SEMIOTIC CONSTANTS AND PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGE : A study of the Symbolism and Imagery of Change and Development in African Literature.

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AFRICAN LITERATURE has always enjoyed an active symbiosis with the social, political and economic milieux out of which it grows. When griots and praise-singers extol the glories of their empire as in Sundiata they invariably hint at what might have been done and at what remains to be done. Their "songs" are always contextual. The audience is led to an increased understanding of its history and of its destiny which in turn becomes the focal point of every performance and the mnemonic ladder to the otherwise inaccessible mists of antiquity. We see this kind of performance in Roots when Alex Haley finally traces the clan and the original village of his African ancestor Kunta Kinte. This poignant and dramatic discovery which is in every way closer to fiction than to fact is made possible by the vast theatrical and mnemonic resources of oral literature.

We can learn from proverbs, riddles, fireside and "animal" trickster tales a great deal about the physical and social environment with which a group of people have had to contend with. Oral traditions carry with them a people's collective wisdom as well as its deepest beliefs and values.

In written African literature the best works usually dramatize a similarly active symbiosis between the matter and the manner of literature with the stuff and stresses of everyday existence. Understanding literature becomes one important way of understanding the stuff and stresses of everyday existence and it is in everyday existence that the deep-seated forces out of which literature grows can be best understood.

In this respect African literature differs significantly from other modern literatures such as, say American literature. In Saul Bellow's Herzog, for example, the central figure is pitted against a world which makes his ideas and his attempts to cope with life irrelevant. He is not even playing on the side-lines of change. He has an entirely different game somewhere on the verge of insanity. It is in a way to avoid that kind of irrelevance and possible insanity that in Henderson the Rain King the central figure seeks rebirth and rejuvenation away from his usual habitat. He goes to Africa to find and understand himself. America has rendered him superfluous and irrelevant.

The best that has been written in Africa focuses on the problems and possibilities of change and these in turn have given us a number of phases through which Africa's written literature has passed. Four phases come readily to mind. These are:

(a) The phase of IDENTITY.

The works dominating this phase of African literature try to recapture and reinstate Africa's perceived identity in matters of culture, politics, law, economics and education. The reinstatement is often pursued as a hopeless task and a tragic realization that things can never be the same any more. At times, as in Bound to Violence by Yambo Oulogwem the writer lampoons all the efforts by both Africans and non-Africans to reinstate Africa's cultural heritage. The works which come readily to mind as prominent in the phase of identity are The African Child by Camara Laye, Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe, The River Between by Ngugi wa Thiang'o, The African by William Conton and the long poem Song of Lawino by Okot p'Bitek.

During the phase of identity the debate which dominates African literature is that concerning "negritude". This debate is to be found in most of the pages of literary and cultural journals such as Transition and Présence Africaine. The classical achievements of the "négritude" school of writing include Rene Maran's novel Batoula, Aimé Cesaire's long poem, Return To My Native Land, as well as the poetry and prose of Leopold Sedar Senghor who stands out as the chief "theoretician" of this school. The poetry of David and Birago Diop belongs to this school as does the novels Climbie by Bernard Dadie and, The Ambiguous Adventure by Cheikh Hamidou Kane. The latter novel carries the distinction of a deep reflective (some would say "philosophical") ambience which pits the Moslem and animist traditions of Africa against the hyperactive materialist ways of the West.

During the literary phase of identity the parallel development in political thinking is that of "the African personality" with the supposed concomitant economic concept of "African Socialism". Across the Atlantic came the concept of "black power". Later derivations of similar concepts in Africa include "authenticity", in Zaire and "black consciousness" in South Africa.

Undoubtedly the most perceptive critique of ideas on identity remains that of Frantz Fanon in The Wretched Of The Earth and in Black Skins White Masks. By linking perceptions of the self to the psychological scars of the oppressed and the material conditions of former colonies Fanon shows how theories on identity and artistic attempts at recapturing and reinstating Africa's lost glories are continually undermined by the deep-seated yearning of some members of the elite to assume and flaunt the mantle of Africa's former oppressors.

(b) The phase of PROTEST and CONFLICT

During this phase literature dramatises moments in the struggle against colonialism. The writer rekindles in his readers that fire of solidarity and single-minded devotion to a cause which characterised most of the struggles against colonialism. Here the modern African Writer is like the ancient griots who sang of the rise and fall of empires such as Mali and Songhai. The epic glories of ancient heroes is now to be seen in the heroism and solidarity of the characters in God's Bits Of Wood by Sembene Ousmane, Weep Not Child and A Grain Of Wheat by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and In The Fog of the Season's End by Alex la Guma. The writer does not create only heroes. He creates traitors and cowards also. More than that he does not show heroism and solidarity instantly leading Africa to a new Jerusalem. He shows survivors of the struggle beset by numerous personal disappointments and in some cases emotional and spiritual emptiness. What does change is history and the parameters within which further changes may be realised "The emergency destroyed us", says a character in Ngugi's novel A Grain Of Wheat. It is not surprising that after the phase of Protest And Conflict came the third phase, that of:

(c) Disillusionment

Here the writer musters his metaphorical resources to dramatise the corroding and corrupting effect of power and wealth among the elites. The most telling image used by a number of writers at this point is that of excrement. The Anglo-Irish satuist Jonathan Swift has been associated by critics with an "excremental vision". In Africa that vision has found its way into Ayi Kwei Armah's novel The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, Wole Soyinka's The Enterpreters and Nuruddin Farah's, A Naked Needle. Lesser achievements with a similar vision include Faustus Iyayi's Violence and The Contract. The world of these novels turns corruption into a kind of weird game of theft and robbing, a dance macabre where those who can as in Ngugi's Devil On The Cross will try to steal even the air we breathe. Chinua Achebe's A Man Of The People comes within this phase as does Ngugi's monumental work, Petals Of Blood.

(d) Phase of Exhortation and Satire

There is no way out of disillusionment except either revolution or satire. In a serious vein the writer is likely to point towards an alliance of workers and peasants as Ngugi does in Petals Of Blood. In a mixture of seriousness and light-hearted mockery a writer may dramatise an individual's exit from society through inner rebellion and madness. This is what Ayi Kwei Armah in Fragments and Kofi Awoonor in This Earth My Brother attempt to do. Most of the poetry of Southern Africa today combines elements of this call to arms and a devastating mockery of the present dispensation. In a less serious mood but with similarly devastating effect Sembene Ousmane's novel, The Last Of The Empire acts out the present phase of African literature which for want of a better term we may call the phase of Exhortation And Satire. We recognise by this term the writer's active participation in the surging tide of change and society's growing recognition of the writer's voice in the debates concerning change and development. We also recognise by this term "the cutting edge" which a writer's voice is likely to possess.

In the attempt to trace the phases through which modern African literature is passing, we become aware of the unspoken paradigms which literature embodies. We become aware of sophisticated critiques of change which are at the back of a writer's mind even if, as is usually the case, the writer does not consciously set out to give us such critiques. It is clear from all this that the phases we have been attempting to identify tend to overlap and interlock. What needs to be gained from their study is the formative value of literature, a value which even the Greek philosopher Plato recognised by banning literature from his ideal, proto-socialist republic. Behind literature's apparent negation lie certain affirmations. If "the beautiful ones are not yet born" we may reasonably look forward to the day when they will be born and "petals of blood" which were once healthy and green may be rid of insidious worms and regain their previous vitality provided that certain conditions are met.

A quarter of a century of modern African writing is probably not long enough to justify the phases through which it has passed. It seems to resemble the modern African state as seen by one of Ayi Kwei Armah's characters in The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born. It resembles a "man-child" who at a very tender age exhibits all the symptoms of old age. This closeness of modern African literature to contemporary social, political and economic realities on the continent means that critics have tended to be acutely aware of the dichotomy between recurrent themes and characteristic aesthetic forms.

Recurrent themes and characteristic techniques present the least problematic exercises in the study of African literature. They also yield the lowest number of insights into the relationship between creative writers and their societies. What needs to be carefully studied is our writers' "energising principle" as opposed to their "organising principles". We need to study that cluster of resources skills and tensions from which creative energy radiates. We need to find the top of the iceberg, the energy source from which creativity erupts into a multiplicity of themes and permutations of techniques. There is a "semiotic cluster" which enables a writer to perceive his/her surroundings in the way he/she does.

We speak of a "semiotic cluster" to denote the multiplicity of "signs" which are linked to build up one over-riding reality. Thus the symbolic burden of a novel could be "land" or it could be an abstract reality such as "wisdom" it could also be a measure of change such as "progress" or a state of existence such as "oppression". This paper speaks of "semiotic constants" to denote the recurrence of clusters of symbols, imagery, situations and tensions in the works of a single author. Such a recurrence is also linked to the author's perceptions. It has a great deal to do with the author's point of view. We will see in the following pages that point of view is also the author's perception of change. It is a view of history.

Consider the works of Chinua Achebe, especially those novels set in the past, viz, Things Fall Apart (1) and Arrow of God (2). Here a cultural dispensation which is on its way to disintegration is presented as being rich and self-contained. This cultural dispensation is neither glorified nor denigrated. it is there in all its strength and weaknesses. In its uses of leisure, its marriage customs, its exaltation how a game like wrestling links different communities in the land. When Okonkwo marries his third wife, a lady who deserts her first husband to follow Okonkwo's wrestling matches we see yet another aspect of life among the people of Umuofia. Valour and military prowess are also highly valued among these people and the glory of an Okonkwo who brings home five enemy heads before he reaches the age of twenty-one is only matched by his vanity as he drinks his palm-wine from the skull of one of his victims.

This is a culture in which strength and masculinity are admired. It is also one in which wisdom demands that those qualities be recognised as favours from divine benevolence. "When a man says, 'Yes', his Chi says 'Yes' also". Although Okonkwo has sweated to fill two barns with yams and has capped this achievement with marrying three wives and taking two titles, he is firmly reminded by one of the elders of his village that these achievements are favours from an indulgent personal god and that they should give Okonkwo no reason to look down on those who are less favoured than himself. It is true that a certain idyllic atmosphere surrounds Okonkwo's village but Achebe does not leave us with the impression that Umuofia is another Garden of Eden. What he does emphasise is the fullness of life within the confines of certain norms and values which guide the individual from the cradle to the grave. Achebe uses the strong points of this cultural dispensation as well as its weaknesses and the fissiparous tendencies within it to show us the internal agents of change within the land of the Igbos. It is these internal agents of change which will facilitate the disintegration brought about by Christianity and colonialism.

Consider the horror which the missionary Smith brings upon Umuofia when he unmasks the egwugwu or spirits of the ancestors. That horror from an outsider can be compared and contrasted with the horror brought about by Okonkwo when he disturbs the peace during a week of special religious observance. Then there is the prophecy which demands that a boy-hostage by the name of Ikemefuna be killed. Ikemefuna calls Okonkwo 'father' and has for all practical purposes come to be identified as Okonkwo's son. The scene in which Ikemefuna is killed becomes a further revelation of the very difficult demands made by culture on its adherents. Okonkwo has to stifle his humanity in order to take part in the killing of Ikemefuna. Wisdom had demanded that he finds a way of accepting the oracles' dictates without violating the bond of fatherhood which has grown up between him and Ikemefuna.

of valour and military prowess, its admiration of the wealth that comes from hard work, this cultural dispensation is shown to have its own rigidity and flexibility. This dispensation serves society well until the arrival of Christianity and colonialism. It has room for a personal god, chi, for a number of less important gods and their sacred icons as well as for an all- powerful and all-embracing god, Chukwu. In its cosmology, the physical and social worlds are both governed by male and female principles. Men and women can seek redress and/or reconciliation in civil cases, punishment for certain crimes and retribution for crimes that offend the recognised divinities of the land. Above all, this cultural dispensation has evolved not only its own philosophy or world-view but also a linguistic medium in which that world-view or collective wisdom of the group is conveyed. One of the lingering assertions in Achebe's first novel Things Fall Apart is that "proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten" (3). A look at the extensive use made of proverbs in Arrow of God would seem to indicate that even their analysis by Bernth Lindfors (4) and later Emmanuel Ngara (5) has not fully unearthed their significance in the world created by Chinua Achebe.

What the richness of the world Achebe has created does is that it provides us with a cluster of "signs" through which we are to follow the destiny of the central figure. Symbolism, imagery, idiom, and dramatic tensions are grouped around a concept with which the central figure must come to terms or be crushed by change. It is the concept of "wisdom". Men like Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart or Ezeulu in Arrow of God are called upon to so fully understand the strengths and weaknesses of their world that they can survive not only the inherent divisions and internal contradictions of that world but also its relentless assault by alien agents of change. Men like Okonkwo and Ezeulu must meet the new dispensation of missionaries and British colonial administrators without sacrificing the rich traditions of Umuaro. Achebe's heroes are pitted against a changing world and the extent to which they can influence or direct this change is the measure of their tragic stature. As Professor Abiola Irele puts it,

> *This use of an individual character as a symbolic receptacle, the living theatre of a social dilemma, is what gives Achebe's novels their real measure of strength...* (6).

In Things Fall Apart the attributes of a culture which is complete and self-contained are to be seen in the achievements and tribulations of the novel's main character, Okonkwo. We see the value attached to sportsmanship in Okonkwo's defeat of "Amalinze the Car". We also see

Achebe continually creates an environment with possibilities for individual fulfilment and social responsibility. His semiotic constants underpin the centrality of wisdom. Okonkwo falls short of this wisdom because he relies solely on physical prowess:

"Let us not reason like cowards", said Okonkwo, "If man comes into my hut and defaecates on the floor, what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No, I take a stick and break his head. That is what a man does..." (7).

True enough, that is what a man does but Okonkwo forgets or does not see that his world may sometimes require that a man who disfigures a people's way of life as the missionaries and colonialists do be handled with care. Okonkwo does not see that his universe does, indeed, value masculinity but does not regard masculinity as the be-all and end-all of life. Okonkwo's world is run on both male and female principles. When, for example, Okonkwo accidentally kills a man during the funeral celebrations for Ezeudu, that crime is regarded as a female crime. It is also an offense against the earth goddess - and it is punishable by seven years of exile. Okonkwo does not seek refuge among his paternal relations. He seeks refuge with his maternal uncle "for mother is supreme". The tragedy of Okonkwo continually brings home to the reader the importance of "balance" as a hallmark of wisdom. A wise man balances his attachment to both strength and weakness, and to the male principle as well as the female principle along which his universe is governed. Chinua Achebe's perception of change hangs on this balance.

The demand for balance as a mark of wisdom is made also on those who find themselves in a more chaotic and more confusing age of transition than that of Okonkwo. Obi Okonkwo of No Longer at Ease, is called upon to display such a balance. The title of Chinua Achebe's second novel compares and contrasts Obi Okonkwo its central character with the unnamed speaker in T.S. Eliot's poem, "The Journey of the Magi" who has taken part in a momentous journey which has changed his whole outlook on life:

"We returned to our places, these Kingdoms. But no longer at ease here in the old dispensation. With an alien people clutching their gods I should be glad of another death" (8).

When Obi Okonkwo returns from his studies in England he finds crass materialism and corruption engulfing his country. The Okonkwo of Things Fall Apart fails to maintain a balance between the opposing forces governing the cultural well-springs of his society. Obi

Okonkwo in No Longer at Ease fails to maintain a balance between his commitment to modernisation and to kinship. Modernisation comes with the dislocation of kinship structures and village taboos while kinship loyalties and family commitments tend to pave the way for corruption and moral turpitude. Obi despises and at the same time acquieces in the new dispensation around him. As Nadine Gordimer says we see Obi Okonkwo "extending himself docilely on the rack of bourgeois values taken over from the white man; values totally unreal in the economic and social conditions of that society"(9).

It is to underline the importance of wisdom in the new dispensation surrounding his hero that Achebe refers to Obi's simplicity in attire and speech as a mistake. What the mistake really stands for is Obi's failure to take into account to whom he is speaking and under what circumstances. To appear in one's shirt-sleeves when everyone else is sweating it out in three- piece suits or formal agbada should normally be applauded but Obi Okonkwo is being honoured by the Umuofia Progressive Union which financed his studies in England. For members of his Union the occasion is formal and deserves formal attire especially by the guest of honour. Misplaced simplicity becomes irreverence and lack of gratitude. Achebe is hinting at this ingratitude when he refers to Obi Okonkwo's attire as "Mistake Number One" (10). The address of welcome from the same Umuofia Progressive Union seems florid and convoluted Obi Okonkwo is probably not required to reply in the same convoluted and florid manner but he is expected to "rise up to the occasion", that is, treat the speech with the seriousness it deserves. His plain English is a kind of anti-climax:

"Education for service and not for white-collar jobs and comfortable salaries. With our great country on the threshold of independence, we need men who are prepared to serve her well and truly" (11).

This simple speech becomes "Mistake Number Two" (12). The irony against Obi Okonkwo is that although he returns from England with such confidence and courage he soon gets caught up in the mire of corruption and moral turpitude. He fails to stand up for the Nigeria of his original beliefs. He accepts bribes, cancels his engagement to the girl of his choice on the grounds that she is descended from a village outcast or Osu and frantically looks for an abortionist to undo the result of his love for this girl. There is a deeper irony in the fact that members of the Umuofia Progressive Union understand his problems better than Obi himself does. They rally around him and decide to engage a second lawyer to launch an appeal against Obi Okonkwo's conviction.

Obi Okonkwo falls short of the wisdom he needs to leave a mark on his country's history. He leaves no positive contribution to change. When he is interviewed for the post he later occupies at the Scholarships Office we are made to see a kind of premonition of things to come. The interviewers probe Obi Okonkwo's knowledge of English literature, in particular his knowledge of Graham Green's novel, The Heart of the Matter. There is a hint in Obi Okonkwo's contribution to this debate that his approach to change is too subjective, too personal to be meaningful to his society. He seems to have gone too deep into the existentialist thrust of Graham Green's novel to come up with something more public and more objective than the tangled passions and redeeming suicide which Graham Green's novel exalts. In practical everyday life Obi Okonkwo lacks real convictions. Unlike the Okonkwo of Things Fall Apart who commits suicide because the men of Umuofia will not fight for their gods and for their way of life, the Okonkwo of No Longer at Ease has no such values and no such way of life to fight for. It is only in a deeply ironical sense that his "uneasiness" with the old dispensation is compared with that of Eliot's wise men in The Journey of the Magi. Although Obi no longer accepts his peole's taboos (and his people's formality in dress and language!) he has seen nothing in the new dispensation for which he is ready to die. Even his love for the Osu Clara is expendable. The lines of William Butler Yeats come readily to mind:

"The best lack all convictions while the worst are full of passionate intensity" (13).

We have in Obi Okonkwo a kind of rebel seeking to influence change but lacking the inner resources of character to do so. Perhaps a Cambridge degree in English literature cannot provide its holder with the necessary wisdom to influence change. Perhaps such a qualification can only succeed in defining Obi Okonkwo's social class and in ensuring for him a place among the elite in the Nigerian civil service.

It is an interesting coincidence that the next intellectual Achebe associates with present-day Nigeria is as devoid of convictions as Obi Okonkwo. In Achebe's fourth novel, A Man of the People, the teacher Odili Samaru does not in the final analysis, differ from the corrupt and cynical Chief Nanga. The latter does flaunt his cynicism and his ill-gotten wealth and influence. Odili Samaru silently envies Nanga's comfort and is ready to throw in his lot with Chief Nanga:

"When I lay down in the double-bed that seemed to ride on a cushion of air, and switched on that reading lamp and saw all the beautiful furniture anew from the lying down position and looked beyond the door to the gleaning bathroom and the towels as large as lappa I had to confess that if I were made a minister at that moment I would be most anxious to remain one foreover" (14).

We may read this as the exaggeration of a man laughing at himself in a moment of enlightenment. We also need to remember that Odili Samaru has at that point already entrusted himself to the Byzantine ways of corruption by accepting Chief Nanga's intercession in the matter of his scholarship abroad. It is also remarkable that Odili Samaru does not break with Chief Nanga until the latter seduces his girl-friend in his presence and his hearing!

Odili Samaru's brief flirtation with political organisation is characterised by a similar lack of conviction and a naive approach to national issues. He is more interested in avenging a personal humiliation than in dealing with national problems. When he is appointed organising Secretary of a newly - formed party he devotes the best part of his time to courting Edna, Chief Nanga's fiancee and not to party programmes. When government falls to a military take-over Odili Samaru uses party funds to pay for the bride-price and educational expenses of the girl he snatches from Chief Nanga. In settling personal scores in this manner Odili Samaru is playing the same game of corruption which the deposed government was playing. Odili Samaru's convictions do not go beyond private and personal loyalties. His admiration for his friend Max stems less from that friend's political position than from the fact that Max had "inspired someone to come forward and shoot (his) murderer in the chest - without asking to be paid". The heroism being singled out for praise here has nothing to do with politics as such. Max is avenged by his girl-friend.

The complexity of contemporary Africa makes it difficult for the kind of heroism found in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God. We have in these two novels semiotic clusters pointing to a world of clear norms and values which everyone understands. In No Longer at Ease and A Man of the People the dominant signs point towards bewilderment and cynicism. Lagos is vibrant and chaotic; sacred associations in the countryside such as the hunters' guild in Chief Nanga's constituency no longer reserve their appearances for solemn religious rituals. They are now used for sychophantic praise - songs and praise-rituals for the new elite. Political debates become personality parades and competitions in mutual name-calling. The allocation of scarce national resources is reduced to a series of auctions for votes. Cynicism grips all sections of society and probity in public life becomes something altogether too refined and too ephemeral to be taken seriously. Perhaps new norms and new values are in the making. Perhaps ... As W.B. Yeats wrote:

"And what rough beast its hour come round at last Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born" (17).

Wisdom then demands that whoever is to influence change have the strength of character of the Okonkwo of Things Fall Apart as well as the intellectual clarity of Ezeulu in Arrow of God. Confused and weak intellectuals such as Obi Okonkwo in No Longer at Ease and Odili Samaru in A Man of the People will not do. The world of these two novels lacks abiding guidelines although in No Longer at Ease remnants of tradition do form a cohesive force among the members of the Umuofia Progressive Union. It would be idle to see in the creation of such a fictional world Achebe's abandonment of all criticism of society. Achebe is, above all, a moralist. His most quoted pronouncements on his own work do seem to bear this out:

Here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse - to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement... I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past - with all its imperfections - was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them (18).

Achebe is an advocate of our trying to understand the past before we can really build on the present:

The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost. There is a saying in Ibbo that a man who can't tell where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he dried his body. The writer can tell the people where the rain begin to beat them. After all the writer's duty is not to beat this morning's headline in topicality, it is to explore in depth the human condition. In Africa he cannot perform this task unless he has a proper sense of history (19).

This would explain why Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God are more accomplished novels than No Longer at Ease and A Man of the People. The metaphoric resources and dramatic skills building up the polity of Arrow of God show that the leadership is subject to a strenous accountability and that the society as a whole enjoys freedom of expression and impressive public debates on all issues confronting it. We are left with the feeling that the quality of leadership and the level of civic responsibility shown in Arrow of God surpasses anything to be seen in No Longer at Ease and A Man of the People. Twenty years ago Achebe wrote,

"The village code of conduct has been violated but a more embracing and bigger one has not been found" (20).

Achebe's third novel, Arrow of God goes deeper than showing a village code of conduct at work. It examines a particular model of leadership against the background of the gathering forces of disintegration brought about by internal and external agents of change. The particular model of leadership we are referring to is embodied in Ezeulu or Chief Priest of Ulu the god of Umuaro.

Ezeulu is far more subtle, far more intelligent than any other character in Arrow of God. In fact, he is the most intelligent and most engaging character in Chinua Achebe's novels. Ezeulu is endowed with an unusual foresight and an unassuming intellectual pride. While the Okonkwo of Things Fall Apart comes to a tragic end because he has followed only the dictates of physical strength and the fear of being thought weak, Ezeulu's "tragic flaw" is the dread of being ignored or being treated as unintelligent. When we first meet him Ezeulu is lonely. He is troubled by the divisions which have entered his society. When we last see him he is again lonely because the disintegration which has visited his society and especially his own family is way beyond his comprehension. We see him in his last days living "in the haughty splendour of a demented high priest" (21). When we first meet him, Ezeulu is ahead of his community. He understands what change really means and how it has to be handled. He sends one of his sons to the white man's church with the hope of capturing some of the white man's wisdom and magic:

It was five years since Ezeulu promised the white man that he would send one of his sons to church. But it was only two years ago that he fulfilled the promise. He wanted to satisfy himself that the white man had not come for a short visit but to build a house and live.

At first Oduche did not want to go to church. But Ezeulu called him *to his Obi and spoke to him as a man would speak to his best friend and the boy went forth with pride in his heart. He had never heard his father speak to anyone as an equal.*

'The world is changing', he had told him. 'I do not like it. But I am like the bird Eneke-nti-oba. When his friends asked him why he was always on the wing he replied: "Men of today have learnt to shoot without missing and so I have learnt to fly without perching". I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying _had we known_ *tomorrow'* (22).

When his son shows signs of being over-zealous about the white man's religion Ezeulu brings out an appropriate proverb of caution:

"When a handshake goes beyond the elbow we know that it has become something else" (23).

What we see in Ezeulu's wisdom is the ability not only to change with the times but also to detect the weaknesses and strengths of every prevailing wind.

Ezeulu serves a god who has been created in man's own image, a god who is set up by the six villages of Umuaro to protect them against the warriors of Abame. This god is in many ways the voice of the clan. _Vox populi, vox dei_, as they used to say in Rome. The saying which continually reminds us of this relationship between the priest as an individual and the priest as a spokeman of the clan is that "no man, however great can win judgment against a clan" (24) and that "no man however great was greater than his people" (25). Ezeulu is also seen as "half-man and half-spirit" (26). This definition recognises his individual will as well as his responsibility to the society of Umuaro as a whole. There is a rule of law under which he must exercise his power and the margin of discretion which that rule of law allows is ultimately dependent on the general feeling of the clan. To a man of Ezeulu's intellect and foresight this "constitutional" point is a continual source of tension. It appears at the opening of the novel and returns with every major crisis. At the opening of the novel, this tension is seen in terms of "power":

Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year *and the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin leaves and for the New Yam feast; but he did not choose it. He was merely watchman. His power was no more than the power of a child over a goat that was said to be his as long as the goat was alive it could be his; he would find it food and take care of it. But the day it was slaughtered he would know soon enough who the real owner was. No! the Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival - no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? No Chief Priest had ever refused. So it could not be done. He would not dare.*

Ezeulu was stung to anger by this as though his enemy had spoken it.

'Take away that word dare', he replied to this enemy. 'Yes I say take it away. No man in all Umuaro can stand up and say that I dare not. The woman who will bear the man who will say it has not been born yet'.

But this rebuke brought only momentary satisfaction. His mind never contents with shallow satisfactions crept again to the brinks of knowing. What kind of power was it if it would never be used? Better to say that it was not there, that it was no more than the power in the anus of the proud dog who sought to put out a furnace with his puny fart... (27).

The cumulative effect of the symbols, images, and dramatic tensions surrounding Ezeulu is the inevitable collision between his price and his persistent doubts about the nature of his power. Ezeulu's intelligence and foresight are beyond doubt, but they also go hand in hand with an intellectual pride, a haughty and sarcastic manner and an unbridled vanity. Ezeulu enjoys showing off his physical strength especially to young men:

"There was one game Ezeulu never tired of playing on them. When they shook hands with him he tensed his arm and put all his power into the grip, and being unprepared for it they winced and recoiled with pain" (28).

In the discussion in which he reveals to his friend Akuebue the fact that he has sent his own son to the white man as sacrifice for the good of the clan, Ezeulu also refers to himself as "Known and... Unknowable, "a man ordained to advise and lead his clan:

"I can see tomorrow; that is why I can tell Umuaro: come out from

this because there is death there or do this because there is profit in it. *If thereby listen to me, o-o; if they refuse to listen, o-o. I have passed the stage of dancing to receive presents*" (29).

When pushed into a corner, especially by the kind of rumours spread about him and his household following his son's imprisonment of a sacred python, Ezeulu is apt to hurl defiance and abuses at his opponents. The following altercation will give us a clearer picture of the kind of abuse Ezeulu can throw at his enemies:

It was a day of annoyance for the Chief Priest - one of those days when it seemed he had woken up on the left side. As if he had not borne enough vexation already he was now visited, at sunset, by a young man from Umunneora. Because of the hostility between Ezeulu's village and Umunneora he did not offer the man kola nut lest he should have a belly-ache later and attribute it to Ezeulu's hospitality. The man did not waste much time before he gave his message.
'I am sent by Ezidemili'.
'True? I trust he is well'.
'He is well', replied the messenger. 'But at the
same time he is not'.

'I do not understand you'. Ezeulu was now very alert. 'If you have a message, deliver it because I have no time to listen to a boy learning to speak in riddles'.

The young man ignored the insult. 'Ezidemili wants to know what you are going to do about the abomination which has been committed in your house'.
'That what happened?' asked the Chief Priest,
holding his rage firmly with two hands.

'Should I repeat what I have just said?'
'Yes'.
'All right. Ezidemili wants to know how you intend to purify your house of the abomination that your son committed'.

'Go back and tell Ezidemili to eat shit. Do you hear me? Tell Ezidemili that Ezeulu says he should go and fill his mouth with shit. As for you, young man, you may go in peace because the world is no longer what it was. If the world had been what it was I would have given you something to remind you always of the day you put your

head into the mouth of a leopard'. The young man wanted to say something but Ezeulu did not allow him.

'If you want to so something with your life, take my advice and say not another word here'. Ezeulu rose threateningly to his full height; the young man decided to heed his advice and rose to go (29).

Ezeulu's arch - enemy, Nwaka is boastful in a crude way and his intellectual contribution to the challenges facing his society does not bear too much scrutiny:

"Wisdom is like a goat skin bag. Every man carries his own" (30).

Ezeulu's mind is sharp, alert. All the proverbs associated with him are richly metaphorical and invariably deep and witty.

Unfortunately Ezeulu fails his society in the hour of its greatest need. His intellect and his pride lead him astray from the wisdom we have all along associated with him. That wisdom would have shown him that his arrest and the events leading up to it meant that the times are unusual and that such times demand unusual decisions. After all, "a disease that has not been seen before cannot be cured with everyday herbs" (31). It is one of Achebe's most dramatic ironies that soon after Ezeulu has stubbornly insisted on consulting his god before acceding to the suggestion of the elders sent to him that he accomodates his priestly practices to the changing times one of the elders "deftly steered the conversation to the subject of change".

He gave numerous examples of customs that had been altered in the past when they began to work hardship on the people. They all talked at length about these customs which had either died in full bloom or had been still-born. Nnanyelugo reminded them that even in the matter of taking titles there had been a change. Long, long ago there had been a fifth title in Umuaro - the title of king. But the conditions for its attainment had been so severe that no man had ever taken it, one of the conditions being that the man aspiring to be king must first pay the debts of every man and every woman in Umuaro. Ezeulu said nothing throughout this discussion (32).

The Ezeulu we see at the beginning of the novel would have risen to the occasion and accepted there elders' counsel. The one we see later is an embittered man who confuses his own thirst for vengeance with the will of his god which; as all the "songs" of the novel indicate is the will of the people of Umuaro.

Achebe shows how a brilliant but headstrong leadership comes unstuck by that elusive but all - important discretion which the polity of Umuaro allows it. The opportunity for influencing change is missed - as the leadership is isolated and left behind by the surging tide of change. In Things Fall Apart, the man who lags behind his time commits suicide and becomes a footnote in a District Officer's intended book, ironically called, The Pacification of the Lower Niger (33). Such an ending is quite in keeping with the complete trust Okonkwo places on physical prowess. In Arrow of God the man who is overtaken by change ends in keeping with his greatest gift and his characteristic weakness. He is a proud intellectual whom we leave "in the haughty of splendour of a demented priest" (34). He is ignored by the followers of his god as they flock to join his adversaries, the Christians. A god who is created in man has no business inflicting inhuman sufferings on his followers.

Ezeulu's interpretation of his god's will bring the people of Umuaro to the verge of dire famine and the way Ezeulu is quickly transformed into "an enemy of the people" is one of the dramatic high points of Arrow of God. The people of Umuaro are concerned with the immediate issues of an impending famine. Chinua Achebe allows us his readers to be more concerned with a deeper problem surrounding Ezeulu, whose religion treats him as "half-man and half-spirit" (35). In such a religion spiritual exercises are of necessity the dramatic or "liturgical" expressions of the material needs of society. Heaven and earth become two faces of one and the same coin. An organic unity runs through all the activities of society and a festival such as, "The Feast of the Pumpkin Leaves" or "The Festival of New Yam" are both spiritual, agricultural, economic and political. When he insists on regarding the "New Yam Festival" as a purely spiritual function to be decided between the god Ulu and his priest, Ezeulu breaks the organic unity that governs life in Umuaro. He divorces a dramatic expression of the people's needs from the needs themselves. He is unwittingly embracing the dichotomy which governs the lives of his religious adversaries, the Christians. It is the dichotomy of body and soul. He allows the white man's handshake to become an embrace. This is the same Ezeulu who earlier on warns the son he has sent to the white man's religion, "when a handshake goes beyond the elbow we know that it has become something else" (36).

In looking at the failure of Ezeulu's model of leadership we are also looking at the multi-faceted debate going on in Arrow of God. It is the debate concerning change. We have already noted how intelligent Ezeulu is. We may add at this point that Ezeulu's contribution to the debate about change makes everyone else's contribution look like gropings in the dark. The central structure of this novel is that of a debate. We keep shifting from one point of view to another. The people of Umuaro are concerned not only with the land-hunger which leads to the fight against Okperi but also and especially with the activities of the Christians and the colonial administrators. How are these people to be handled? How do we deal with change?

The Christians are holding their own debate within the great debate about change. Here the position of Moses Unachunkwu who pleads for as little interference as possible with local customs is opposed to that of Good country and Ezeulu's zealous son, Oduche, who wants to confront local culture head-on and, if possible, uproot it. A similar debate goes on among the colonial administrators who have been asked to implement the policy of indirect rule by appointing "warrant chiefs". Ezeulu loses this debate because he abandons his original contribution, that of adapting to change wisely and intelligently.

We are back to our original premise. The "energising principle" in Achebe's novels is his concept of wisdom. It is what all the semiotic clusters and the idiom of works such as Arrow of God overwhelmingly enhance.

The idiom of Arrow of God is a complex interplay of the English of colonial administrators such as Winterbottom, the narrative simplicity of the omniscient narrator with the proverbs and truisms of the people of Umuaro (37). More work remains to be done on proverbs and it is not necessary to share the view of both Herskovits and Bernth Lindfors who see proverbs as "the grammar of values" of the African people (38). In Arrow of God the validity of these proverbs is tested against the ravages of time and against their ability to guide their users in the age of transition from one socio- political dispensation to another. How meaningful are proverbs in dealing with change? Before Ezeulu's son Obika collapses to his death in a marathon which forms part of the rites of a funeral of one of the elders of Umuaro, his mind moves from one proverb to another. For a stretch of close to three pages the novel rings with proverbs (39). Achebe's scrupulous concern with "wisdom" comes into its own here. We are indirectly taken back to the debate running through the novel and are reminded of the fact that the ambience of Arrow of God is a deeply intellectual one.

Achebe himself has said that Arrow of God is the one novel which he is most likely "to be caught sitting down to read again" (40). In the view of this paper Achebe may well have sensed that in Arrow of God he has given us something worth treasuring. He has a towering contribution to the many ideas on change and development. He has fully substantiated his contention that "it would be futile to try and take off before we have repaired our foundations" (41). The strides made by peoples who have retained the best in their cultures would also seem to bear out Achebe's saying that, "Sophistication is no substitute for a spiritual search for one's roots" (42).

When we move from Chinua Achebe to Ngugi wa Thing'o we again find a writer who is greatly concerned with change but whose semiotic constants are centred not on "wisdom" as such but on the material basis of wisdom, which in the Kenyan context and in the perception of Ngugi means land. It is interesting to note that although in Achebe's novels land is important and causes the war which gives us some of the dramatic tension in Arrow of God, land as such does not form the basis of the conflict between the indigenous people of Umuaro and the external agents of change, the missionaries and colonial administrators. The difference in the use made of land by Achebe and Ngugi may be ascribed to the differences in the mode and aims of colonisation between Kenya and Nigeria. Permanent settlement does not feature in the brief of the colonisers in Nigeria, while in Kenya it formed an integral part of colonial policy. Ime Ikiddeh has outlined the major landmarks in the alienation of peasant land which forms the background to Ngugi's work (43). We will now explore the way in which Ngugi clusters his symbols, images, and dramatic tensions around this very issue of land.

In the works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o land is presented as the concrete origin of creation myths. It is also the pivot of history. In The River Between (44) the people of Makuyu are united in a secret society which is ultimately dedicated to the recovery of lands taken over by missionaries and colonial settlers. it is this same alienation of their lands by colonial settlers which leads to the Mau Mau war in Weep Not Child (45) and A Grain of Wheat (46). In Petals of Blood (47) land is the concrete sign of the inequalities and lop-sided development plaguing Kenya. The play I Will Marry When I Want (48) is built around the exploitation of poor peasants by a land-owning class which uses sanctimonious wiles to take away from the poor peasant even that little which he thinks he has. The robber-barons of Devil on the Cross (49) have mortgaged virtually whatever the land has or can produce, including air and water for the small profit margin they receive from their international business associates. In Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary (50), Ngugi links what he sees as the malaise of present-day Kenya to the colonial "culture of legalised brutality, a ruling-class culture of fear, the culture of an oppressing minority desperately trying to impose total silence on a restive oppressed majority" (51). That colonial culture was based on the possession of vast areas of Kenyan real estate by a few colonists who might otherwise have remained nonentities in their own country. In the Kenya of 1920-30's Margery Perham saw ordinary Britons who could "live in sunlight... and have the intoxicating sense of belonging to a small ruling aristocracy..."(52).

In The River Between land is the issue on which Waiyaki's leadership is tested and found wanting. Waiyaki has rallied the people of Makuyu and Kameno around his enthusiasm for education. This enthusiasm for education binds Waiyaki from the realisation that education needs a material purpose which in the context of Makuyu and Kameno means the recovery by Waiyaki's followers of the lands lost to missionaries, colonial settlers and the colonial government. That is why the reconciliation which Waiyaki preaches, that between Makuyu who accepts Christianity and Kameno who does not, is understood by Waiyaki's enemies as an accomodation with the forces which are alienating the land from the people of Makuyu and Kameno. Instead of the reconciliation which Waiyaki preaches, "a Kiama" or secret society is formed to work "for the purity of the tribe" and the recovery of lost lands. Ironically this secret society uses Waiyaki's name and oaths are taken "in the name of the Teacher". It is Waiyaki's politically astitute friend Kinuthia who brings home to Waiyaki the anomaly in which Waiyaki finds himself:

"You are the symbol of the tribe, born again with all its purity. They adore you. They worship you. You do not know about the oath. You have been too busy. But they are taking the new oath in your name. In the name of the Teacher and the purity of the tribe" (53).

There would have been no anomaly in Waiyaki's position had he been clear on the purpose of the education around which he has rallied his followers. We have here a case of the leadership having to be led by the followers. The organisers of the Kiama knew what they want:

"At home the Kiama was getting more and more power over the people. The cry that started the new schools was again taken up. Keep the tribe pure. And people listened to them because they did not want the tribe

to die. And the Kiama wanted to fight for the land which had now been taken by the settler, the missionary and the government" (54).

Waiyaki attempts to reconcile people on a spiritual basis only. We see the development of his understanding of the essence of both Christianity and Kikuyu culture. The Christianity preached by the missionaries of his day is found wanting because it does not take into account what the people already have as values. It ignores "spots of beauty and truths in their way of life" (55). Such a religion "would only maim a man's soul making him fanatically cling to whatever promised security, otherwise he would be lost" (56). On the question of circumcision he recognises the importance of image and fulfilment which aspects of culture, however cruel they may appear, bring to the individual:

"Circumcision of women was not important as a physical operation. It was what it did inside a person... If the white man's religion made you abandon a custom and then did not give you something else of equal value, you became lost..." (57).

All this understanding of religion is quite correct as far as it goes but as a leader Waiyaki is called upon to understand religion in an even wider context than he does. He needs to understand it in relation to the burning question of the lands lost to government, to missionaries and to the settlers. That understanding demands political action. It is only at the last minute when he is about to be tried for breaking his oath with the Kiama" that he realises the essence of what his followers really want. They want unity and the unity should be for political action:

"May be one day he would join forces with the men from Muranga, Kiamba and Myeri and with one voice tell the white man "Go!" And all at once Waiyaki realised what the ridges wanted. All at once he felt more forcefully than he had ever felt before the shame of a people's land being taken away, the shame of being forced to work on those same lands, the humiliation of paying taxes for a government that you knew nothing about" (58).

The River Between has been interpreted by most critics as the story of the clash between Christianity and traditional religion as represented by the two villages of Makuyu and Kameno. If we study the novel along the lines of semiotic clusters and semiotic constants it is not enough to see what individual symbols or images or dramatic tensions represent. We will need to go beyond individual images to the collective impression which all the metaphoric resources or "signs" of the novel leave on the reader. The novel is set in a clearly defined area which has ridges, valleys, and a "river of life", called Honia. Boys and girls are growing up in the ways of their tribe. They look after cattle, play, wrestle, fight, draw water from the river and generally follow the self-contained life of their culture. Divisions come with foreign agents of change of whose arrival the prophet Mufo spoke. There are sacred groves and some points where the land can be seen in its totality. The heart of the indigenous culture is the prophecy which gives the land of the Gikuyu people to the first man (Gikuyu) and the first woman (Mumbi). God takes these two to the highest point in the land and says to them:

"This land I give to you, O man and woman. It is yours to rule and till, you and your posterity" (59).

At the heart of the semiotic cluster of man set in a fertile land is this god-given bond between man and his land. The prophecies of Mugo the seer are all related to this bond. Mugo prophecies that:

'There shall come a people with clothes like butterflies' (60).

Waiyaki's father who sees himself as a successor to Mugo but who does not consider himself a saviour whispers Mugo's prophecy to his son:

"Salvation shall come from the hills" (61).

We therefore see that the rivalry between Christianity and traditional religion which the ridges of Makuyu and Kameno represent ultimately takes second place to Ngugi's recurrent concern, that is, the bond between man and his land which the colonial government, the settlers and the missionaries break. On this point the most perceptive observation is that of Professor D.G. Killam who says that Ngugi's fiction is "a systematic fictional examination of the consequences of the alienation of the people from their land, thus effectively from life" (62).

In Weep Not Child the importance of this dehumanisation by means of removal of people from their land is voiced by the peasant Ngotho:

And yet he felt the loss of the land even more keenly than Boro, for to him it was a spiritual loss. When a man was severed from the land of his ancestors where would he sacrifice to the Creator? How could he *come into contact with the founder of the tribe, Gikuyu and Mumbi?* (63).

The words of Ngotho here echo those of Kenyatta in his book, Facing Mount Kenya:

> *Communion with the ancestral spirits is perpetuated through contact with the soil in which the ancestors of the tribe lie buried. The Gikuyu consider the earth as the 'mother' of the tribe, for the reason that the mother bears her burden for about eight or nine moons while the child is in her womb, and then for a short period of suckling. But it is the soil that feeds the child through a lifetime; and again after death it is the soil that nurses the spirit of the dead for eternity. Thus the earth is the most sacred thing above all that dwell in or on it. Among the Gikuyu the soil is especially honoured, and an everlasting oath is to swear by the earth* (64).

Kenyatta goes further. He sees the alienation of a people's land as an agent of family and tribal disintegration:

> *When the European comes to the Gikuyu country and robs the people of their land, he is taking away not only their livelihood, but the material symbol that holds family and tribe together (65).*

Weep Not Child puts the issue of land at the heart of war, class, and childhood. Land is the central figure of this novel. Every cluster of metaphoric resources ultimately leads us to the question of land. Every character is defined and defines himself/herself in relation to land. That accumulation of property by a few people which enters its flowering stage in Petals of Blood begins in Weep Not Child where we see a few Africans who have been allowed to grow cash crops like pyrethrum.

In the very first chapter of Weep Not Child land is used to indicate the inequalities 'separating black people from white people:

> *You could tell the land of black people because it was red, rough and sickly, while the land of the white settlers was green and was not lacerated into small strips* (66).

In later works Ngugi still uses the land in this manner but it no longer separates white people from black people but rich people from poor people, exploiters from the exploited. In later novels land becomes one gigantic symbol of the uneven development taking place in Kenya. In Weep Not Child we are still looking at how the colonial government and colonial settlers use land to reward their supporters such as Jacob who then enters a certain class of Africans who are allowed to grow cash crops such as pyrethrum and are thereby given a start on the "rat-race" of capital accumulation which we find in Petals of Blood and Devil on the Cross. Land in Weep Not Child also becomes a symbol of the unequal treatment given to those white men and black men who fought for the British during the First and Second World Wars. Black people return to Kenya to find that their lands have been taken by the colonial government and given to British settlers returning from the same wars in which blacks fought on the side of the British. The experience of the peasant Ngotho is as painful as that of his son Boro. Ngotho is conscripted by the British when he is very young:

'Then came the war. It was the first big war. I was then young, a mere boy, although circumcised. All of us were taken by the force. We made roads and cleared the forest to make it possible for the warring white men to move more quickly. The war ended. We were all tired. We came home worn out but very ready for whatever the British might give us as a reward. But more than this, we wanted to go back to the soil and court it to yield, to create, not to destroy. But Ng'o! The land was gone. My father and many others had been moved from our ancestral lands. He died lonely, a poor man waiting for the white man to go. Mugo had said this would come to be. The white man did not go and he died a Muhoi on this very land' (67).

The disillusionment which befalls Ngotho is the same as that which befalls his son Boro. Ngotho works for a white farmer because the white farmer occupies Ngotho's ancestral lands and for Ngotho it is just possible that Mugo's prophecy of "salvation coming from the ridges" might be fulfilled and the ancestral lands might return to their rightful owners. For Boro there is no such hope. His is one of the bitterest experiences we see in Weep Not Child:

Boro thought of his father who had fought in the war only to be dispossessed. He too had gone to war, against Hitler. He had gone to Egypt, Jerusalem and Burma. He had seen things. He had often escaped death narrowly. But the thing he could not forget was the death of his step-brother, Mwangi. For whom or for what had he died?

When the war had come to an end, Boro had come home, no longer a boy but a man with experience and ideas, only to find that for him there was to be no employment. There was no land on which he could *settle, even if he had been able to do so. As he listened to this story, all these things came into his mind with a growing anger.*

How could these people have let the white man occupy the land without acting? And what was all this superstitious belief in a prophecy?

In a whisper that sounded like a shout, he said, 'To hell with prophecy'.

Yes, this was nothing more than a whisper. To his father, he said, 'How can you continue working for a man who has taken your land? How can you go on serving him?

He walked out, without waiting for an answer (68).

Ngugi shows through Boro's experiences the way in which a bitter landless proletariat is being created in Kenya and how such a "proletariasation" creates dedicated warriors for the Mau Mau movement. The irony which Ngugi builds into his later works particularly into Petals of Blood is that independent Kenya now dominated by businessmen and party stalwarts treats former Mau Mau fighters in much the same way as the colonial government and the colonial settlers treated the black soldiers who fought for them in the two World Wars. In Petals of Blood we see one such former Mau Mau fighter now a cripple who is callously treated by the new dispensation:

> *'I waited for land reforms and redistribution.*
> *'I waited for a job.*
> *'I waited for a statue to Kimathi as a memorial to the fallen.*
> *'I waited...*
> *'Still I waited.*

'I heard that they were giving out loans for people to buy out European farms. I did not see why I should buy lands already bought by the blood of the people. Still I went there. They told me: this is new Kenya. No free things. Without money you cannot buy land: and without land and property you cannot get a bank loan to start business or buy land. It did not make sense. For when we were fighting, did we ask that only those with property should fight? (69).

In Weep Not Child Ngugi has made land the point of reference of every character's hopes and fears. Land has become "the be-all and end-all" of human existence. Land fuels the antagonisms between black and white and between those black who own land and those who own nothing.

Ironically land generates an intense and passionate attachment to itself in people on both sides of the colour line as well as on both sides of the economic divide. To the colonial settler Howlands land has become a kind of god taking precedence over wife and children :

"He seemed to worship the soil. At times he went on for days with nothing but a few cups of tea. His one pleasure was in contemplating and planning the land to which he had now given all his life" (70).

Land enables Howlands to forget his terrible experiences in the First World War. Land gives him a sense of fulfilment, of having done something with his life. But this is the very land on which Ngotho works hoping for the fulfilment of Mugo's prophecy. Ngotho is therefore as intensely and passionately attached to the same lands as Howlands. That is the irony Ngugi achieves by showing us Howlands and Ngotho together inspecting the land they love so much:

They went from place to place, a white man and a black man. Now and then they would stop here and there, examine a luxuriant green tea plant, or pull out a weed. Both men admired this shamba. For Ngotho felt responsible for whatever happened to this land. He owed it to the dead, the living and the unborn of his line, to keep guard over this shamba. Mr Howlands always felt a certain amount of victory whenever he walked through it all. He alone was responsible for taming this unoccupied wildness. They came to a raised piece of ground and stopped. The land sloped gently to rise again into the next ridge and the next. Beyond Ngotho could see the African Reserve.

'You like all this? Mr Howlands asked absent-mindly. He was absorbed in admiring the land before him'.

'It is the best land in all the country', Ngotho said emphatically. He meant it. Mr Howlands sighed. He was wondering if Stephen would ever manage it after him.

'I don't know who will manage it after me...'.

Ngotho's heart jumped. He too was thinking of his children. Would

the prophecy be fulfilled soon?
'Kwa nini Bwana. Are you going back to-?'.
'No', Mr. Howlands said, unnecessarily loudly.
'... Your home, home...'
My home is here!'.

Ngotho was puzzled. Would these people never go? But had not the old Gikuyu seer said that they would eventually return the way they had come? And Mr Howlands was thinking, would Stephen really do? He was not like the other one. He felt the hurt and the pain of loss.

'The war took him away'.

Ngotho had never known where the other son had gone to. Now he understood. He wanted to tell of his own son: he longed to say, 'you took him away from me'. But he kept quiet. Only he thought Mr. Howlands should not complain. It had had been his war (71).

We are shown Ngotho's attachment to the lands of his ancestors quite early on in the novel when Ngugi uses a fireside story-telling session to introduce the creation myth which we heard of in The River Between. In Weep Not Child the dramatic tension with which the myth is revealed shows that we are coming to grips with one of the central themes of the novel:

'...There was wind and rain. And there was also thunder and terrible lightning. The earth and the forest around Kerinyaga shook. The animals of the forest whom the Creator had recently put there were afraid. There was no sunlight. This went on for many days so that the whole land was in darkness. Because the animals could not move, they just sat and moaned with wind. The plants and trees remained dumb. It was, our elders tell us, all dead except for the thunder, a violence that seemed to strangle life. It was this dark night whose depth you could not measure, not you or I can conceive of its solid blackness, which would not let the sun pierce through it.

'But in this darkness, at the foot of Kerinyaga, a tree rose. At first it was a small tree and grew up, finding a way even through the darkness. It wanted to reach the light, and the sun. This tree had Life. It went up, up, sending forth the rich warmth of a blossoming tree - you know a holy tree in the dark night of thunder and moaning. This was Mukuyu, God's tree. Now, you know that at the beginning of things there was only one man (Gikuyu) and one woman (Mumbi). It

was under this Mukuyu that he first put them. And immediately the sun rose, and the dark night melted away. The sun shone with a warmth that gave life and activity to all things. The wind and lightning and thunder stopped. The animals stopped wondering and moved. They no longer moaned but gave homage to the Creator and Gikuyu and Mumbi. And the Creator who is also called Murungu took Gikuyu and Mumbi from his holy mountain. He took them to the country of ridges near Siriana and there stood them on a big ridge before he finally took them to Mukuruwe wa Gathanga about which you have heard so much. But he had shown them all the land - yes, children, God showed Gikuyu and Mumbi all the land and told them:

"This land I hand over to you. O Man and Woman It's yours to rule and till in serenity sacrificing Only to me, your God, under my sacred tree...".

new Kingdom with Murungu. He wished he had been there to stand near Him in His holy place and survey all the land. Njoroge could not help exclaiming.

'Where did the land go?'
Everyone looked at him.

'... I am old now. But I too have asked that question in waking and sleeping. I've said, "What happened, O Murungu, to the land which you gave to us? Where, O Creator, went our promised land?". At times I've wanted to cry or harm my body to drive away the curse that removed us from the ancestral lands. I ask, "Have you left your children naked, O Murungu" (72).

The passion which Ngotho puts into the telling of this story explains the hope that keeps him working as a sharecropper. He sincerely believes that his ancestral lands will revert to him or his heirs. When that hope seems to be thwarted by the repression that follows the strike he enters the Mau Mau war. Ironically Howlands joins the colonial government to punish Mau Mau for standing between him and the land he loves. His one hope is that during his work as a District Officer he will come into contact with Ngotho and really punish him for joining forces with those who want to take the land away from Howlands:

Mr Howlands felt that soon he would come to grips with Ngotho. Ngotho was his foe. But Mr Howlands could not explain to himself why he always waived plans to bring Ngotho to a submissive *humiliation yet this was what he wanted. This would be the crowning glory of his career before his triumphal return to farming life. Meanwhile he would resist all Jacob's moves to have Ngotho arrested just now... (73).*

Howlands savours his expected revenge against Ngotho who in Howlands' mind had now betrayed an unspoken but sacred bond between himself, Howlands and the soil. Ngotho, as far as Howlands is concerned should have been content to remain a part of Howlands' farm like the vegetation, the weather, the farm animals who no doubt matter but whom no settler in his right mind would care to regard as human:

He had been called upon to take up a temporary appointment as a District Officer. He had agreed. But only because this meant defending his god. If Mau Mau claimed the only thing he believed in, they would see! Did they want to drive him back to England, the forgotten land? They were mistaken. Who were black men and Mau Mau anyway, he asked for the thousandth time? Mere savages! A nice word-savages. Previously he had not thought of them as savages or otherwise, simply because he had not thought of them at all, except as a part of the farm - the way one thought of donkeys or horses in his farm except that in the case of donkeys and horses one had to think of their food and a place for them to sleep. The strike which had made him lose Ngotho and now brought about the emergency had forced him to think, to move out of his shell. But they all would pay for this! Yes, he would wring from every single man the last man the last drop till they had all been reduced to nothingness, till he had won a victory for his god. The Mau Mau had come to symbolize all that which he had tried to put aside in life. To conquer it would give him a spiritual satisfaction, the same sort of satisfaction he had got from the conquest of his land. He was like a lion that was suddenly woken from his liar (74).

In Weep Not Child man's attachment to the land helps us to understand some of the ferocity with which the Mau Mau war was fought. It also helps us to understand some of the residual elements of colonialism as well as the inequalities and lopsided development which Ngugi attacks in Petals of Blood, Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary Devil on the Cross and I Will Marry When I Want. The Trial of Dedan Kimathi opens with peasants being forced to work on colonial settlers' farms and among "the tempters" who want to lure away Dedan Kimathi from his goal of genuine independence are bankers whose real power resides in the ownership of vast acres of land.

A Grain of Wheat would appear to be the one novel where Ngugi does not group his "signs" around the land. Such a reading would need to explain quite a few things in the novel. This writer has already had occasion to disagree with this kind of reading in a comparative study of Ngugi and Joseph Conrad (75). The time has now come for a more extended discussion of the reading being followed in this paper.

The title of the novel comes from the biblical quotation:

"Thou fool that which thou sawest is not quickened, except it die. And that which thou sawest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain" (76).

In the context of A Grain of Wheat this quotation refers to the suffering and martydom of many Kenyans who fought for independence. The emergency destroyed us "says one of the minor characters, Githua, to Mugo, the centre of the novel's action" (77). Clearly suffering and destruction are implied in the title. Clearly also fermentation and germination are equally implied and the base of this germination is the soil. We first see Mugo wrestling with the soil. We last see him being taken away for trial by those who fought for the land.

The author's note to A Grain of Wheat is important in this regard. Besides carrying the conventional disclaimer concerning the identity of characters and places the note says:

Names like that of Jomo Kenyatta and Waiyaki are unavoidably mentioned as part of the history and institutions of our country. But the situation and the problems are real - sometimes too painfully real for the peasants who now see all that they fought for being put on one side (78).

Basic to "all that they fought for" is the question of land. Land burns in the background of all the sufferings and brutalities of the Mau Mau war. In chapter 2 of A Grain of Wheat Ngugi traces the history of the Party: from the arrival of the first missionaries to the day of independence:

Nearly everybody was a member of the Party, but nobody could say with any accuracy when the Party was born: to most people, especially those in the younger generation, the Party had always been there, a *rallying centre for action. It changed names, leaders came and went, but the Party remained, opening new visions, gathering greater and greater strength, till on the eve of Uhuru, its influence stretched from one horizon touching the sea to the other resting on the great Lake* (79).

The popularity of the party is linked to the alienation of the land both by the missionaries and the colonial settlers. The Waiyaku who takes up arms against colonialism is different from Ngugi's hero in The River Between. We are here introduced to the historical Waiyaki who is alarmed by both the zeal of the newly converted Christians and the expansion of missionary work which involves the alienation of more land and the coming of more colonial settlers:

The few who were converted, started speaking a faith foreign to the ways of land. They trod on sacred places to show that no harm could reach those protected by the hand of the Lord. Soon people saw the whiteman had imperceptibly acquired more land to meet the growing needs of his position. He had already pulled down the grass-thatched hut and erected a more permanent building. Elders of the land protested. They looked beyond the laughing face of the whiteman and suddenly saw a long line of other red strangers who carried, not the Bible, but the sword.

Waiyaki and other warrior-leaders took arms. The iron snake spoken of by Mugo wa Kibiro was quickly wriggling towards Nairobi for a thorough exploitation of the hinterland. Could they move it? The snake held on to the ground, laughing their efforts to scorn. The whiteman with bamboo poles that vomited fire and smoke, hit black; his menacing laughter remained echoing in the hearts of the people, long after Waiyaki had been arrested and taken to the coast, bound hands and feet. Later so it is said, Waiyaki was buried alive at Kibwezi with his head facing into the centre of the earth, a living warning to those, who, in after years, might challenge the hand of the Christian woman whose protecting shadow now bestrode both land and sea.

Then nobody noticed it; but looking back we can see that Waiyaki's blood contained within it a seed, a grain, which gave birth to a political party whose main strength thereafter sprang from a bond with the soil (80).

The bond between the party and the soil explains many of the anomalies which Ngugi explores in his later works. In A Grain of Wheat this bond between the party and the soil is used by some leaders to acquire land at the expense of their followers. The memorable case is that of the Honourable Member of Parliament for Rung'ei who is asked by his constituents to help them acquire a farm from a European settler who is leaving for England. The next thing they see on the entrance to the farm is the name of their MP. He has used his constituents to acquire the farm which his constituents were in the process of buying.

The land motif runs throughout A Grain of Wheat. The pre-Mau Mau days during which some of the characters grow in the ways of their culture are suffused with a certain joy that springs from living and working on the land. Among the most memorable scenes from this period is the courtship between Gikonyo and Mumbi. This courtship turns into that "impasse" of a marriage that is like so many things ruined by the Mau Mau war. "The emergency destroyed us". The hopes of rebuilding are there and they are all ultimately dependent on the use and abuse of the land.

In Petals of Blood, Devil on the Cross and in the play I will Marry When I Want the use and abuse of the land becomes the use and abuse of capital. The alliance between indigenous entrepreneurs and foreign business interests especially multinationals is based on the power of capital. Multinationals have the money to buy up anybody in Kenya. They have the standing and backing to borrow any amount of the money they need to buy up any promising business such as theng'etha brewing in Petals of Blood. Representatives of multinationals have only their political standing to sell. They may or may not own vast acres of land but they have a political standing which they exchange for cooptation by multinationals. Such cooptation plays a dramatic role in the lives of Chui, Mzigo and Kimeria in Petals of Blood.

It is in Petals of Blood that Ngugi explicitly shows what went wrong with the bond between the party and the soil. The Ilmorog which is the centre of the action of the novel and which is slowly dying in the sun when the school-teacher who is the narrative voice of Petals of Blood first visits it becomes a symbol of the changes which have taken place in an independent Kenya. Through Ilmorog we are able to seek Kenya's transition from a subsistence economy to large-scale farming, enclosures, small-scale industries and the strangle-hold of money-men from Nairobi and overseas. Nairobi grows in direct proportion to the wasting - away (and, possible, "withering - away" of places like Ilmorog:

'In my mind I now put this wretched corner beside our cities:

skycrapers versus mud-walls and thatch; tarmac highways, international airports and gambling casinos versus cattle-paths and gossip before sunset. Our erstwhile masters had left us a very unevenly cultivated land: the centre was swollen with fruit and water sucked from the rest, while the outer parts were progressively weaker and scraggier as one moved away from the centre' (81).

When such "progress" manages to come to Ilmorog, peasants are forced to exchange their tiny holdings of land for loans that will tie them firmly to the world of finance and international capital:

Progress! Yes, development did come to Ilmorog. Plots were carved out of the various farms to make a shopping centre. Shops planned and people were asked to send in applications for building plots to the County Council. A mobile van - African Economic Bank - came to Ilmorog and explained to the peasant farmers and the herdsmen how they could get loans. They crowded around the man fascinated as much by the up-and-down motion of his adam's apple as by the rounded voice coming out of the loudspeaker. Demarcation. Title deeds. Loans. Fencing the land. Barbed wire. One or two grade cows. Kill or sell or cross-breed the others. A Farmers' Marketing Cooperative in other Districts? African Economic Bank would do similar things here. Milk. KCC. Wealth. From this one would pay back the loans at a small interest. Not in one lump sum. Oh no. Paying back would also be spread over a number of years. No steady farmer need ever feel the pinch. Only one condition: payment had to be regular. Easy. It was a year of hope. Mzigo came to the area. The school, being now more accessible, would expand. New buildings. New classes. New staff houses. More trained staff. Really, it was another year of hope in Ilmorog, except for Njuguna, who was almost ruined. His four sons had suddenly returned and they all demanded their share of the ten-acre farm. What could he do with the two acres that remainded to him? The younger son used the title deeds as security for a loan to start a kiosk in Nairobi. Later he returned to Ilmorog once again and set up the old man in a kiosk business and later in a shop. But in the year of demarcation, with the sons almost coming to blow with one another, Njuguna was a sad man. The road. Trade. Progress. We saw the new owners of plots bring stones and concrete. We watched the trenches being dug and we were glad that at least two of us from Ilmorog, Wanja and Abdulla, had secured a plot and so would show these outsiders that even Ilmorog had people who could put up stone buildings. Flowers for our land. Long live Nderi wa Riera. We gave him our votes: we waited for flowers to bloom (82).

Petals of Blood stands on an intricate web of stories within the main story, narrative suspense and flash-back reminiscences which owe a great deal to Ngugi's interest in oral literature as well as to his exposure to modern cinematography. When we encounter "progress" at Ilmorog again, the narrative has moved seven pages and an old woman's land is being sold by auction. The old woman Nyakinyua becomes only one of the many victims across the land who are now at the mercy of auctioneers, bankers and lawyers - that priestly caste of parasites in Nairobi:

'She was not alone: a whole lot of peasants and herdsmen of Old Ilmorog who had been lured into loans and into fencing off their land and buying imported fertilizer and were unable to pay back were similarly affected. Without much labour, without machinery, without breaking with old habits and outlook, and without much advice they had not been able to make their land yield enough to meet their food needs and pay back the loans. Some had used the money to pay school fees. Now the inexorable law of the metal was driving them from the land (83).

The old woman's efforts to regain her land is reminiscent of the desperate attempts by Chinua Achebe's Okonkwo (Things Fall Apart) to persuade his countrymen to stand up to the new dispensation:

She tramped from hut to hut calling upon the peasants of Ilmorog to get together and fight it out. They looked at her and shook their heads: whom would they fight now? The Party? Nderi? Nderi? yes, who would they really fight? But she tried to convince them that all these were one and that she would fight them... I'll go alone... My man fought the white man. He paid for it with his blood... I'll struggle against these black oppressors... alone...(84).

The old woman is right in seeing bankers and politicians as one. They all live off the fruits of the land. It is their way of distributing and using the land which has created the Kenya of Petals of Blood. It is their action which forces the old woman's grand-daughter back into prostitution after she has redeemed her grand-mother's land. That act by the old woman's grand-daughter results in the founding of a famous brothel, "Sunshine Lodge" which becomes the pivot of the novels closing action. It is in this brothel that three representatives of finance capital are killed and burnt to death, an event which enables Ngugi to open the novel with the arrest of three of the four main characters. The land gives and land takes away. Long live the land.

This paper has attempted to explore the "semiotic constants" of Achebe and Ngugi. In the process of this exploration we have examined the attitude to change dramatised in a number of novels. It becomes clear that Achebe emphasises a kind of wise balance between the defence of known and tried values and the reception of a new age. The odds are weighted against rigidity and insensitivity to the weak points in what is passing and the strong points of what is to come. Ngugi brings us "down to mother earth" as it were and warns us against perpetuating the cruel and heartless tradition of colonialism. That is a tradition by which land is alienated from its peasant owners and the "landlessness" so caused is used to enrich the already rich at the expense of the poor. These are fundamental issues which theories of development must always take into account if they are not to bring only a superficial "progress" as opposed to "serious" development. It is as if these two great writers, Achebe and Ngugi were positing instances of change in which certain disparities and contradictions are bound to be like the biblical poor always with us as long as we ignore certain fundamentals.

The paper has not gone beyond two writers. It is hoped that other chapters of this study will touch on more writers in different contexts. The approach taken in this paper might have shown, for example, that Ayi Kwei Armah sees decay at the heart of the present-day body - politic in Africa, a decay which in his novel, Fragments he attributes to "the cargo mentality", a concept derived from the Polynesian myth of return, by which education and learning are only the means for the acquisition of property, no matter how. Nuruddin Farah sees a similar kind of decay though in political rather than economic terms. It is a decay born of hypocrisy and self-deception, of signalling left when moving right. Wole Soyinka sees decay in soulless and meaningless "progression" which maims, kills and destroys.

We might have gone on exploring the many varied viewpoints which emerge out of every writer's semiotic constants. We remain content with the knowledge that creative writers in Africa have something deep to say about change and development.

Notes:

* University of Botswana.

1. Heinemann, 1958.

2. Heinemann, 1964.

3. Things Fall Apart, London, Heinemman, 1958 p17.

4. "The Palm-Oil With Which Achebe's Words Are Eaten" in C.L. Innes and Bernth Lindfors, editors, Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe, London, Heinemann, 1979 pp 47-65.

5. Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel, London, Heinemann, 1982, Chapter 5, pp 75-77.

6. The Tragic Conflict in the Novels of Chinua Achebe" in Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe pp 14-15.

7. Things Fall Apart p. 45.

8. "Journey of the Magi" in T.S. Eliot, Selected Poems, London, Faber and Faber pp. 97-98.

9. Nadine Gordimer, The Black Interpreter, Johannesburg, pro-Cas/Ravan, 1973 p. 23.

10. No Longer at Ease, London, Heinemann, 1960, p.31.

11. No Longer at Ease, pp. 32-33.

12. No Longer at Ease, p. 33.

13. "The Second Coming in Norman Jeffare, editor, Poems of W.B.Yeats: A New Selection, London: MacMillan, 1984 p.246.

14. A Man of the People, London, Heinemann, 1966 pp.36-37.

15. Ibid. p. 149.

16. Ibid.

17. "The Second Coming" in Jeffare, editor p. 246.

18. "The Novelist as Teacher" in G.D. Killam, editor, African Writers on African Writing, London, Heinemann, 1973, pp. 3.

19. "The Role of a writer in a New Nation" in African Writers on African Writing p.8.

20. Ibid., p. 12.

21. Arrow of God, London, Heinemann, Second Edition 1974 p. 229.

22. Ibid., pp. 45-46.

23. Ibid., p. 13.

24. Ibid., p. 131.

25. Ibid., p. 230.

26. Ibid., p. 133.

27. Ibid., pp. 3-4.

28. Ibid., p.1.

29. Ibid., pp. 53-54.

30. Ibid., P. 16.

31. Ibid., p.133.

32. Ibid., P. 209.

33. Things Fall Apart, p. 152.

34. Arrow of God, p. 209.

35. Ibid, p. 133.

36. Ibid., p. 13.

37. See Ngara, Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel, Heinemann, 1982 Chapter 5.

38. "The Palm-Oil with whom Achebe's Words Are Eaten in Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe, pp. 47-65.

39. Arrow of God, pp. 225-227.

40. Author's Note to Arrow of God, 1974.

41. "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation" in African Writers on Writing, p. 10.

42. Ibid., p. 10.

43. Ime Ikiddeh, "Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Novelist as Historian in Bruce King and Kolawole Ogunbesan, editors, A Celebration of Black African Writing, Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press; London Oxford University Press 1975, p. 210.

44. London, Heinemann. 1963.

45. London, Heinemann. 1964.

46. London, Heinemann. 1967.

47. London, Heinemann. 1977.

48. Nairobi, Heinemann. 1980.

49. Nairobi, Heinemann. 1980.

50. London, Heinemann. 1981.

51. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary, London Heinemann, 1981 p. 34.

52. Ibid., p. 30.

53. The River Between, p. 11.

54. Ibid., p. 109.

55. Ibid., p. 141.

56. Ibid., p. 141.

57. Ibid., p. 142.

58. Ibid., p. 142.

59. Ibid., p. 2.

60. Ibid., p. 2.

61. Ibid., p. 20.

62. G.D. Killam, An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi,London, Heinemann, 1980, p. 20.

63. Weep Not Child, London, Heinemann, 1964 p. 74.

64. Jomo Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya, London, Heinemann, 1979, p. 21.

65. Ibid., p. 317.

66. Weep Not Child, p. 7.

67. Ibid., pp. 25-26.

68. Ibid., pp. 26-27.

69. Petals of Blood, London, Heinemann, 1977, p.254.

70. Weep Not Child, p. 31.

71. Ibid., pp. 31-32.

72. Ibid., pp. 33-34

73. Ibid., pp. 97-98.

74. Ibid., p. 77.

75. Continuity and Change in Conrad and Ngugi, KUNAPIPI, Vol. III, Number I, 1981, pp. 91-109.

76. 1 Corinthians 15:36.

77. A Grain of Wheat, London, Heinemann, 1968, p.5.

78. Author's Note to A Grain of Wheat, Leeds 1966.

79. A Grain of Wheat, Chapter 2, P. 11.

80. Ibid, pp. 12-13.

81. Petals of Blodd, p. 49.

82. Ibid., p. 268.

83. Ibid., p. 275.

84. Ibid., p. 276.

RESUME

La littérature africaine a toujours vécu en étroite symbiose avec les milieux sociaux,, politiques et économiques dont elle est issue. Les proverbes, énigmes, contes au coin du feu et fables mettant en scène des animaux en disent long sur l'environnement physique et social dans lequel une communauté évolue, tandis que les traditions orales sont une expression de la sagesse populaire, des voyances et des valeurs profondes d'un peuple. La littérature, affirme l'auteur, met en lumière les évènements et les contraintes de la vie quotidienne. La littérature africaine s'illustre par l'éclairage sous lequel elle peint les problèmes et les perspectives de changement. En conséquence, la littérature africaine a progressé par étapes, plus ou moins parallèlement aux changements intervenus dans la pensée politique et dans les théories économiques de l'heure. (a) L'étape de l'identité décrit les efforts faits pour recouvrer et restaurer le patrimoine africain... Cette étape prit fin lorsque Fanon rappela que les classes dirigeantes africaines sapaient, par leur tendance à se pavaner dans les atours du colonisateur, ces initiatives visant à faire renaître de leurs cendres les gloires passées de l'Afrique. (b) Etape de la protestation et du conflit. L'héroisme et la solidarité, thèmes dominants de cette période, font ressortir les temps forts de la lutte contre le colonialisme. Les protagonistes de cette étape sont des traîtres et des lâches, et les survivants à la lutte sont profondément déçus. Une page de l'histoire était tournée et le cadre dans lequel de nouveaux changements pouvaient être apportés avait changé. Quoi de surprenant qu'à cette deuxième période succéda. (c) L'étape de la désillusion - l'effet corrodant et corrupteur du pouvoir et de l'argent sur les élites africaines après l'indépendance constitue le thème dominant de cette étape. Ces thèmes sont développés dans des ouvrages de grande portée comme "The Beautiful Ones are not yet born de Ayi Kwei Armah, Devil on the Cross et Petals of Blood de Ngugi, dont les titres traduisent bien cette désillusion. (d) L'étape de l'exhortation et de la satire - la révolution et/ou la satire sont les thèmes dominants de cette période, qui combine l'appel aux armes avec une décision dévastatrice du présent. Cette étape marque la participation active de l'écrivain dans les conflits et les débats relatifs au changement et au développement et la reconnaissance par la société que l'écrivain a droit au chapitre.

Ces différentes étapes tendent à se chevaucher et à s'interpénétrer. L'étude de ces différentes périodes, nous permet de dévoiler le

paradigme non exprimé et portant la valeur formative qu'incarne la littérature. L'apparente négation de la littérature masque une certaine affirmation. Pour le comprendre, l'on devrait essayer de déterminer ce qui pousse les écrivains à écrire, c'est-à-dire le faisceau de ressources, de talent et de tensions d'où émane le génie créateur. Un "système sémiotique" dénote la multiplicité des signes" qui sont liés à une réalité dominante telle que la terre, la "sagesse", le "progrès" ou l'"oppression", ou reposent sur elle. L'auteur utilise des "constantes sémiotiques" pour dénoter la récurrence de systèmes de symboles, d'images, de situations et de tensions dans les oeuvres d'un même écrivain. Citant en exemple les oeuvres de Chinua Achebe et de Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, l'étude met en exergue l'ensemble des ressources métaphoriques utilisées, les "constantes sémiotiques" et souligne l'impression générale faite sur le lecteur.

La notion de "sagesse" est le "principe stimulant" dans les oeuvres de Chinua Achebe. Les protagonistes de ses principaux ouvrages tels que Le Monde s'effondre et Arrow of God sont aux prises avec le monde en mutation et leur stature tragique est à la mesure de l'autorité dont ils peuvent user pour influencer ou orienter ce changement. En cette période de transition i.e. pré-coloniale, coloniale, et des indépendances, le cimat est à la confusion, au cynisme, à la corruption, à la turpitude morale. Un modèle particulier de dirigeants s'impose; ils n'ont à répondre devant personne et leur responsabilité civile n'est jamais engagée, ce qui conduit à un détournement des maigres ressources nationales. Confronté à ces changements, Achebe souligne la nécessité de trouver un juste équilibre entre le meilleur de notre culture et les apports d'une ère nouvelle.

Chez Ngugi le thème central est la "terre", la signification de l'aliénation des terres dans le contexte kényan. Face au problème de la pénurie des terres, Ngugi souligne les différentes formes d'exploitation, les abus et les litiges fonciers ainsi que les espoirs de reconstruction. Dans le contexte actuel, la terre symbolise les différentes formes d'utilisation du capital par les multinationales et leurs représentants, ainsi que la différenciation sociale en expansion. La souffrance, la destruction ainsi que l'agitation et les germes de crise sont les thèmes dominants dans les oeuvres de Ngugi. Les auteurs, souligne l'article en conclusion, peuvent parler en profondeur du changement et du développement.