth/of woodsman turning home with axe about his neck."

By an irony of history it happened that Nigeria, which had shared a common colonial background with Ireland, was destined, like Ireland, too, to experience a period of civil war. In their response to this turmoil, Yeats and his attitude to the Irish Civil War became, again, a meaningful example to the Nigerian poets, and to Peters. They appreciated Yeats's humanity, his condemnation of hatred, his concern for the destruction of life and property, and his appeal for love and brotherly understanding among the contending parties in the conflict. But, above all, they shared his dread of the disaster that can threaten a beloved homeland in the event of war. Thus, Okigbo's evocation of the dreadful monster with "cast-iron steps" which were "forged into thunder of tanks"<sup>2</sup> became a symbolic analogue to what Yeats had foreseen as a "rough beast" and whose dreadful approach he had described as "Thunder of feet, tumult of images."<sup>3</sup>

Even in their individual response to tragedy on a personal level (tragedy, according to Yeats is the inescapable destiny of the man who lives), Yeats is probably the poet with whom these poets have most in common; for

Yeats was familiar with what he frequently alluded to as "the night of the soul":

All minds that have a wisdom come of tragic reality seem morbid to those that are accustomed to writers who have not faced reality at all; just as the saints, with that *Obscure Night of the Soul*, which fell so certainly that they numbered it among spiritual states . . . seem morbid to the rationalist.<sup>4</sup>

Tragedy, in its relation to the agony of the suffering artist, induced in Okigbo, Soyinka, and Peters a response that was similar to Yeats's in his dark moments. It is a response that verges on self-extinction or self-annihilation. The landscape which most typically represents the world occasioned by this response is what Yeats called, to modify his phrase slightly, the sacred dark of tragic contemplation.<sup>5</sup>

Shelley, whom he admired, he wrote, quoting Matthew Arnold, "beat his ineffectual wings in the void."<sup>6</sup> In Shelley's poetry the "void" is represented by the "cave" and other images of similar description. In Yeats, it is represented by an analogous symbol, abyss; and, as he confessed, he laboured at one time in his poetic career to master Shelley's world until that world "had grown solid underfoot and consistent enough for the soul's habitation."<sup>7</sup> Okigbo, Soyinka, and Peters (Clark has no vision of the world of the soul) retreat, like Yeats, to the landscape of the innermost soul represented in their poetry also by cave and abyss.

In their attitude, then, to their own land and life, the Nigerian poets, including Peters, are close to Yeats; and in their response to the echoes of the soul to which

the tragic artist is susceptible, it is again Yeats who is immediately suggested.

It needs to be emphasized, however, that these poets' kinship with Yeats is not a consciously cultivated phenomenon in every circumstance in which such a kinship is demonstrable; for every poet, in spite of his exposure to literary influences, is original in his own way. Yeats has a theory of literary influence which is pertinent. "The persons and passions in our poems," he wrote, "are mainly reflections our mirror has caught from older poems and from the life about us."<sup>8</sup> This statement is perhaps a significant clue to Yeats's own response to the influences that had worked on him; it is suggestive also of the subtle process by which his impact on the poetic growth of other poets might have operated. To Okigbo, Clark, Soyinka, and Peters, Yeats was a great mirror on which they caught their own reflections from their individual angles of vision.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier, Modern Poetry from Africa (Harmondsworth: Penguins, 1963), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Labyrinths (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 208.

<sup>4</sup>Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 322-23.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 294.

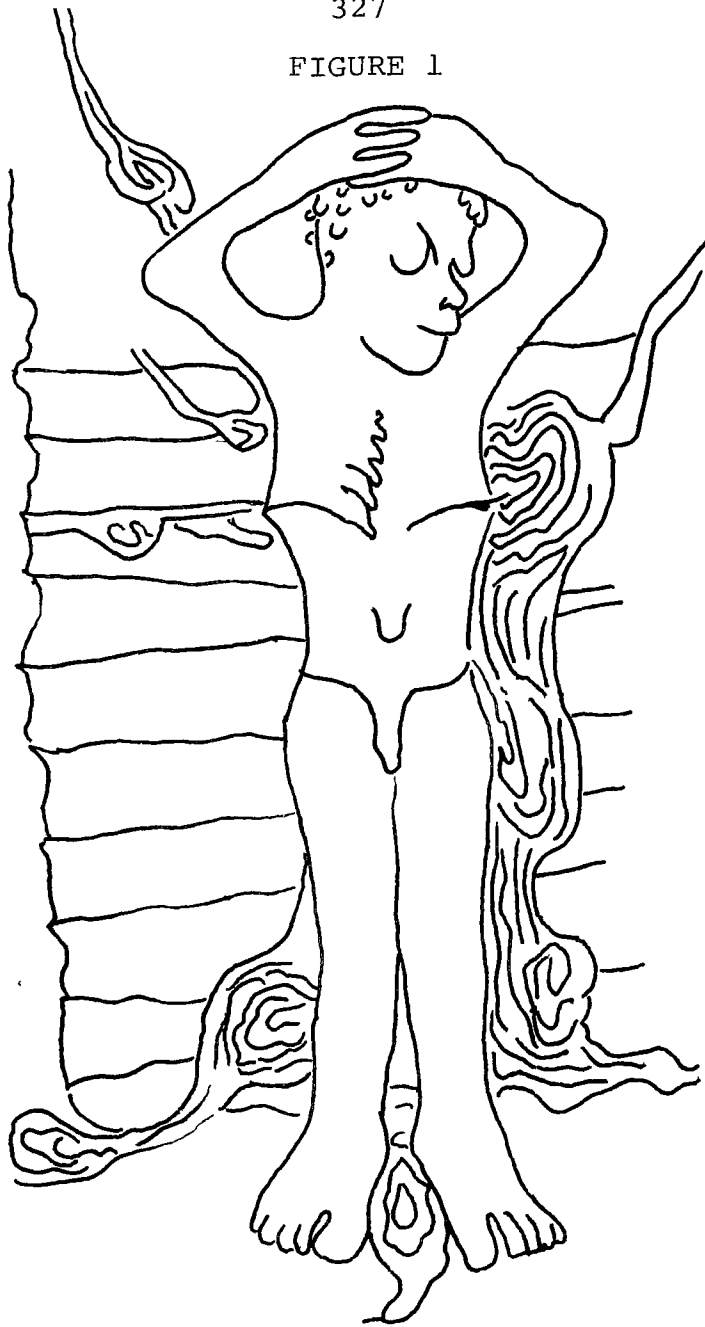
<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 196.

## APPENDIX

FIGURE 1



## IDOTO

BEFORE you, mother Idoto,  
 naked I stand,  
 before your watery presence,  
 a prodigal,

leaning on an oilbean;  
 lost in your legend .....

Under your power wait I on barefoot,  
 Watchman for the watchword at  
 HEAVENSGATE;

out of the depths my cry  
 give ear and hearken.

FIGURE 2

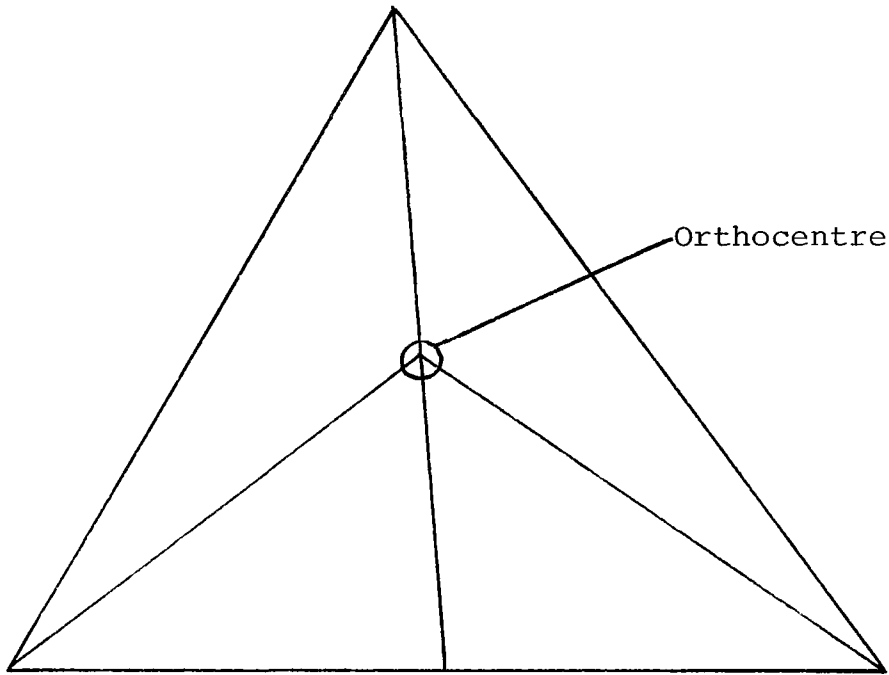
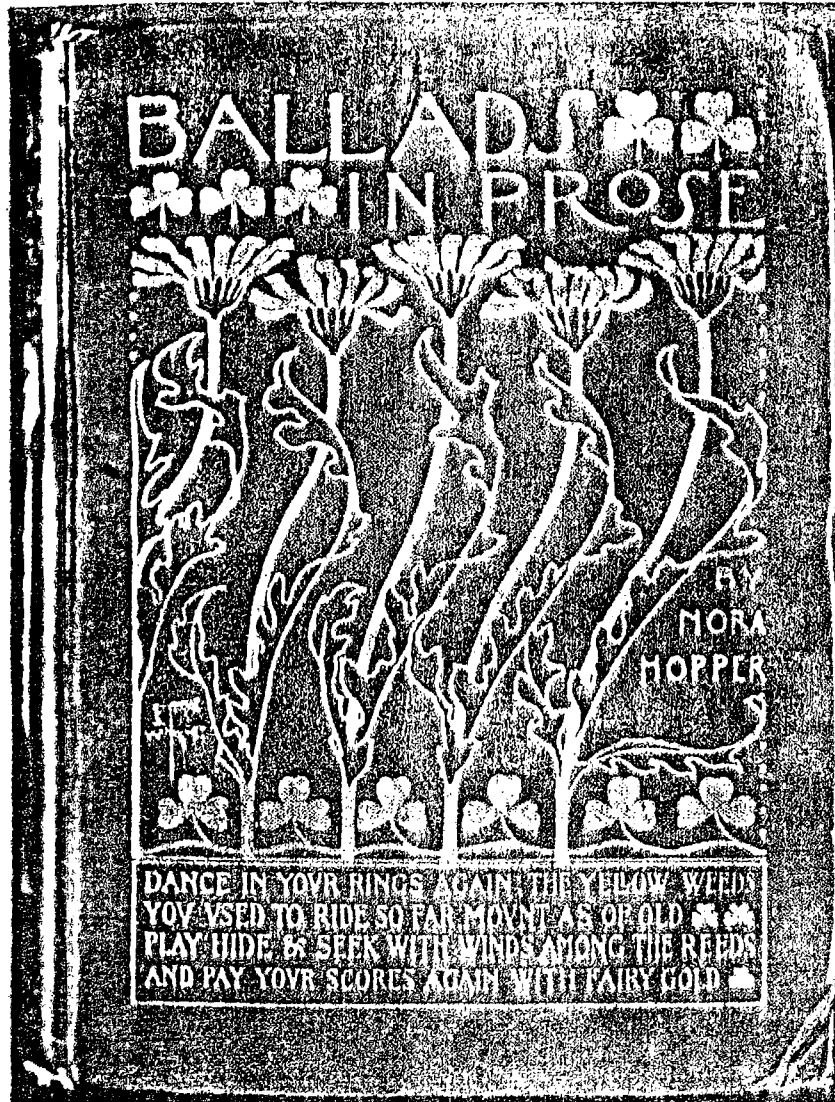


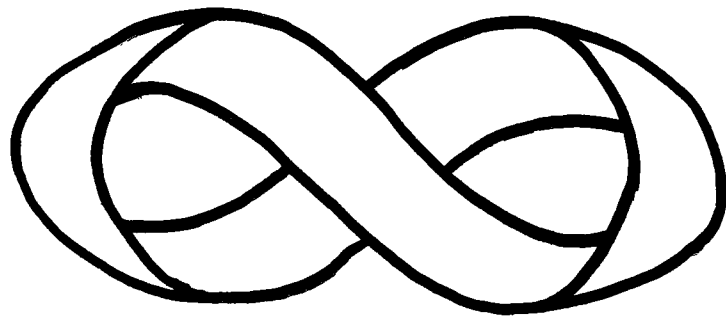
FIGURE 3



The cover of Nora Hopper's *Ballads in Prose* published in 1894. (Reproduced through the courtesy of the Bodley Head Press)

Cover Design depicting the action of the wind among reeds.

FIGURE 4



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## ABSTRACT

Modern Nigerian poetry owes its origins to Ibadan's privileged position as a centre of cultural awareness in the Nigeria of the early fifties. A university had been established there in 1948, and by 1955 Nigeria's leading poets such as Christopher Okigbo, John Pepper Clark, and Wole Soyinka had been enrolled at Ibadan as students of the new university. Their interest in creative writing and in English literature was stimulated by the presence in Ibadan at this particular epoch of Ulli Beier, founder and the first editor of the influential literary periodical Black Orpheus (1957), Gerald Moore, critic and Co-ordinator of Extra-Mural Studies at Ibadan (1953-1956), and Professor Molly Mahood, Head of the Department of English (1954-1963). By 1959, J. P. Clark had begun to publish his own poems and those of Okigbo and Soyinka in the poetry magazine, The Horn, of which he himself was the founding editor.

A few years after the birth of Black Orpheus in 1957, Beier founded the Mbari Writers Club as a forum for an exchange of literary ideas among the Ibadan poets. In time, a publishing company named Mbari, which also was Beier's brain child, began to publish the work of the first generation of modern poets in Nigeria. The rapid escalation of these events resulted in the dawn in Nigeria of a literature

that was national and modern.

But the impact of the stimulus provided by Ibadan was felt beyond the boundaries of Nigeria. To the British critic of African literature, Adrian A. Roscoe, the Ibadan dawn created a favourable climate for the emergence of modern African literature. In his opinion, Black Orpheus and Mbari made known "the work of the Nigerian writers Clark, Soyinka, and Okigbo, Ghana's Awoonor-Williams, Gambia's Lenrie Peters, and South Africa's Alex La Guma." These poets and novelists are sometimes known as "Mbari Writers," partly in acknowledgement of the effort of Black Orpheus and Mbari to give publicity to their work, and partly in recognition of the specifically African characteristics of their writings.

The Mbari writers were conscious of the literary possibilities of their land and life. Their own environment, and their local customs and traditions, they recognized, were suitable materials for creative literature. Landscape embodies all of these conceptions in broad terms. In their use of elements derived from their own environment as materials for their own creative expressions, the Mbari poets were of a kindred imaginative spirit with the poets of the Irish Literary Revival, notably Yeats.

The present study examines the work of four Mbari poets--Christopher Okigbo, John Pepper Clark, Wole Soyinka, and Lenrie Peters--from the perspective of landscape or setting, relating their attitude to their land and life to

Yeats's decision from The Rose onwards to provide his own poetry with a setting that was predominantly Irish. Okigbo, Clark, Soyinka, and Peters are poets of African twilight, just as Yeats was a poet of Celtic twilight.

All four of the African poets selected are situated, however, in the context of Nigerian literature; for Mbari writing was dominated by the influence of the Nigerian muse. The literary revival, if such an expression may be permitted for the upsurge of literary activities in Ibadan in the epoch already noted, was initiated in Nigeria.

The mood of Nigerian poetry written in English up to the time of the Ibadan poets is similar to the temper of Irish poetry shortly before the emergence of Yeats. The phase in the evolution of Nigerian poetry dominated by Dennis Osadebay and the poets of the "Young Africa" school corresponds to the phase in the history of Irish poetry dominated by Thomas Davis and his colleagues of the "Young Ireland" poetry, while the phase dominated by Okigbo, Clark, and Soyinka parallels the school of imaginative tradition founded in Ireland by Yeats. Nigeria and Ireland are further united by a common historical destiny. The Nigerian Civil War evokes memories of the Irish Civil War. As was the case in Ireland, poetry written in Nigeria during the war years reflects the changing fortunes of the environment in which it was conceived.

The greater part of this study develops in detail some of the points so far noted. In the final section,

however, the emphasis of the work is shifted from the poet's concern with his own environment to his preoccupation with the reality within. Okigbo, Soyinka, and Peters are intensely subjective while Clark is pre-eminently objective. The landscape occasioned by the poetry of subjective experience is often the interior world of the soul. In their descent into the landscape of the innermost soul in those of their lyrics dealing with subjective experience, Okigbo, Soyinka, and Peters seem to have been conscious of Yeats's precedent. The study concludes with thoughts on the parallels in imaginative insight which are decipherable in the work of the Nigerian poets, including Peters, and in Yeats.