THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

FROM FRENCH WEST AFRICA

1926 TO 1969

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THE TECHNIQUE OF THE FRENCH WEST AFRICAN NOVEL I926 TO I969.

This work undertakes a study of the said novel between the dates of I926, that of its first example, and I969, a date at which a kind of change of direction might be discerned, and beyond which it was not possible to take the study, given the nature of the project, the preparation of a thesis for Ph.D., at the University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent, England.

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Preface

The emergence of francophone literature in French West Africa over the last fifty years poses questions for the student of literature. How should he approach it? If he attempts to describe and evaluate it, in what terms should he do so? Is it to be thought of as a branch of African literature in French, or of French literature in Africa? The creative writing of the area has been mainly in the novel and in poetry; in considering, as this thesis does, the novel only, what is the relevance of Western novel criticism? Can one define a novel? Can one define a good novel? Such are the questions behind the title of this thesis, The Technique of the Novel from French West Africa, 1926 to 1969.

The nature of the novel is notoriously difficult to state: nevertheless, insofar as the field under study has sought expression within a traditional novel form, that of telling the story of a life or of a situation, it becomes subject to the commonplace description of a novel in terms of characterisation, intrigue, milieu and prose style. These lines of approach are therefore used here. Representative and outstanding novels are considered as wholes in respect of the nature and role of these elements within the novels.

It seems axiomatic that the life of a field of literature over a period of time lies in the inter-action of the processes of imitation and innovation. This process is considered within the two main sub-groups into which the field naturally falls, the biographical and the situational narrative.

One powerful force in favour of imitation is the socio-political reality in which the educated young African stands. From the origin of this literature until Independence the colonial presence

has acted as an unavoidable irritant insisting that literature be externally orientated. Hence come the contemporaneity and similarity of so much of the field's thematic material, concerned to register protest or to preserve a disappearing image. The idea of a personal or of a universal literature has remained remote under the pressure of new social problems.

Innovation has taken place to a limited extent within the stereotyped framework of the exploited African, as some authors offer the experience of a vicarious revanche unlikely in reality. In terms of external form, one author has experimented with a mélange des genres, another derives his ideas from Kafka and in several the prose style stands as an important original component of the novel's effect. Variety is, however, largely provided by the many presentations of different kinds of milieu.

The very few works which see man as universal, either predator or outsider or mortal, and seem to exist in their own right, set new standards for the field as it outgrows its autobiogaphical need and its cries of protest.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

(a) Some Aspects of Novel Criticism Relevant to the Field

(i) General Considerations

Discussion of a given field of fiction in critical terms implies a certain awareness of the various views about the nature of fiction and, in this case, of the novel. The critic attempting to preface his study with an account, however brief, of previous critical work is faced with a forbidding wealth of literature[1], and such an endeavour is not proposed here. From any study, however, of the novel in its many manifestations and of the multiplicity of views expressed about it there emerges the conclusion that final definitions are out of the question when dealing with a form of which the one stable feature appears to be its versatility as a mirror and source of human experience.

It is, nevertheless, possible to group novels in such a way that certain family characteristics are to be seen, such as, for example, the dominance of one or the other of the traditional elements of characterisation, narrative or description, and a work may belong more or less to one group rather than to any other in respect of its technique. So, certain periods favour certain approaches to fiction in terms of substance and of form. The gist of this study lies in its attempt to consider the works of fiction of French West Africa as motivated by a certain common approach which is fundamentally influential in respect of both substance and form.

The field of French West African fiction in novel form presents a homogeneous appearance, it will be seen, which is due to its narrative nature: nearly all its works narrate the encounter of people and events and places

(1) See, for example, Jacques Souvage, Introduction to the Study of the Novel, Story, Gent, 1965.

over a strictly determined period of objective time, at the end of which the situation for the character at the centre of the work is substantially changed. The field, then, falls within the area of critical assessment marked out by R. M. Albérès:

> Il semble impossible de donner une synthèse et surtout une définition du genre. La définition minime du roman au sens le plus vague, des origines à nos jours, est d'être une 'histoire', de comporter des 'personnages' et une action. S'il n'y avait plus qu'un décor sans personnages, qu'une méditation sans décor, le mot de roman perdrait son sens et l'œuvre deviendrait poème, essai, soliloque, etcetera. (1)

This view of the nature of the novel is of relative value only, in that it embraces the traditional kind (des origines à nos jours) without looking at modern trends for which any such definition would be quite irrelevant. The subject of this present study does come within the sort of definition which requires characters, setting and action, and I propose here to consider certain ideas about these elements so as to approach the field with those views in mind which seem to enjoy general acceptance in novel-criticism. So one's role as critic in this field would be to consider the value of these elements as parts of the individual works, and to consider how far the field shares a common approach to their use in the expression of various or general themes.

There is one important distinction to be drawn within the general field of traditional fiction, and that is between works which set out to create an imaginary world and those which are concerned with an attempted reproduction in words of the observable world of everyday actuality. The question of 'realism' is in the background of this distinction and is considered briefly at a later stage(2). A typical definition of the first kind is found in the words of Katherine Lever:

> A novel is the form of written prose narrative of considerable length, involving the reader in an imagined real world which is new because it has been created by the author(3).

(1) R. M. Albérès, Histoire du Roman Moderne, Albin Michel, Paris, 1962, p. 421.
(2) P. 5 below.
(3) K. Lever, The Novel and the Reader, Methuen, London, 1961, p. 16.

This sort of novel is a coherent world of imagination-structuring words, asking to be understood on its own terms, and not by any means an attempted reproduction of the commonplace actual world. René Wellek and Austen Warren base their theory of the novel upon this position, and go on to make it the central factor in an appreciation of the work:

> The world or Kosmos of a novelist - this pattern or structure or organism, which includes plot, characters, setting, worldview, tone - is what we must scrutinise when we attempt to compare a novel with life or to judge, ethically or socially, a novelist's work. In using the term 'world' one is using a space term. But 'narrative fiction', or, better, a term like 'story', calls our attention to time and sequence in time. The situation at the end is very different from that at the opening.(1)

The authors go on to quote Desmond McCarthy in order to point to the relation of the novelist's imagined world to that of everyday experience; in McCarthy's view Meredith, Conrad, James and Hardy . . .

> . . . have blown great comprehensive irridescent bubbles, in which the human beings they describe, though they have, of course, a recognizable resemblance to real people, only attain in that world their full reality.(2)

Each novelist's creation is a personal one:

> If Pecksniff were transplanted into 'The Golden Bowl' he would become extinct. The unforgiveable artistic fault in a novelist is failure to maintain consistency of tone.(3)

The sort of novel that this critical approach can usefully encompass lies at one end of a spectrum at the other end of which may be placed the documentary novel whose aim is to present before the reader's mind aspects of contemporary social experience. It is within this area that the novels considered in this study are largely found. Consequently, any assessment of the techniques of the field is largely concerned with an account of the ways in which the elements of character, plot, milieu-evocation, comment

(1) R. Wellek and A. Warren, Theory of Literature, Penguin, London, 1963, p. 214.
(2) D. McCarthy, Portraits, Putnam, London, 1931, p. 75.
(3) Ibid., p. 156.

and narrative contribute to, and are affected by, the documentary or didactic purposes of the work, rather than with the success of the authors in achieving a consistency of life in an imaginary world.

Both kinds of novel have an important relation to the question of realism and to society as an object of literary activity. It seems useful here to consider briefly this relation, and so see the field of French West African novel-writing in an historical perspective. The close connection between the novel in its early stages and society has been shown by Ian Watt[1], a connection which is borne out in the French West African field also. It seems more than coincidental that both this novel and that of the early 18th Century could be described as free from the idea of the novelist's role as creator of imagined worlds and that both novels emerge at a time of unusual inquiry and of changing views about the nature of society. Thus the novel may be seen as a particularly modern literary form, arising in the late 17th and early 18th Centuries to replace the romance and, to a lesser extent, the drama. Its popularity was, it may well be supposed, due to the satisfaction it provided to curiosity about other people's lives, a curiosity given respectability by the new philosophy of empirical inquiry and of individualism in society. So a close causal link may be seen between the work of the novel's leading exponents Defoe, Richardson, Fielding and Sterne and the contemporary intellectual and social climate.

In his discussion of realism I. Watt raises the matter of form. He sees the novel as:-

> the logical literary vehicle of a culture which, in the last few centuries, has set an unprecedented value on originality, on the novel; and it is therefore well named.[2]

(1) Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel, Chatto and Windus, London, 1957, p. 13.
(2) Ibid. p. 13.

The novel, in its attempt to grasp and convey the flux of reality, has to abandon formal convention and concentrate upon a multitude of succeeding and diverse phenomena. In this view realism amounts to the presentation of individualised characters and physical context as well as specific chronology. In this realism, the product of the philosophy of Locke, Berkeley and Hume, is found the genesis of the modern movement in general and the Western novel in particular. Realism and freedom of form are inseparable:

> What is often felt as the formlessness of the novel, as compared, say, with the tragedy or the ode, probably follows from this: the poverty of the novel's formal conventions would seem to be the price it must pay for its realism.(1)

This is, perhaps, not the place for even a limited study of the history of the term 'realism' with reference to the European novel. Different schools of thought have made contributions of varying usefulness, and most writers would claim that their material is reality. For the present purpose, it may suffice to draw attention to the comparison between the early English-speaking novelists and the post-war group of Francophone African writers in terms of their determination to remain firmly within the world of actual commonplace experience. Further comparison would not, perhaps, be very fruitful.

For the reader of the French West African novel, the realistic effect is limited to a documentary and autobiographical quality which is concerned with conveying the hero's impressions of his changing situations. Overriding this tendency towards authentic reportage, however, the main formative influence is that of a common stereotyped conception of theme, with the result that the works lack the sort of objective authenticity of documentation that might be looked for.

(1) Ibid. p. 13.

(ii) Composition in the Novel

While it is necessary in considering novels of a traditional kind to look at the usual elements of character, plot and setting, this can be seen only as an initial part of the critic's task; the major feat of the novelist is his composition of the various elements. It is the composition of the novels in question which will form the subject matter of this study. In this matter, however, different approaches are possible. The interlocked nature of the novel's elements ideally reflects the artist's vision, with each reacting upon the other:

> Dans le roman le terme de 'composition' présente trois sens assez différents. L'art de composer une intrigue, l'art de composer un caractère, l'art de composer un état. L'art de composer une intrigue ne prend une valeur que lorsqu'il est un moyen dans la composition d'un caractère ou des caractères.(1)

This view of A. Thibaudet restates what is generally understood of novel composition. G. Michaud presents a similar view of this interlocking of elements, adding to it the idea of the novelist's use of time as an important dimension of the work's composition:

> Le romancier habile saura tenir son lecteur en haleine, par tous les moyens. D'abord par le mouvement, le rythme qu'il imprime à son récit. Mais il ne se contente pas de nous imposer son rythme. Il nous impose aussi son temps. Il peut le réduire, l'allonger, le suspendre à sa guise, voire, comme le héros de H. G. Wells, le parcourir en arrière. Il s'agit de comparer au temps objectif le temps réel du roman, c'est à dire, le temps subjectif selon lequel le romancier fait vivre le lecteur.(2)

So the novelist has to imitate the complicated involutions of the area of reality his vision proposes to him, by related statements about people together or alone, passive or active, in the flow of time. For this task he has now an increasingly large range of techniques. For example, the question of summary and scene was faced early in the history of the genre:

(1) A. Thibaudet, Réflexions sur le Roman, Gallimard, Paris, 1938, p. 18.
(2) G. Michaud, L'Oeuvre et ses Techniques, Nizet, Paris, 1957, p. 139.

> When an extraordinary scene presents itself, as we trust will often be the case, we shall spare no pains or paper to open it at large to our reader; but if whole years should pass without producing anything worthy of his notice, we shall not be afraid of a chasm in our history, but shall hasten on to matters of consequence.(1)

The question of time in the novel was given one of its most outstanding treatments in the early novel Tristram Shandy.

The history of the novel may mainly be seen as an exploration and demonstration of techniques, with different aspects receiving prominence at different times. It is possible, for example, to see the question of 'point of view' as central, as developed particularly by Henry James(2) and later by Wayne Booth(3). Other critics would start with style, such as D. Lodge, who draws a comparison between poetry and the novel:

> Reality is structured by the novelist initially in the words and arrangement of words with which he creates these characters, events and objects. In this case a novel is made of words, just as much as a poem is made of words.(4)

Different techniques may be important for different authors at different times. Martin Turnell sees the history of the French novel as a progressive refashioning of technique to express new vision:

> Form is not a matter of technical devices: it is a mode of apprehending experience which is determined by the artist's vision. The classic form was admirably designed for psychological exploration and for concentrating a beam of light relentlessly on the hidden places of the mind. It was temporarily superseded in the nineteenth century because it was not an adequate vehicle for what the principal nineteenth century novelists had to say and because of the decline in psychological insight. The speed with which the novelists' angle of vision changed explains the appearance in rapid succession of the Stendhalian 'roman d'aventure', the cyclical novel of Balzac and Zola, and Flaubert's arrangement of 'images'.(5)

(1) Quoted by Phyllis Bentley, 'Scene and Summary', The Theory of the Novel, ed., P. Stevick, Free Press, New York, 1967, p. 46, from Tom Jones, Book II, Chap. 1.
(2) The Art of Fiction and Other Essays, ed., Morris Roberts, Heinemann, London, 1963.
(3) The Rhetoric of Fiction, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1961.
(4) The Language of Fiction, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1966, p. 18.
(5) M. Turnell, The Art of French Fiction, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1959, p. 14.

The preceding references to various critical approaches to the technique of novel-writing suggest the breadth of the topic and the level of complexity at which discussion of the European novel has to take place. My study of the Francophone African novel leads me to conclude that discussion at such a level may not be altogether useful when one is attempting a general survey. Only in a small number of works is the prose style, for example, of a texture sufficiently significant to warrant detailed individual study. A sophisticated study of 'point of view' in the field would yield only the most obvious results. In hardly any of the novels is the imaginative facility of the temporal dimension utilised.

The general issue of the relation of composition and vision, however, does offer the most useful approach to the technique of this group. The novels have these two main critical factors in common: it is the shared vision of reality which determines the general nature of the works' compositional balance. The vision is of a communal existence in a state of crisis, and it gives rise to a predominance of a socially significant narrative. How this vision is given expression through different sub-groups of this kind of narrative, and the variations exhibited by various works from the influential narrative stereotype, form the substance of this thesis.

(iii)Classification of Novels

A study of the field of Francophone African fiction from the point of view of novel technique then leads to a method of classification whereby novels may be grouped together on a technical basis. It seems appropriate to make some general observations on the question of classification, before an exposition of the method adopted here.

Classification of novels in general should be purposeful, systematic and consistent. From the many possible ways of grouping a field, the critic selects the one suited to his purpose and resulting from his angle of vision

of the novel, and he applies this method across the board. If it is sound, it will account for all the works, with only a very small proportion, if any, unassignable, or debatable. A pragmatic approach is to be preferred to one which assumes a Platonic system of types of novel, into which all works must be fitted, such as the 'philosophical' novel, the 'psychological' novel, the 'social' novel, and so forth, since, while the themes and areas of interest of these works may be so styled, there are works which, for example, imply a philosophy through the study of people's minds, or of a social problem and its solution, or which share partly one, partly another of these natures. Even if it were possible to find a coherent way of grouping novels by having every novel placeable in thematic terms, this could still be of little interest to the literary critic of technique.

The consistency of a classification system relates to the nature of the items classified and, in the case of the novel, to the nature of the novel. This, it is generally agreed, is definable, not in terms of subject matter, but in terms of form; point of view seems the natural kind of classification available to the critic who is concerned with the role of the narrator, although it may well produce very large groups. To its advantage is the incontrovertible clarity of the system which permits no overlap and accounts for all novels, a merit deriving entirely from the fact that the system derives from the nature of the novel as a form of narration.

While, however, the novel is essentially a form of narration, it is often also much else, and, as the critic attempts to embrace method in addition to the substance, he finds the lines of demarcation becoming increasingly fluid, until, like Roger Caillois, for example, he has a spectrum of possibilities into which, with as much subjective estimation as indisputable objectivity, he places each individual work. For Caillois[1] the critic

(1) Roger Caillois, Puissances du Roman, Sagittaire, Marseille, 1942, p. 58.

should assess the novel in terms of a range of characteristics: its ampleur (the number of characters), its densité (relation of real imagined time to fictional time), its extension spatiale, extension temporelle, extension sociale, its attention au réel, its intériorité, (or manner of representing the characters' inner life), its degré d'identification de l'auteur à ses héros, and la volonté d'influer du romancier. There would thus be available a kind of assessment of the work which could even be put into numerical form:

> Un nombre d'une demi-douzaine de chiffres environ suffirait ainsi à indiquer la physionomie propre de tout roman. Ces indices renseigneraient aussitôt le lecteur averti et comme aucun ne mesure la valeur de l'oeuvre, on n'aurait pas à craindre d'être égaré par le caprice d'un critique: il ne s'agit pas en effet d'apprécier, mais d'appliquer une sorte de barême tout objectif.(1)

Objections to this seem serious enough to put it out of court as a valid system: for example, it would be impossible to obtain a general critical consensus on the terms of the framework (the one offered lacks conspicuously style). The estimation of each feature implies subjective judgement. It nevertheless has value as an indication of dissatisfaction with the sort of classification which emphasises themes at the expense of form and technique.

The problem of classification changes in emphasis somewhat as one considers a localised field of production, since it may be that all the works to be considered are of a similar kind in some important respect. In the case of this present work, the main concern is the continuation of a certain structural or compositional pattern. The works themselves being more récits than romans, and the pattern being essentially a narrative one, the field is classified in terms of the novel's narrative base, which determines the structure of the novels in a more distinctive way than do other characteristics.

(1) Ibid., p. 68.

(iv) The length of the novel

In analysing the technique of the novels, the question of length or substance cannot be overlooked, affecting as it does the critic's judgement as to whether the work is sufficiently substantial to be a novel. So, the novel is presumably never too long, but could be too short, and various quantitative suggestions may be made. The question how many words are necessary to create the illusion of a real world inhabited or inhabitable by one or more 'real' person(s) is of course unanswerable, as one can point to the poet who creates a similar illusion with far fewer words than even a short-story writer. The novelist is no doubt also free to use 'poetic prose' and so achieve the desired end. In general, the works of the field considered here are comparatively short.

One work seems to illustrate particularly well the question of length, Avant Liberté I of Cheikh Dia,(1) which purports by its title page to be a novel and consists of some 16,000 words, while the remainder of the works have an average total of 75,000. The substance of the work deals with an episode in the life of a Parisian, recalled by him some twenty years later as he has to turn away an African would-be guest from his hotel. In the episode, as a young man, he took up a commercial post in French West Africa, became romantically involved with a young French woman of doubtful reputation, idealistically rejected the principles determining French trading practice in Africa and 'went native', taking an African mistress and trying to settle in the bush as one of the villagers. The attempt failed and he was rescued from the dilemma by an attack of tropical disease which necessitated his immediate and final departure from Africa for the homeland. Thematically the work offers a contrast with Le Regard du Roi(2) in which the White man is successfully assimilated into Africa, albeit at a metaphorical level. Technically,

(1) Editions du Scorpion, Paris, 1964.
(2) Camara Laye, Le Regard du Roi, Plon, Paris, 1954.

however, there are certain fundamental objections to describing it, as Mouralis does[1], as a successfully objectivated novel. My central objection is the incompatibility of the brevity of material with the range of narrative, characterisation and setting which is attempted. The character-narrative development seems inadequate for the major changes and upheavals which are presented to the reader, such as the arrival and adjustment to life in Dakar, a subject which is soon replaced by a hasty love-affair, with little preparation and insight. The journey and arrival into the interior receives some narrative treatment, but there is little time to appreciate the experiences of normal trading before the hero's rebellion happens and the situation is completely changed. A similar change occurs in the hero's personal relations, as his old mistress discards him and he takes up with an African girl. His departure is similarly precipitous - an attack of tropical fever and his African options are closed. The setting is sketchy, particularly in view of the breadth attempted: Paris and Marseille, Dakar and the expatriate community at work, the bush, traditional rural Africa in its customs and social attitudes, all are suggested without becoming real. The work fails to achieve the substantial realisation of situation and character necessary to create the illusion of truthfulness to human experience.

In this case, the main limitation was brevity, and it is possible to imagine the basic data as a skeleton of a novel, with situations which could be developed. It is doubtful, however, how far any prose work of so few words could hope to achieve a realisation of such a setting-character-narrative-time complex sufficient to provide conviction of reality, or stimulate suspension of disbelief. A similar question arises, with a different answer, in the case of Vehi-Ciosane[2] which may be placed in the indeterminate

(1) Bernard Mouralis, Individualité et Collectivité dans le Roman Négro-Africain, Université d'Abidjan, 1969, p. 119.
(2) Sembène Ousmane, Vehi-Ciosane, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1964.

zone between novel and novella, dealing in some 30,000 words, with one incident having a range of characters, but with a point of view firmly placed within the consciousness of the central African mother-figure, the realisation of whose mind helps ensure the reality of the work.

(v) Didacticism

The idea of social commitment in literature also raises certain critical issues. Perhaps the outstanding feature of the French-African novelists is the extent to which they raise contemporary socio-political issues in their work, usually from one point of view. The critic faces the question how far this element detracts from, or contributes to, the works' literary validity.

There is no question of distinguishing here between different kinds of issues, as between political and religious, but rather of considering the general issue of commitment and literature and then of noting ways in which this commitment finds expression.

The central quality of European literature - its mimetic reflection of humanity - ensures its concern with life as it is, controversies and all: the raw material of the novel being problem-ridden humanity, the very selection made by the novelist from this material implies some commitment. The use he makes of his selection, considering the impossibility of total objectivity, implies the same. However, Dickens' commitment to social justice, for example, may be seen as essentially literary. He could reasonably be described primarily as a novelist and an artist, more concerned with literary values than with the sufferings of the poor, whose experiences provide a fruitful source of dramatic and popular material for a massive novelistic output. There would be little case for dismissing his work as literary propaganda on the basis of the social implications of his raw material. On the other hand, Camus' commitment to a philosophical position, for example, may be seen better as that of a philosopher who is using the novel form as a

didactic medium, particularly, say, in L'Etranger. In this case the use, however, is made by a writer of considerable literary power, and, in the end, it may well be a subjective response that decides that L'Etranger tells the reader less of philosophy than of an artistic creation of a 'real world'. To move further towards the ideological content brings one into the literary sphere of Voltaire's Candide and Zadig, for example, whose undeniable literary qualities only partially overlap those of the novel, or that of Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse, where didacticism overwhelms fictional freedom. In fact, the relationship between commitment and art has been explored throughout the history of the French novel. A full discussion would require consideration of the work of a large number of accepted novelists, particularly that of Sartre, a major contemporary exponent of a Voltairean commitment in literature. Of him, however, it is necessary to note that his novel-production was broken off, and other avenues of commitment followed, after a succession of works designed to illustrate certain philosophical positions, from the introduction to existentialism of La Nausée to the demonstration of various outworkings of that system in Les Chemins de la Liberté. It is also relevant to the present discussion to note that it is precisely Sartre, as a committed intellectual of authority, who lent his support to the young movement of African writers in French in their use of literature to fight for independence in the post-war era.(1) The human interest of a controversial issue may well provide material for a novel, but if the object of the writer is to demonstrate a certain point of view, considerable literary gifts will be essential to ensure the work remains in the realm of literature. Otherwise the personal voice of the author, expressing his ideology, may destroy the essential illusion of objectivation, and with it the truth of humanity in art.

(1) See his 'Orphée Noir', the preface to Anthologie de la Nouvelle Poésie Nègre et Malgache, ed. L.S. Senghor, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1948.

The author's voice may intrude in various ways, and so hinder dramatic illusion. The ensuing studies of works in this field show some of the ways in which this happens, as, for example, in author's commentary, in rigging of dialogue to produce unnatural discussions of the issues in question, in characterisation as a central means of author's domination (through 'representative' character), and in the use of the stereotyped and would-be significant situation - management. This field, it will be seen, affords many examples of these ways, in which the authors' sense of socio-political commitment inspires a considerably more direct statement of personal belief than the novel as a work of art may seem able to accommodate.

(vi) Relative Critical Standpoints

Is there, moreover, a set of universally acceptable criteria to apply to a certain national field? To attempt even to describe a work in novel terms of character, plot, themes, and so on, implies a critical position from which to do so. The very selection of a work as a subject for novel-criticism does the same, and it is necessary to ask whether this is justifiable when dealing with the product of a culture foreign to the critic or partially foreign. This could not be the place to explore adequately the question of universal aesthetic or artistic values. My position approves in principle the objection to the idea of an international, or intercultural, common pool of criteria, except at the general level of truth to experience.

The position of the literary field under consideration, however, is not entirely that of a non-European culture. Rather, it is a matter of apparent imitation of an already existing European form, the elementary novel. A parallel case would be, for example, if an African-dialectophone were to become sufficiently versed in English to attempt the writing of a Petrarchan sonnet in English. There would be no question but that his work would be described, and perhaps evaluated, in the terms proper to that of sonnet

appreciation. Conversely, there could be no attempt to describe an African tribal chant of his background in terms of English versification. His sonnet may well have themes drawn from his African experience, but their Africanness would not, in general, affect the technical position of his verse. It is, then, legitimate to look to European critical ideas for the means of appreciating this particular group of novels.

The modern African writer, however, who attempts novel writing, has considerably greater scope than the hypothetical sonneteer. The sonnet has a rigid formal requirement, and the novel, by definition, has not. What is particularly striking about the French African novel, in comparison with its Anglophone counterpart is precisely the extent to which it conforms to a certain self-proposed pattern and fails to enter into the freedom of its form.

In this respect, there has arisen a critical non-sequitur in the study of the French West African novels in respect of its low evaluation of characterisation, and in the idea that a sign of its progress towards Western quality would be an increase in the creation of this feature of the novel. For, if the essence of the novel form is its freedom, its nature being to innovate, to be 'novel', while remaining true to human experience transposed into a fictitious art-form, a Western critic who may attack African fiction for concentrating upon situations rather than personality, is applying irrelevant criteria, which he would not use in describing, for example, a European work of Science Fiction, or Detective Fiction. A symbolic novel, or a poetic novel, for example, would not respond to an analytical method suitable for a work of Balzac. Thus a characterisation-based critique of the African field is attempting to force the growth of the field into, not even a simply Western, but a particular kind of Western, novel. It would, therefore, be more reasonable to hold critical reservations about the field in question, not because it does not follow the patterns of a certain kind of fiction, but because it does so too much, and because it fails to enter into the freedom

of the novel form as it could, remaining firmly influenced by the structural patterns of the works of its early flowering period of the fifties, works which were themselves patterned upon a simple European form. The importance of this influence, the subject of this work, is particularly to be seen when the field is compared with examples of West African novels in English, among which some of the works of Amos Tutuola(1), Wole Soyinka(2) and Kwey Armah(3), in the late sixties, show a far-reaching freedom in use of plot, character, setting and time, to create organised and coherent works of fiction.

Moreover, the African critic who complains(4), for example, that European critics apply Western criteria to African literature, and rebuts their charges of lack of characterisation on the grounds that African art is not necessarily concerned with European norms, may be equally limited in not realising that the novel form can accommodate the kind of works the African writers produce without it having to be thereby specifically considered African in anything but subject matter and provenance. A novel is not obliged to exist by virtue of characterisation, for example. Nor, to be African, is an African writer obliged in the final analysis to concern himself with social conflict or awareness, or to incorporate elements of ethnological material.

A further cause of confusion in this area of comparisonisthe idea that the contemporary outputs of two cultures in a common field, such as the novel, in this case, may be considered as now absolutely comparable, without respect to the idea of progression, of imitation and initiative, of increasing sophistication in the use of language. The critic may lose sight of the fact that he is not comparing like with like, and that African European-language literature

(1) Amos Tutuola, The Palm Wine Drinkard, Faber, London, 1962.
(2) Wole Soyinka, The Interpreters, Deutsch, London, 1965.
(3) Kwey Armah, The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1968.
(4) Rand Bishop, for example, in 'On Identifying a Standard of African Literary Criticism: Characterisation in the Novel', Journal of New African Literature and Arts, No. 11-12, September 1971, pp. 1-7.

is very young, while European literature is very old. It would perhaps be more appropriate to consider the Afro-European literature in relation to its own cultural origins than to the achievements of another literature with considerably more experience in the European languages.

Also, the Francophone novelists, having learnt French as a second language, have had to depend upon Europe, not only for their language and for their literary forms, but also for their national organisation and their awareness of contemporary world-life, with which has come an acceptance of Western modernity and cultural standards. It is possible, therefore, to see these men as more or less Gallicised, assimilated, on the way towards the position of, for example, René Maran, whose West Indies and African backgrounds are almost immaterial to his literary technique, even when writing about his ancestral country in Batouala(1). The differences between the novel from French Africa and the novel from France may therefore be due more to difference in maturity than in racial quality, and all the more as there is little attempt to write in an African style of French, which would seem to be the main area where a racial determination could operate to produce a distinctively African French novel. This view may be supported by the consideration that the Francophone African novel has effectively progressed from a tabula rasa in the twenties, and simply adopted an elementary novel form, the autobiography, and the ethnographical documentation of Doguicimi(2) in the thirties, and built upon these two foundation patterns of récits, without having recourse to the traditional African forms of 'oral literature' except as occasional setting material. The French African novel, then, as it has largely appeared, may be described as a recent branch of French literature, a kind of regional novel with a strongly expressed socio-political didactic element.

(1) René Maran, Batouala, Albin Michel, Paris, 1922.
(2) Paul Hazoumé, Doguicimi, Larose, Paris.

The influence of Western criticism on this field may be at least twofold: firstly, in provoking a nationalist reaction, as illustrated above. Secondly, in producing an inappropriate set of absolutes in writers who see progress in Western terms. For example, research into African criticism suggests a high opinion of the value of Western-type characteristics.(1) Such a stance, if correctly seen, would further indicate the influence of the Western market upon this field.

The problem seems to lie, not in the difficulty attendant upon a critic of one culture attempting to describe in technical terms the product of another culture, but rather in the apparently intercultural position of this field, which has the possibility of belonging neither to the French metropolitan tradition of literature and of the novel, nor to the African oral literature tradition. Belonging partly to both, it may be argued, the field is susceptible to the critiques proper to both cultures or to neither one.

On closer appraisal, however, the approach to the field from the viewpoint of African oral literature seems to offer little of constructive value to assist in encompassing the works as they stand: reference will be made in passing, for example, to the supposedly basic esthétique baoulée of Le Soleil Noir Point(2). As I see it, however, the influence of griot contes may be contributory to the simplicity of the works, and their social concern. Otherwise, the Western critic unfamiliar with the linguistic achievement of the oral literature is dependent upon the rare specialist versed in both cultural areas. The familiar European concepts of traditional European novel critique, and so on, seem adequate to assess the field as it has appeared.

The view, however, that the novel exists largely as a verbal and therefore stylistic construction opens another possibility for an African understanding of the novel, for it may be argued that the style derives its

(I) Rand Bishop, Op. cit., pp.I-I7.
(2) Charles Nokan, Présence Africaine, Paris, I962, p.8.

character from African precedent, and so gives the field a distinct African character.

This view is expounded particularly by Janheinz Jahn (I), who detects in poetry written in French and in English as a second language by Africans similar elements of style and rhythm foreign to both these languages, he claims. These elements the European critic might wrongly dismiss as mistakes of style or surrealistic elaborations. As for rhythm, it is not easy to see how this distinguishes African work from European, in view of the great importance it has played throughout the history and achievement of European poetry, and of the various experiments it has for the meaning of a poem, nor is it easy to see how the emphasis upon architectural quality distinguishes the African from the French poem.. Jahn claims that poetry in European languages by African-speaking Africans maintains strong links with its African past:

> (La poésie néo-africaine) conserve cependant des liens vivants avec la tradition poétique et récitative africaine par le fait qu'elle utilise des procédés stylistiques élaborés par celle-ci. La magie incantatoire des images s'ordonne selon un rythme spécifique, poésie et prose sont engagées, en poésie lyrique l'élément incantatoire a le pas sur l'élément descriptif. (2).

These elements he sees as basic. He suggests there are probably others yet to be identified, as difficulties exist in the fact that the stylistic analyst works in a European language and would be likely to overlook such a phenomenon as the dying fall of a line, supposedly a typical product of the African philosophy of vital forces, a philosophy expressing itself naturally in a static syntax and making use of a concrete vocabulary. It seeks to avoid a

(I) 'Rythmes et Style dans la Poésie Africaine', Actes du Colloque sur la Littérature Africaine d'Expression Française, Université de Dakar, 26-29 Mars, 1963, Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines No. 14, University of Dakar, Dakar, 1965, p.231.

(2) Ibid.p.231.

European tendency to move towards a conclusion in a line or lines.(1) According to Jahn, the task of literary history is to show the dialectical process of mutual assimilation and rejection of the two different traditions. That of the movement of African assertion, meanwhile, is to enhance the contribution of African philosophy and literature to the growth of African self-awareness, thus insisting upon independence in literature as much as in politics.

This view would have consequences in respect of the language of the African novel in French: so Jahn views with approval the writers who have, he claims, maintained elements of African style in their French writing:

> Il en est de même chez les romanciers, par exemple, Mongo Beti, Camara Laye, Ferdinand Oyono.(2)

This critical viewpoint lacks convincing substantiation in relation to the novel, and I myself, while taking note of works' styles where their contribution seems important, and admittedly unable to comment authoritatively upon a hypothetical African style-source, have been unable to isolate a non-French kind of style which could support such a viewpoint. It is in this critical area that the Anglophone field of African novel production may provide a point of comparison, particularly in such a work as The Voice(3) which deliberately seeks to import a local African style into the English texture of the work.

The preceding observations upon aspects of novel theory have a bearing upon the present inquiry in several ways. By reviewing certain main views on the novel as an artistic composition it is possible to establish a line of approach relevant to the sort of fiction being dealt with. The essential simplicity of the works becomes more apparent when compared with the potential complexity of the form. Moreover, its apparent lack of concern with the

(1) Ibid., p. 232.
(2) Ibid., p. 235.
(3) Gabriel Okara, The Voice, Deutsch, London, 1964.

aesthetic or artistic values of literature points to its central socially-orientated interest, which explains largely the sort of literature it is. An objectivated fictional world is not the self-proposed aim of this group of writers, and the discussion moves to the question what literary use is made of the actual world of racialism, prejudice and growing nationhood, in which the writers are deeply involved. The chosen mode is the sociopolitically significant narrative, and it is in terms of this structural base-line that this inquiry classifies and compares the works. I consider the varied and developing effects of this mode upon the combination of character, setting, theme and style. The latter element only occasionally calls for comment.

Introduction (b)

Critical Approaches.

(i) Some Representative Criticism of the works

In establishing common ground on which to discuss French West African novels in similar terms to those used for European works, one is contributing dignity to a critical field which may have been open to the charge of condescension.

> We must apply to these African writers the same stringent standards of literary criticism with which we judge other writers. We don't have to pat them on the back and make them think they have already written masterpieces when we know they haven't.(1)

The search for community of approach is simplified by the fact that the works in question seem less like foreign cultural manifestations and more like imitations of familiar western forms. A central distinction, however, from much Western work is the extent to which this field is unified by a common conception of the purposes of literature. It may be said that the emergence and development of the field are closely, even causally, related to the

(1) Chinua Achebe, 'The Novelist as Teacher', New Statesman, 29th January, 1965, p. 161.

growth of political and social awareness which has been the main preoccupation of most educated West Africans since the Second World War.

The closeness of the connection between literature and politics in modern French West Africa is a recognised historical phenomenon which must be considered largely responsible for the special emphasis of Francophone West African literature:

> Many of the eventual leaders of the new Africa appeared at first more in the guise of intellectuals than in that of practical politicians. Léopold Senghor, for example, was a notable Senegalese French poet before he became an effectual nationalist leader . . . Such men usually spent a period studying and working in and around universities in France, Great Britain or the United States . . . The main concern of Negro leaders on either side of the Atlantic was to establish a respectable intellectual and moral station for their people in a world which seemed excessively dominated by the traditions and values of Western Europeans. The forging of concepts of négritude, of la présence africaine, of the 'African personality', seemed an essential prerequisite for effective African action in the political field.(1)

The genesis of the intellectual upsurge of which the novel and poetry are the two dominant artistic manifestations is to be found in a political awakening which could be seen as commencing in the thirties, and going on to achieve effective strength in the post-war period.

The 1944 Brazzaville Conference of Free French politicians and colonial officials led to an increasing African political awareness and to the transformation by 1960 of a colonial empire into a group of independent states whose administrators and leaders were French-educated Africans. Within the same period the novel achieved considerable status and much of its most important work was written. All of this work was of a socially or politically committed nature, and the novel had the appearance of exploring and embodying the concepts proper to an African assertion. This characteristic has continued to be dominant through the following decade, but with significant developments to be considered in due course, and has been of common note, well into the sixties:

(1) R. Oliver and J. D. Fage, A Short History of Africa, Penguin, London, 1966, p. 245.

> The hero of the African novel is nearly always black, and if by chance he is white, as in Le Regard du Roi, the action at least is situated in Africa and the story deals with the contact with the African mentality. The poet, for his part, sings of the African woman and the land of Africa, or denounces colonialism.(1)

The literary philosophy behind this output has been expounded without regard to aesthetic criteria, or to any discussion of an artistic purpose inspiring the literary fiction:

> Mais il y a une parenté qui est évidente entre les livres écrits par les différents romanciers et conteurs noirs. C'est celle de la prise de conscience ethnique. Il en est ainsi parce que cette planète, en ce vingtième siècle, ou l'image que nous avons d'elle, pas pour longtemps, espérons-le, se caractérise par l'oppression, le racisme, la discrimination.(2)

The implication seems to be that there can be no free literature until its potential writers are free men. Without question, in this view, literature must be polemical in a situation of oppression:

> Le roman négro-africain, même s'il est lyrique, même s'il est épique, est bien souvent une oeuvre engagée, un écrit où palpitent la vie et la revendication, ce sont des livres qui décrivent le malheur de vivre et le désir de vivre mieux.(3)

The second of literature's twin functions in the urgent colonial situation is to reinforce protest with the construction of a truthful image of the personality of the oppressed people. The relationship between this twofold role of literature and the traditional idea of literature as a matter of schools and styles is not generally explored:

> Il nous paraît oiseux de s'attacher à établir ici une classification et à distinguer les écoles littéraires. Les écrivains noirs, comme le fabuliste, ont pris leur bien où ils l'ont trouvé. Seule compte l'habileté avec laquelle ils sont parvenus à révéler leurs peuples à eux-mêmes . . (4)

In the thesis of L. Kesteloot, this commitment is an essential characteristic of this literature:

(1) Claude Wauthier, The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa, Pall Mall, London, 1966, p. 24.
(2) Léonard de Sainville, Anthologie de la Littérature Négro-Africaine, Paris, 1963, p.20.
(3) Ibid., p. 21.
(4) Ibid., p. 22.

> En effet, dans le cas des écrivains noirs, l'engagement a été la condition nécessaire de la naissance et l'épanouissement d'un mouvement littéraire entièrement autonome.(1)

The concern of such critics as L. de Sainville and L. Kesteloot for formal matters is slight. Others, however, consider the works more in terms of novel technique. A. C. Brench attempts, for example, to see them as displaying a growth by stages(2) and praises a certain work for being a 'good novel':

> It is not meant to be a political manifesto, an indictment of colonialism, but a novel, and, as in all good novels, the society against which it is set is vividly portrayed.(3)

While A. C. Brench is largely concerned with considering the field from the point of view of its range of reference, despite his occasional comment upon form, a more systematic approach to the works as formal constructions is to be found in the proceedings of the Colloquium on French African literature, held at the University of Dakar in 1963.(4)

P. Bol bases his observations(5) upon such criteria as objectivation, consistency, dramatisation and adequacy of creation of character, narrative and milieu. He distinguishes three kinds of novels here [illegible], the autobiographical works, those which attempt an objective presentation of contemporary Africa and those which take the reader into pre-colonial Africa. In Bol's view the autobiographical group fail as novels because of their lack of psychological complexity, their sketchiness of milieu, their thinness of narrative, and their authors' failure to seek structural consistency convincing dramatisation of situation or objectivation. The concept of

(1) L. Kesteloot, Les Ecrivains Noirs de Langue Française, Brussels, 1963, p. 321.
(2) A. C. Brench, The Novelists' Inheritance in Africa, Oxford University Press, London, 1967, p. 9.
(3) Ibid., p. 60 (my underlining).
(4) Les Actes du Colloque sur la Littérature Africaine d'Expression Française,
(5) 'Les Formes du Roman Africain', Ibid., pp. 133-138.

truthfulness to humanity is then applied by Bol to his second group. Here we meet again the idea popular in the field of social commitment.

> Ici une forme est accomplie, et par cet accomplissement le monde noir est posé de façon vivante devant le lecteur, est affirmé comme un tout cohérent et existant que nous avons à contempler en ce qu'il est. Avec cette série de romans nous sommes vraiment mis en présence d'un univers qui se possède, qui se réfléchit; c'est celui de l'Afrique moderne, maître de soi et de sa condition, se déterminant librement à partir de ses propres ressources et possibilités, affrontant le monde avec lucidité.(1)

Bol's emphasis upon social depiction leads him to distinguish a third group by its specifically African use of the form, creating works described as follows:

> . . . des écrits qui réintroduisent le lecteur dans l'Afrique traditionnelle ou précoloniale, soit par le geste de ses héros, romans historiques comme Doguicimi de Paul Hazoumé(2), récits d'allure épique comme Soundiata de Niane(3), soit enfin par le monde mythique des contes.(4)

Bol here sees this group as the most promising area of African fiction, because it enables the reader to penetrate into what he calls le pur domaine de l'imagination nègre, through la vertu du style, and le dynamisme de la forme, qualities which he defines as peculiar to the oral style which has survived in these works:

> Leurs auteurs ont réussi à récréer, par la manipulation de la langue et surtout par l'organisation du récit, une forme à la fois ancienne et nouvelle. C'est par cette forme qu'ils nous touchent à l'intime de l'être; elle nous introduit dans une attitude particulière, dans une façon d'appréhender le monde qui rejoint le poétique, sans aucun doute, mais qui peut également contribuer à donner à l'art romanesque des formes nouvelles extrêmement efficaces.(5)

The foregoing perhaps demonstrates the difficulty of applying the criterion of objectivation in a generally acceptable way, even though it is agreed that this may constitute a valuable approach to the novel.

(1) Ibid., p. 134.
(2) Paul Hazoumé, Doguicimi, Editions Larose, Paris, 1935.
(3) Djibril Tamsir Niane, Soundjata, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1960.
(4) Bol, loc. cit., p. 137.
(5) Ibid., p. 138.

Bol's classification of the field relies largely upon this concept but is nevertheless open to serious objections. His observations on the weaknesses of the autobiographical kind of work will be confirmed in the following pages, but his second group, the few novels of satisfactory objectivation, could easily be amplified by another critic, and the criterion is set aside completely in his consideration of his third group, distinguished by a peculiarly African approach:

> Ces oeuvres . . . restituent les prestiges du style oral . . . Leurs auteurs ont réussi à récréer . . . une forme à la fois ancienne et nouvelle . . . (1)

It appears that his enthusiastic support of supposedly African kind of literature has led him to abandon the central consideration of the nature of a novel, which by common consent would exclude short stories, legends and verbatim transcription of historical tradition, all of which he includes in this third group. The latter may well be considered objective productions, since the 'author' is little more than compiler; in lacking a fictional organisation they hardly merit the title of novels. Thus, granted some valuable insights, these critical appreciations of the field are found wanting in certain important respects.

A further approach is provided in the same Colloquium by R. Mercier, for example in his comments upon Le Regard du Roi (2).

> Non seulement le sujet, avons nous vu, tient plus du mythe que de la réalité, mais la forme s'affranchit des lois du genre romanesque . . . c'est donc une composition essentiellement poétique, qui procède, non par description, mais par suggestion, par symboles, qui tend à la saisie d'une autre réalité. Cette méthode est celle même de la poésie. (3)

Such a comment seems significant in its emphasis upon technique ('Une composition essentiellement poétique, qui procede non par description, mais par suggestion, par symboles . . . '). The work in question, on the other hand,

(1) Ibid., p. 138
(2) Camara Laye, Le Regard du Roi, Plon, Paris, 1954.
(3) 'Préliminaires d'une Analyse', op.cit., pp. 32-43.

could well be seen as the field's leading example of its tendency to create 'romans à thèse'.(1)

A more recent and fuller attempt to discuss this field in technical terms is that of B. Mouralis(2), who considers the novels in groups, those which have for their subject communities of the past, and those which are situated in contemporary Africa. His treatment of the first group raises the question of the definition of 'novel' in this context, in so far as he describes certain of the works as being little more than transcriptions of historical tradition, of others he is unable to distinguish the slightest literary contribution:

> Au lieu de composer des romans historiques - genre d'origine européenne - ils ont transcrit intégralement certaines périodes de l'histoire de leurs pays, sans faire intervenir les critères modernes de l'objectivité exactement comme la tradition les leur avait transmises.(3)

Mouralis cites a number of works in this connection, the large majority being collations of folk-tales. Of these, the only works which, by generally accepted criteria, could be called novels are Paul Hazoumé's Doguicimi and Nazi Boni's Crépuscule des Temps Anciens(4). His inclusion of Niane's Soundjata ou l'Epopée Mandingue is to be questioned in this context in that it seems to lack the fictional invention that one would look for in a novel, being, as it is, a collation of legendary material. One might see it as an objective reproduction of some oral literature, but not as an objectivated work of fiction.

Mouralis's attempts to apply the criterion of objectivation to other groups of works are hardly more successful. It is only partially possible to agree with his strictures upon certain works for their supposed lack of objectivity in depiction of social setting:

(1) See p. I62 below.
(2) Individualité et Collectivité dans le Roman Négro-africain, Université d'Abidjan, 1969.
(3) Ibid., p. 104.
(4) Présence Africaine, Paris, 1962.

> La vision subjective des faits limite l'objectivité de la peinture. D'autant plus que le dessein véritable du romancier n'est pas de décrire la société traditionnelle pour l'intérêt qu'elle peut présenter à titre documentaire: mais surtout d'opposer en une structure antithétique l'enfance, toujours heureuse, du héros aux difficultés présentes que ce dernier connaît, une fois qu'il est transplanté dans le monde moderne. Ainsi, tandis que les détails sont exacts et contribuent efficacement à créer une atmosphère 'vraie', la perspective générale se trouve faussée.(1)

The implication appears to be that the novelist has a duty to be 'true to life' and to depict society 'as it is'. The novelist, however, could possibly rather be criticised for failing to attempt a transmutation of 'objective' data into an artistic expression of his vision of life. Moreover, not all the works cited by him bear out his observation; he goes on to refer to B. Dadié's Climbié(2), which does, and to A. Koffi's Les Dernières Paroles de Koimé(3), D. Ananou's Le Fils du Fétiche(4) and B. Matip's Afrique, nous t'ignorons(5), which do not, appear to do so.

The difficulty in applying this criterion is further illustrated by Mouralis's claim that Laye's L'Enfant Noir(6) and Le Regard du Roi and O. Bhêly-Quénum's Piège sans Fin(7) succeed by their depiction of traditional Africa.(8) However, L'Enfant Noir is as much dependent upon the happy childhood/unhappy adolescence antithesis as is Dadié's Climbié. Le Regard du Roi derives its motivation from an inversion of African and European in the colonial situation, and its inspiration is the commonly found anti-colonial rhetoric. The setting plays an important part in the work, but rather as an expression of a mysticism which seems to owe as much to Western influence as to African tradition.(9) Bhêly-Quénum's Piège sans Fin(10) could seem

(1) Ibid., p. 106.
(2) Seghers, Paris, 1953.
(3) Nouvelles Editions Debresse, Paris, 1961.
(4) Nouvelles Editions Latines, Paris, 1955.
(5) Lacoste, Paris, 1956.
(6) Plon, Paris, 1963.
(7) Stock, Paris, 1960.
(8) Op. cit., p. 106.
(9) See p.162 below.
(10) See p. 120 below.

superficially to illustrate Mouralis's concept of objectivation by its depiction of African society. It does have a wide range of social reference, perhaps one of the widest of the field. On the other hand, the various representatives of different levels and areas of society are mainly seen through the eyes and experience of the hero, who not only has the usual limitations of an individual subjectivity but also suffers increasingly from madness. It is precisely within the mentality of the hero that the main action takes place.

I have looked at Mouralis's use of the criterion in some detail as it illustrates the central consideration of the critic of the novel, the choice and application of criteria. His approach is important in that it concentrates attention upon the dominant social emphasis of the field and in that it does so from a creative writer's point of view. It is not, in my view, possible to accept the idea of the value or possibility in literature of an objective statement of social environment which Mouralis seems to hold. The difficulties he has in illustrating the idea with examples from the field point, perhaps, to the basic weakness.

A further attempt to develop an analysis of the whole field from a particular point of view is that of Sunday Anozie(1). Anozie takes the standpoint of the sociologist who attributes the main features of the field to the sociological realities of the total situation. After the highly systematised theorising of the first half of his work Anozie goes on to illustrate his thesis through reference to a few selected novels.

He distinguishes three types of determination. The first operates through a twofold definition of the local novel form, as an extension of oral literature and African folklore and also as the vehicle of a traditional African world-view. The second type of determination concerns the hero as both a man of two worlds and a problem-beset individual. The third type sees the

(1) Sociologie du Roman Africain, Aubier-Montaigne, Paris, 1970.

novel as a means of expressing a threefold malaise, that of a colonially dependent situation, that of a period of social and urban change and that of a period of political development and upheaval.

> Notre but consiste à dégager dans ce roman un ensemble de caractères et de thèmes interdépendants, en choisissant pour cela les 'types' du sujet, (héros ou personnage principal) et la nature du conflit que véhiculent les romans.(1)

This explanation of the broad pattern of the novel as the product of a developing social situation implies the similarity of literatures of similarly situated societies, so that Anozie is able to include the product of Anglophone societies as expressing similar characteristics.

It is important to have this inductive approach of Anozie's, whereby certain general principles are taken from the methodology of sociology and from a reading of the particular social scene _in toto_, and then applied to a selected range of texts. There is value in the resulting confirmation of the idea, which is important in the present work, of the strength of sociological realities in the socio-literary equation. There is, however, a clear necessity for this approach to be counterbalanced by a pragmatic, deductive approach, which looks at the works in themselves first of all as literature, and only then moves on to drawing sociological conclusions if required. The non-literary nature of Anozie's approach is indicated by the way he himself has admitted the difficulties his method encounters when endeavouring to apply his theory to the complexity of a work of literature:

> En particulier, lorsqu'il s'agit des oeuvres d'un seul écrivain . . . à partir de quel moment précis et selon quels critères objectifs un auteur peut-il être considéré comme manifestant une préférence pour l'un et l'autre 'type' de personnage et de situation romanesques? Ou bien encore, quels sont les signes indicatifs précis qui caractérisent le passage d'un écrivain d'un 'type' privilégié de personnage et de situation romanesques à un autre?(2)

(1) _Op. cit._, p. 9.
(2) _Ibid._, p. 11.

The consequence of these difficulties would appear to be that the critic using this approach has to ignore the artistic unity of the works he is dealing with in order to extract passages, areas, characters, which illustrate the particular sociological point he is demonstrating.

The possibility of an author changing his approach from one work to another, however, does not appear damaging to Anozie's thesis, since it would be generally agreed that the critic is justified in looking for consistency only within a given book rather than in an author's total work, and it could be assumed that, while a general sociological pattern may obtain within a culture, there would be different aspects which an author may treat in turn. Nevertheless, Anozie does see real difficulty here:

> Si de telles questions, dont la réponse dépasse le cadre de notre ouvrage, démontrent assez clairement qu'il est vain de développer à l'heure actuelle une véritable sociologie ou théorie du roman africain, elles illustrent néanmoins la souplesse et la qualité dynamique de l'approche utilisée ici.(1)

To some extent, the work of Anozie has covered ground which is also the concern of this present work. In dealing with his classification of heroes, he develops the idea of cultural hybridisation:

> Le héros favori des romans ouest-africain du groupe détermination intro-active est essentiellement 'l'individu problématique'. Il découvre l'incompatibilité des deux mondes traditionnel et moderne et par conséquent s'aperçoit que son existence et son équilibre spirituel restent en marge de ceux-ci . . . Une grande majorité des héros de ce type se sont engagés dans une sorte de quête longue et labyrinthique.(2)

Such a comment provides a valuable insight into the phenomenon described in my own study, the large proportion of works based upon the biography, often of the lonely hero:

> **Les romans nous montrent un écroulement de quelque valeur entre d'un côté l'individu et son environnement social, et de l'autre côté le héros et lui-même. (3)**

(1) Ibid., p. 11.
(2) Ibid., p. 41.
(3) See p.32 below.

Anozie's work deliberately limits itself to the sociological approach and succeeds in showing that a considerable area of the work yields up much of its meaning to an inquiry into the close relationship between social concerns and literature. His study, however, remains that of a sociologist applying the principles of his science to the books, and makes no claim to be that of a literary critic seeking to describe the novels in appropriate technical terms.

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The foregoing review of some representative criticism indicates that a general descriptive study in terms of novel critique has yet to be done. Accounts of plots, collations of thematic elements, background biographical studies, sociological explanations and so on, all of these contribute to the corpus of critical literature, but without coming to grips with the question, what sort of literature quâ literature has emerged? This study can only undertake one step of the task. From the different possible avenues of criticism suggested in my examination of novel technique , it seemed appropriate to follow that of the composition of the novel, an aspect which seemed to me the most fundamental of the several which offered themselves.

(ii) The Basis of this Study of the Composition of the French African Novel

The most striking feature of African fiction written in French is the importance it gives to the ideas of African identity, of protest against exploitation of Africans by the colonial power and of the cultural dilemma in which the educated African finds himself because of his two-fold intellectual and spiritual allegiance. The impression emerges that these ideas constitute in effect the raison d'être of the works as a whole.

The policy of 'assimilation' adopted by the French Government in its colonial educational practice, as distinct from that adopted by the British Government, may well largely explain the uniformity and ideology of much of the Francophone African literature.

The effect of this motivation is to be seen at both the thematic and substantial level and at that of form. With regard to the latter, the premium placed upon the ideas to be communicated detracts from a sense of formal opportunity. Technique develops within a limited scope alone. Nevertheless my examination of the works has shown sufficient formal development between 1926 and 1969 to require demonstration at some length.

This development is to be seen as a process of experiment and imitation. Imitation is here largely a matter of restating the customary emphasis upon social conflict by means of a particular balance of character, narrative and milieu. Experiment is observable in the way this balance changes, within the ideological limitations of the field in general and also in some more universal statements of human experiment.

What has been intended here is to consider works within certain groups based upon their narrative structure. The starting point of my approach is that a novel must at least be an organisation of elements such as character, narrative, setting or style. The crucial point of novel-creation occurs when the author, influenced by ideology, artistic inspiration, vision of life or whatever, decides upon an organisation of those elements in their relation to one another. It is in this central decision that the novelist-technician may best be seen as an innovator or imitator.

These novels may better be described as récits. They make their point, mainly, by means of event rather than by character or by setting. Moreover the story used is often largely the same, that of the disillusionment of the African after a period of fascination with France. It is by reworking this basis within a limited area of character and milieu selection that the field diversifies and yet remains the same. The submerged form, or basic stereotype, dominates the field as much by its technical as by its thematic implication.

This domination, I found, could be studied more effectively by looking at groups of works on the basis of their narrative substructure. The idea of kinds of narratives led to grouping the works according to the duration of the hero's life, which was either supposed to be a complete life, from childhood to death, admittedly usually a premature and violent death, or an open-ended life. The alternative kind of work, the narrative developed upon a short-lived situation, provided a further large group.

This kind of classification led to consideration of the different kinds of compositions, since the composition of a life story is very likely to differ from that of a situation-story in the extent to which they are able to develop characterisation, episodes, branching, depiction narratives or social depiction.

One group uses the basis of the chronological life, that is on the one hand an uncompleted life of an ostensibly autobiographical nature, or a similar uncompleted life of a fictitious nature, and, on the other, a life which is terminated at the end of the book by a death designed to give socio-political significance to the experience of that life.

The other main group, constructed around a situation, may also be considered in various sub-groups. In one the situation develops from the clash of social forces in the experience of one person. In another the experience of the community as a whole provides the means of seeing the conflict of socio-political realities. In yet another, the material derives from the development of a sexual-romantic relationship. A fourth category is represented by only one work in this study, the presentation of the inner life of a person in crisis, regardless of socio-political considerations.

Each of these sub-groups provide the material for separate chapter studies. The method I have used is to select a number of works from each group for individual study in the terms outlined above. It seems preferable to study

works in themselves rather than as illustrations of critical aspects: a novel is to be seen as an entity, in the final analysis. The selection has been made so that the studies centre upon leading works in the groups, on the one hand, that is, those which achieve a fuller statement of theme and greater organisation of means than others. On the other hand, I have attempted, at the same time, to select works which illustrate the main tendencies within the groups. A study of works listed but not discussed would not add anything material to the development of the thesis.

The novels considered as belonging to the field may, then, be grouped in the following way:

(a) (i) Works based upon the life of one hero

The autobiographical novel

Bakary Diallo, Force-Bonté, Rieder, Paris, 1926.
Bernard Dadié, Climbié, Seghers, Paris, 1953.
Camara Laye, L'Enfant Noir, Plon, Paris, 1953.
Kindengve N'djok, Kel'lam, Fils d'Afrique, Alsatia, Paris, 1958.
Atta Koffi, Les Dernières Paroles de Koimé, Nouvelles Editions Debresse, Paris, 1961.
Mamadou Gologo, Le Rescapé de l'Ethylos, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1963.
Ikelle Matiba, Cette Afrique-là, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1963.
Maurice Kone, Jeune Homme de Bouaké, Grassin, Paris, 1963.
N. G. M. Faye, Le Débrouillard, Gallimard, Paris, 1964.
Denis Oussou-Essui, Vers de Nouveaux Horizons, Scorpion, Paris, 1965.
Camara Laye, Dramouss, Plon, Paris, 1966.
Boubou Hama, Kotia-Nima, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1969.

(ii) Biographical Fictions, open-ended

David Ananou, Le Fils du Fétiche, Nouvelle Editions Latines, Paris, 1955.
Emile Cissé, Faralako, Liberté dans la Paix, Rennes, 1958.
Joseph Owono, Tante Bella, Au Messager, Yaoundé, 1959.
Ferdinand Oyono, Le Chemin d'Europe, Julliard, Paris, 1960.
Ake Loba, Kocoumbo, l'Etudiant Noir, Flammarion, Paris, 1960.
Charles Nokan, Le Soleil Noir Point, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1962.
Cheikh Dia, Avant Liberté I, Scorpion, Paris, 1964.
Abdoulaye Sadji, Maïmouna, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1965.
Yambo Ouologuem, Le Devoir de Violence, Seuil, Paris, 1968.

(iii) Death-orientated biographical fictions

Ousmane Socé, Mirages de Paris, Nouvelles Editions Latines, Paris, 1955.
Ferdinand Oyono, Une Vie de Boy, Julliard, Paris, 1966.
Sembène Ousmane, O Pays, Mon Beau Peuple, Amiot-Drumont, Paris, 1957.
Olympe Bhêly-Quénum, Un Piège sans Fin, Stock, Paris, 1960.
Cheikh Hamidou Kane, L'Aventure Ambiguë, Julliard, Paris, 1961.
François-Marie Evembé, Sur la Terre, en Passant, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1966.
Hamadou Kourouma, Les Soleils des Indépendances, University of Montreal Press, Montreal, 1968.

(b) Works based upon a situation

(i) Situational works involving the clash of social forces in the experience of one individual

Camara Laye, Le Regard du Roi, Plon, Paris, 1954.
Eza Boto, (pseudonym for Mongo Beti), Ville Cruelle, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1954.
Mongo Beti, Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba, Laffont, Paris, 1956
Ferdinand Oyono, Le Vieux Nègre et la Médaille, Julliard, Paris, 1956.
Sembène Ousmane, Le Docker Noir, Nouvelles Editions Debresse, Paris, 1956.
Benjamin Matip, Afrique, nous t'ignorons, Lacoste, Paris, 1956.
Seydou Badian, Sous l'Orage, Les Presses Universelles, Avignon, 1957.
Mongo Beti, Mission Terminée, Corréa, Paris, 1957.
Sidiki Dembélé, Les Inutiles, Bingo, Dakar, 1960.
Sembène Ousmane, Vehi-Ciosane, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1964.
Abdoulaye Sadji, Nini, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1965.
René Philombé, Sola, Ma Chérie, Clé, Yaoundé, 1967.
Francis Bebey, Le Fils d'Agatha Moudio, Clé, Yaoundé, 1967.
René Philombé, Un Sorcier Blanc à Zangali, Clé, Yaoundé, 1969.
Rémy Medou Mvomo, Afrika Ba'a, Clé, Yaoundé, 1969.

(ii) Situational novels of Community conflict

Sembène Ousmane, Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu, Le Livre Contemporain, Paris, 1960.
Sembène Ousmane, L'Harmattan, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1964.
Olympe Bhêly-Quénum, Le Chant du Lac, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1965.

(iii) The Love-Story situation

Félix Couchoro, L'Esclave, La Dépêche Africaine, Paris, 1929.
Paul Hazoumé, Doguicimi, Editions Larose, Paris, 1935.
Ousmane Socé, Karim, Nouvelles Editions Latines, Paris, 1935.
Félix Couchoro, Amour de Fétiche use, d'Almeidah, Ouidah, 1941.
Félix Couchoro, Drame d'Amour à Anecho, d'Almeidah, Ouidah, 1950.
Nazi Boni, Le Crépuscule des Temps Anciens, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1962.
Félix Couchoro, L'Héritage, Cette Peste, Editogo, Lomé, 1963.
Thérèse Moukoury, Rencontres Essentielles, (publ. by author), Paris, 1969.

(iv) The Psychological Drama

Malick Fall, La Plaie, Albin Michel, Paris, 1968.

PART I

Works based upon the life of an African hero

Introduction

The influence of the authors' political and social attitudes upon the structure and composition of their novels is perhaps most clearly to be observed in the 'biographical fictions', which constitute about half their total output. A subdivision of this group may be made, showing three subgroups, one in which the novels are entirely based upon the experience of the author and in which invention of material is difficult to establish or discern, a second in which the author has more clearly fictionalised his material (which is still taken from contemporary social conditions relevant to the authors' own experience) while maintaining the structure of an open-ended biography, and a third in which the biography is taken to the point of a fictitious death, which in some way illustrates the theme of the Africans' inferior status in the culture-clash. Again, this last subgroup uses the experiences of the contemporary conflict, external and internal, of the educated African, as the basis of the work.

The reasons for the predominance of this basically autobiographical work could be at least threefold. Firstly, the author has undergone a radical transformation of cultural awareness as a result of his education in adolescence, an education which accords high priority to literature. He would naturally seek to record his special experiences in a literary form, albeit elementary. Secondly, with the freedom of Western culture has come to the educated African a realisation of social and political inequality, so that it could be natural for him to commit himself to a socio-political

activism in literature expressed in biographies so structured as to present a case against colonialism. A third influence could be the market-factor, which would indicate to the potential writer the profitability of the exotic appeal to the French readership: a novel such as Laye's L'Enfant Noir has a dual appeal, firstly in presenting a picture of African society, in its traditional form, and secondly in showing the hero in a state of conflict through his experience of French education. In other works, for example, Loba's Kocoumbo, l'Etudiant Noir, the hero is able to record his reactions to Parisian life as a foreigner, and the French reader is afforded the pleasure of seeing his own society in a new light. Some such influences may explain the predominance of the biographical form in itself. They may also account for the main features of the structure and composition of the works. There is a considerable similarity between all these novels in terms of the material drawn upon. The writers' experience of childhood in an African setting, their education leading to contact with the French in Africa and often also in France, usually Paris, and their subsequent disillusion, either in France or in Africa are often presented so as to imply protest against the invidious position of the African.

Childhood in these works is often shown as happy, in an idyllic or at least harmonious and natural setting of African village life. This is particularly evident in Laye's L'Enfant Noir, in Dadié's Climbié, in N'Djok's Kel'lam, Fils d'Afrique, and in Socé's Mirages de Paris. The happiness of childhood is connected with the contrast of an idealised African rural society with a superficial view of Westernised urban life.

Important exceptions to the rule of 'happy childhood/unhappy adulthood' antithesis can be found in three groups of novels. Bakary Diallo's Force-Bonté depicts a happy childhood in rural Africa as a prelude to a similarly happy experience of the French presence in later years. There are those which

present an unhappy childhood, such as that of the hero of Kane's L'Aventure Ambiguë, who suffers under the rigorous training of his Moslem instructor. The childhood of Raymond Spartacus in Yambo Ouologuem's Le Devoir de Violence, illustrates the evil use of power of the local African potentate. Others depict a happy childhood without reference to a colonial or French presence to frustrate the hero's hopes: this will be done by other forces, such as in Bhêly-Quénum's Piège sans Fin, where the hero's happiness as a child is progressively eroded and destroyed by a malignant destiny. In Sadji's Maïmouna, we have the contrast of childhood happiness with adult disillusion caused by betrayal in love of the heroine in the city of Dakar, whence she returns home to her village.

The importance of French education in the lives of the writers is reflected in the emphasis given to it in these works. It may be significant that there is very little, if any, idea conveyed of the interest that individual academic subjects could provide. Hardly any impression appears that the educational process is worth continuing for its own sake. In general, this experience is seen in terms of its effect upon the relationship of the hero with his home, the personal contacts he makes in the process, and the extent to which it opens access to higher social status. It is at the same time the main area of culture-contact for the adolescent, where he is introduced to the rationalist and empirical approaches of Western culture, and where the foundations are laid of a lasting conflict between those values and the ones in which he has been reared.

This conflict is a recurrent theme, playing a determining role in the experiences of such heros as Samba Diallo of L'Aventure Ambiguë, Fara of Socé's Mirages de Paris, Nî of Faralako, and so on. The concern of the authors with this clash and resulting spiritual disequilibrium combines with their sense of disappointment that education has not brought with it the fulfilment of their hopes. This element of the novels' structure acts as a bridge to the disillusion of adulthood.

The effect of the post-education stages is to convey the idea that the attempt to achieve equality of status with the European has failed. Its main feature is the return of the hero to his country or place of origin. Thus, Laye's hero in Dramouss returns to Guinea to find the homeland of his nostalgic memory changed into a dictatorship where his freedom is threatened. Climbié, Dadié's eponymous hero, realises with despair that his expensive education has fitted him only for the role of a minor functionary, with little hope of escape from an oppressive regime. Kel'lam, in N'djok's Kel'lam, Fils d'Afrique, returns to his native village, having experienced the frustration of racial prejudice in his clerical post. Kocoumbo, of Loba's Kocoumbo, l'Etudiant Noir, however, remains in Paris long enough to justify the depiction of the unsatisfactory status of the African element of the Parisian pupulation, before deciding to return home. Gologo's hero in Le Rescapé de l'Ethylos receives an elaborate training for the medical profession, only to meet hostility from his White superiors and rejection with the onset of his alcoholism, and it is from an African healer that he achieves deliverance. Nî, of Cissé's Faralako, returns to his native village within the first chapter of the work, after his European education, which he renounces hopefully in favour of African tradition; Cissé's attitudes seem confused, however, in that the story also develops in an anti-traditional direction.(1) Franz Môhma, of Matiba's Cette Afrique-là, finds that his education does not save him from persecution, although in this case the chronicle leads to a successful conclusion for the hero. Raymond Spartacus's position, in Ouologuem's Le Devoir de Violence, is rather different from that of other African students returned from Paris, for he has achieved professional success in Europe, and his return is the result of the machinations of El Saïf, the African ruler, who will continue to rule in Africa through his creature, Spartacus. To consider works which take the process to

(1) See p.78 below.

its ultimate conclusion for the hero, Faye, of Ousmane's O Pays, Mon Beau Peuple, returns to his death in his homeland, Fara, of Socé's Mirages de Paris, Kossia, of Nokan's Violent Etait le Vent and Samba Diallo, of Kane's L'Aventure Ambiguë, all illustrate, by their deaths, the idea that the European educational process applied to the African produces disastrous results, because it is the instrument whereby the hero is subjected to demands of a culture in addition to, and in conflict with, those of the culture and society to which he is, in fact, largely and initially a member. Further illustrations of this general structural basis may be seen in Koné's Jeune Homme de Bouaké, whose hero goes back to the idyllic life of his village. Hama explores the values and traditions of non-colonial Africa and advocates a return to them in Kotia-Nima. Oussou-Essui's Vers de Nouveaux Horizons is also based upon the village-town polarity, with the hero departing and returning.

The majority of the novels based upon a biography, then, present this contrast. A protest is effected by contrasting the hopes of adolescence with the disappointments of manhood. By embodying the conflict betwen societies in their heroes, these authors contribute to the assertion of equality which it has been necessary for Africans to make in the world.

CHAPTER 1

The Autobiographical Novel

An important proportion of the field consists of works which present an account of the life of the author up to his present time[1]. The relation of autobiography and art offers scope for differing critical views: here it is taken as a combination of self-revelation, its ostensible raison d'être, on the one hand, and of the selection and arrangement of material in the interests of some other purpose or purposes of a literary or otherwise tendentious nature, on the other. The purely objective statement of a subjective experience of life, the aim of universal conviction sought by an individual writer, are evidently unattainable, and it is in the area where the author fails to be universal and objective that his prejudices, conscious and unconscious, are revealed. The autobiographies under consideration all share the same sort of prejudices, and it is this community of interest that this present chapter is about.

The idea of autobiography itself is developed in the work of J. Olney, Metaphors of Self[2], which adopts the position that the autobiography of a writer is the totality of his work, the corpus of his ideology as part of his life, and that this whole amounts to a metaphorical restructuring of the world whereby the writer achieves self-expression. The relevance of Metaphors of Self to the present thesis is, perhaps, limited to suggesting the generalisation that the African novel in French is mainly concerned with reflecting a national self-hood through the writers' need to establish a national and cultural identity. This is particularly observable in the

(1) See p. 36.
(2) J. Olney, Metaphors of Self, The Meaning of Autobiography, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1972.

autobiographical fictions themselves, and in the biographical fictions, to be discussed in more detail. In these it is possible to discern the creation of a literary stereotype in the cultural half-caste as the dominant metaphor in which the educated African may find a frame of reference for his socio-political search for values. That the need for this frame of reference is met through the imitation of a characteristically European literary form, the novel, indicates the reality underlying the metaphor. The predominance of the specifically autobiographical, as well as the submerged autobiographical, fiction suggests the importance and duration of that need.

In his later work, Tell Me Africa[1], Olney argues that the autobiographies are of prime importance in the literature of Africa, not for their technical achievement, but for the unique insight they provide into the life of the continent:

> Autobiography can legitimately be assigned a primary role in approaching African literature generally, and this on three counts: first, for the non-African reader, autobiography offers a way of getting inside a world that is inevitably very different from his own in its assumptions and values, in its attitudes and beliefs, in its practices and observances; second, much of the best literature from Africa generally is - in a strict as well as in a loose sense of the word - autobiographical; third, through autobiography one can, in many instances, approach fiction, or whatever other literature, with considerably greater assurance and validity.[2]

To the first of Olney's counts it may be objected that the non-autobiographical fiction of Mongo Beti, for example, offers a far superior way of entering the world of the African than any of the autobiographies, by virtue of its range of observation and its freedom from the technical limitation of autobiography. The second count begs the whole question with the assertion that 'the best literature from Africa . . . is . . . autobiographical'. The third offers difficulties of comprehension: it may be taken to mean that the knowledge of African life one derives from reading the autobiographies, which

(1) J. Olney, Tell Me Africa, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1973.
(2) Ibid., pp. 6,7.

are simple, enables one to understand the other fiction, which would otherwise be difficult. A reversal of this statement, however, would be equally true.

It seemed nevertheless worthwhile to consider Olney's work as a major and recent attempt to bring together the wide variety of modern Franco- and Anglophone African literature into some kind of critical comparison and evaluation. Its relevance is limited, however, at this stage, to supporting my attempt to look at the autobiographies, not merely as interesting voices from contemporary Africa, but also as literary compositions which, when brought together, may illuminate the question of the relation of literature and society at a certain time:

> When an autobiography succeeds it does so, it seems to me, in much the same way as the successful novel: that is, by a significant ordering, of recalled experience drawn from the writer's observation and awareness of himself, of his past, and of the entire social and spiritual context in which he has and has had his moral being.(1)

The combination of 'ordering' and 'awareness' produces the individuality of each work of art through obedience to the 'voice of vision':

> It would be a very great critical error to disregard 'the voice of vision' that informs a work of art. It is precisely this 'vision' that is the sine quâ non of a work of art.(2)

This inspiring quality, however, turns out to be less individual than might be imagined from the above, and Olney notes that the dominant influence on the African writer's minds is a certain attitude towards the past:

> The reverential attitude towards the past, whether it be an individual, an ethnic, or the African, past motivates not only historians and anthropologists, but also autobiographers, whose work, depending on which past they choose to embrace, will issue in personal, cultural or symbolic autobiography.(3)

Here Olney widens the term 'autobiography' to include works about an historic racial culture in a manner which this writer finds inimical to the

(1) Ibid., p. 21.
(2) Ibid., p. 23.
(3) Ibid., p. 35.

interests of critical terminology. In this connection he incorporates Le Devoir de Violence as an autobiography:

> I have called Yambo Ouologuem's Bound to Violence a symbolic autobiography of the African continent, but that is merely a way of saying that he intends to take the African past and the broad sweep of the continent for his subject.(1)

The ethnic, communal quality of actual African autobiography is of major importance in my own present study. The occasional exception stands out in strong relief, as, for example, Faye's Le Débrouillard(2). Olney dismisses it summarily:

> His autobiography, consequently, is not really typical of anything African (nor - which is perhaps surprising, given his life - is it very interesting).(3)

I suggest reasons elsewhere(4) why it could be read with interest by critic and general reader.

As to the classification of his field, Olney distinguishes five categories: the factual, chronological but otherwise unstructured record, the 'cultural autobiography', the 'autobiographical novel', the thematically arranged narrative and the symbolic autobiography. Olney's private interpretation of 'autobiography' facilitates a fairly free approach to classification, and he considers a range of works from both East and West Africa. Consequently his scheme offers little of value to the student of Francophone Africa alone, particularly if one is to maintain the necessary distinction between individual autobiography as a genre and attempts at fiction, however, much informed by their author's personal and social experiences.

The wide range of Tell me Africa precludes, it seems, an adequate distinction of separate local traditions such as those of British and French

(1) Op. cit., p. 24.
(2) See p.36
(3) Op. cit., p. 49.
(4) See pp. 53-55 below.

West Africa. In considering the essence of the field to lie in the clash of old and new, moreover, Olney has overlooked the development of a new novel in such a work as Fall's La Plaie[1], for example, which owes little to the Beti-Oyono-Laye tradition, or such as the modern industrial novel of Ousmane, Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu[2], both of which works I see as among the most important.

My consideration of the actual autobiographical element of the field is based upon the need to study representative works in terms of their composition or construction, and at the same time in terms of their position in the complex of tendentious commitment, artistic creation and personal self-revelation. From this study, a certain community of attitude is seen to emerge, which relates the group closely to other groups in the field.

Of the works which I have listed as autobiographies nearly all have in common the purpose of making some point about the colonial presence in Africa. By their presentation of their experience the authors seek to show their grounds for some particular attitude, generally rejection, but some times of indifference or of approval.

I propose to consider two kinds of autobiographical work, the simple and the pretentious, to illustrate the range of autobiographical composition. The former, less elaborate compositions display a limited variety of attitudes to the French presence, from the uncritical adulation of Force-Bonté to the indifference of Les Dernières Paroles de Koimé and the acceptance of Le Débrouillard. The autobiographical life of the work is made to serve different purposes rather than being allowed to exist for itself. With Force-Bonté it is pressed into the service of oversea France and France at war. With Les Dernières Paroles de Koimé it is made the basis of a novelettish

(1) See pp. 207-216 below.
(2) See pp. 172-182 below.

romance. Only with Le Débrouillard does the hero seem to live an autonomous life, asserting himself against the problems of life as a person rather than as an African. All three works, however, may be seen as markedly lacking in compositional sophistication, and can be seen as illustrating the French West African autobiographical form in the process of becoming.

The autobiographies of the second group, on the other hand, illustrate the qualities of the field in a sustained and elaborated form, and show the genre at its most advanced level. Here it combines elements of artistic composition, racial assertion and personal self-narration, in varying degrees but nevertheless at a significant level of complexity. All share a certain reservation of attitude towards the French presence, Laye's L'Enfant Noir and Dramouss, Dadié's Climbié and Gologo's Le Rescapé de l'Ethylos. Matiba's Cette Afrique-là I include here, with reservations as to its construction, for the sake of its interesting combination of autobiography and history.

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Diallo's Force-Bonté may be called the first Francophone African novel. This distinction has been questioned(1) and its African authorship doubted It commands some consideration, however, along with less questionable works, through its close relation with the subject matter and its relatively unsophisticated method, as a product of the early phase of French West African literature. Autobiographical in its basic approach, it seems less concerned with a genuine self-revelation than with an attempt to present the French colonial presence in Africa in the most laudable light.

(1) See p. I85n(I) below.

One might consider briefly here a possible relation between the chronology of the French West African novel and authorial attitudes such as those of Force-Bonté towards the French presence and influence. The pro-French attitudes of the early works Force-Bonté and Doguicimi, the latter appearing in I935, and the lack of anti-colonial feeling in novels written before the I950-60 decade, could suggest the general development of nationalist awareness towards a position of protest in that decade, a position which is then gradually relinquished. On this reading [illegible], Force-Bonté sets the first pace from which a dynamic movement develops. The picture, however, is not so clear-cut as this: for example, Camara Laye's autobiographical work, L'Enfant Noir, is relatively undisturbed by overt anti-colonialism. The main exception, perhaps, to such a generalisation is David Ananou's Le Fils du Fétiche. Published in I955, this work has two inspirational sources, firstly a desire to observe and record the customs of traditional Africa, and secondly a wish to assert the superiority of the best of Western civilisation, particularly its Christian values and its achievements in medecine, over the reprehensible features of African culture. So the hero's painful experiences of polygamy provide a strong contrast with his later monogamous happiness. Where the local diviner fails to cure the heroine's sterility, French medecine effects the desired result. Much of the interest of the plot resides in the frustration of plots by sorcerers to kill the hero. With the exception of Force-Bonté, the common denominator of these pro-French works is their close observation of traditional Africa.

This admiration of France which motivates the work of Diallo may also be seen as part of the controversy which took place in Paris in the early nineteen-twenties on the subject of the treatment of the negro in the French colonies. Two important works in the argument were Maran's Batouala, Vrai Roman Noir,(1) in which the colonised Africans are brutal and superstitious, and the French corrupted by their opportunities for exploitation, and Vrais Noirs et Vrais Blancs d'Afrique en XXe Siecle(2) by J. Blache, which presented an opposing view. Force-Bonté, seen in this context, is more a work of polemics than might otherwise appear.

The character of the work is suggested by Jean-Richard Bloch's preface:

> Le seul danger que je voie dans ces pages réside précisément dans le soin que leur auteur apporte à ne point condamner, à éviter de nous juger, à faire prédominer l'amour sur la rancune. C'est un effet de sa bonté. Nous savons que nous ne méritons pas les éloges qu'il nous décerne. Qu'au moins notre coeur se serre en découvrant ici, dans son ingénuité, ce que les Africains de nos colonies attendent de nous.(3)

In fact, the author's naïve admiration of the French colonial power is allowed to dominate the work. The title is intended to describe the characteristics of France, and Diallo uses his own experiences, his autobiography, to demonstrate this view. Thus, his first contact with the Whites sets the tone for what is to follow:

> Je rentre chez le traitant et j'y vois une personne jeune, aux cheveux blonds dorés, aux yeux bleus. C'est la première fois que je vois une femme blanche. Je me trouve devant des gens plus blancs que les Foulbes. Je suis étonné, je les regarde et je les entends parler; comme je ne les comprends pas je suis encore plus étonné. Il me vient à l'idée de demander le nom de la race de ces personnes et un homme noir qui travaille dans la maison me dit,
>
> 'On les appelle Français, mon petit . . . Il y en a qui sont bons, intelligents'.(4)

Admiration is to be seen in all the further stages of Diallo's experiences; he joins the French Army:

(1) René Maran, Batouala, Vrai Roman Noir, Albin Michel, Paris, 1921.
(2) J. Blache, Vrais Noirs et Vrais Blancs d'Afrique en XXe Siecle, Caillette, Orléans, 1922.
(3) Op. cit., p. (i).
(4) Ibid., p. 11.

> On nous reconduit au bureau du jeune Blanc aux galons dorés, le sergent-fourrier.
>
> Le voici toujours assis à la meme place. Je suis ravi de sa façon d'écrire, il me charme. Son regard est très calme et me semble doux. Je l'examine curieusement. Il a des cheveux blonds, des yeux bleus, un petit nez droit, de très petites moustaches tenues soigneusement. Et en tout ce que je vois de son corps la propreté est belle. Il parle, sa voix est limpide et ne fait point d'efforts, et le rire se dissimule sous ses paroles. Fini de causer, ses lèvres s'écartent pour sourire. Il fait l'effet d'un homme bon.(1)

He sees the French as the instruments of a benign Destiny, and himself and his fellows as fortunate indeed to be allowed to share in the task of pacifying North African tribes:

> Dans le nombre des soldats désignés pour aller faire la guerre je ne vois que des gestes de courage. Les jeunes qui depuis leur plus tendre enfance ont été mis au courant des exploits des guerriers n'bias tels que Guelory ou Gueladio Djegui, Samba bo Culatta, Bottol Sedi, El Adji Omar et d'autres braves encore se félicitent de l'honneur que le destin leur a offert de se distinguer dans la cause française. Ils remercient la France qui trouve moyen de les mêler à des luttes qu'ils croient capables de développer la force de coeur qui fait l'homme vrai.(2)

As the work progresses the interspersed comments become more elaborate, the adulation more total. He serves in the First World War in France and meets a French family:

> O vous Français de France, vous que Dieu a faits nos maîtres depuis déjà de longues années, vous qui n'avez point hésité à nous confier, comme à vos propres fils la défense de la France, vous qui nous avez vus au travail avec vous sur les terres africaines, vous qui, au milieu des erreurs, trouvez la justice, la vérité, la bonté, vous nation que Dieu a faite la foi de l'humanité de par sa grâce et par la grâce de vos idées, de votre raison et de vos bienfaits, vous allez avoir la preuve totale de l'attachement que nous avons pour vous.(3)

Diallo is aware of the existence of a different view of the situation but dismisses it briskly:

> Beaucoup parmi nous croient que nous ne sommes considérés que comme des chiens de chasse, à lancer où besoin est . . . Eh bien, c'est une mauvaise croyance. La France est trop humanitaire pour avoir des sentiments contraires aux inspirations humaines.(4)

This persistent Francophilia takes him through an unfortunate muddle whereby, a naturalised Frenchman by virtue of his military service, he cannot draw

(1) Ibid., p. 36.
(2) Ibid., p. 49.
(3) Ibid., p. 117.
(4) Ibid., p. 118.

the appropriate pay. To make matters worse he is scheduled incorrectly for repatriation to Senegal. He avoids this unwelcome eventuality, and the work ends with a series of addresses to various French benefactors. Il concludes with a poetic image in which the golden-haired young woman of his first encounter with the French reappears as a symbol of France itself: a young lady has given some bread to some birds, which he requests to join him in a hymn of praise to France:

> En face de votre Bienfaitrice, cette dame au visage doux, aux cheveux blonds dorés, qui a pensé à vous apporter jusqu'ici le pain, je vous supplie, dites avec moi: Vive la Force-Bonté de la France! (1)

This early work is a significant indicator of the way literary forms and particularly the autobiographical fiction, will later be used for socio-political purposes in this field, more composedly perhaps, but with no less commitment. Thus the incidents are developed for their contribution to the theme. The characterisation range is limited to the central figure and a few illustrative personages. The character development is ideologically functional and the author - hero's comments dictate and control the reader's responses to the events and people.

The creation of an autobiographical fiction was also attempted in Les Dernières Paroles de Koimé: the experiences of childhood, family life and early education, unusually full of reference to his later academic work, observations of village life, his growing sexual awareness, accounts of experiences related to him by acquaintances, all are presented quite fully, in a sectional, chapter-dominated manner, and provide the first term of the 'youthful hope - mature disillusion' pattern. The second term is expressed in the young man's experience of town life, suffering exploitation and disappointment.

As direct autobiography, the bulk of the work appears prosaically candid. The introduction of a fictional element, however, seems to destroy its unity.

(1) Ibid., p. 208.

A suddenly formed romantic attachment, towards the end, for a young girl provides the conclusion: the hero discovers the girl to be the daughter of the woman who rejected his father's love when the latter had abandoned the hero's mother, and who thus influenced him to kill himself with his son yet unborn. This resolution had been prepared by only brief references and by a sketchy development of the growth of the hero's love.

The work does, however, address itself to one apparent problem, how to conclude an 'autobiographical' work by a young or middle-aged man. Marriage is one answer, death another, through a fictionalisation of the narrative basis: the former method is seldom used, the latter more frequently.(1)

One work stands out as unique in the autobiographical group in relation to the general compositional pattern, N. G. M. Faye's Le Débrouillard. The author here recollects his life for its own interest's sake. The only tendency which may be discerned is that of a naïve religiosity:

> Je ne fais le pape, ni le prêtre auprès de vous. Je veux seulement vous dire ce que je pense de celui que nous ignorons tous tant que nous sommes . . . Si vous l'avez trouvé, vous vivrez heureux, car personne ne fera plus de mal à l'autre, de peur d'être jugé par le maître suprême.(2)

The work contains no comment on racial issues, neither does it attempt to provide a picture of a social scene. This freedom from the field's customary tendentiousness may relate to the author's self-confessed lack of academic status:

> Ce livre n'est pas écrit par un écrivain ni par un professeur. Seulement par une personne de niveau très primaire.(3)

The stimulus of the work has been a desire to share his experience of life, which he interprets as a reason for hope and determination in life:

(1) See pp. 107 to 132 below.
(2) Op. cit., p. 7.
(3) Ibid., p. 7.

> Mais croyez-moi, ce n'est pas une histoire gratuite que je vais vous raconter, c'est une réalité, du fait que je l'ai vécue moi-même . . . Pour moi, avec de la volonté et de la patience on arrive à vaincre la vie qui est notre purgatoire terrestre.(1)

Le Débrouillard presents the early childhood and hardships of the hero, a brief educational experience and a longer one of gaining a living in a variety of menial tasks, relying upon his wits and personal resources, before success as a boxer in Europe leads to fame as a film-star - a complete reversal of the 'happy African childhood-unhappy Europeanised adulthood' pattern. Committed to recreating many episodes of a varied life, Faye maintains a highly personal approach to his experience. From the work emerges an impression of a lively, articulate and resourceful person, intensely aware of life as a struggle, and proud of his success. Principles and broad issues are hardly considered; rather emerge the immediate emotions and drives of a particular existence through a succession of individual experiences, the most dominant feature of Faye's inner life being his need to prove himself after an unhappy childhood, and to reward and comfort his mother.

The personal nature of the autobiography is enhanced by its style. The flow of inner life is conveyed in the language of the man himself:

> Dieu créateur allait vite me dépanner grace à une femme à qui j'avais porté ses achats. Cette femme, je ne souviens plus de son nom. Mais son mari Moussa, je me rappelle son nom.(2)

He talks to himself, about himself, to his reader in a vividly familiar and colloquial style:

> Et c'était fini. Vous vous rendez compte combien ils sont gentils? Loger un gosse pendant des mois, sans pièces, sans savoir même d'où il vient? Moi, je vais vous dire pourquoi, et j'espère que vous allez comprendre. Parce qu'ils étaient des croyants. Parce qu'ils le faisaient pour rendre service.(3)

Faye's Le Débrouillard is unique in the field for sustained and immediately autobiographical quality. It has no concern with the general issues of

(1) Ibid., p. 7.
(2) Ibid., p. 49.
(3) Ibid., p. 63.

European-African relations. Instead of presenting a passive hero who is overcome by a new milieu, it sets out a man who conquers his circumstances and beats the commercialising Westerner at his own game. In terms of composition it lacks complexity, consisting merely, in the final analysis, of reminiscences bearing a particular personal emphasis. The vision which inspired its creation lacked range, and the work is restricted in its scope. It remains, for all that, one of the most personal autobiographies of the group.

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The works I have grouped together to consider next share in varying degrees a sense of disillusion and resentment because of the experiences of the colonial situation of their authors. In these the evocation of the milieu is of considerable importance; the reality and nature of African society is asserted here as an essential element in any thinking about the colonial situation. In Matiba's Cette Afrique-là the milieu is an historical panorama; in Laye's L'Enfant Noir Africa means mystery and love. For Dadié the important thing is to evoke the crowded town life of Dakar and the happy country life of his childhood. Gologo's Le Rescapé de l'Ethylos dwells upon African past greatness as well as its present confused mixture of difficulties and hopes.

These works all have as their hero a man who suffers rather than acts, who watches, observes and comments in preference to carrying out effective action against a situation. Dadié and Gologo develop the inner life of their hero much more extensively than other authors of the group. Generally the autobiographies are little concerned with the complex reality of personality and so may be compared with the remainder of the works.

A well developed use of autobiographical data is to be found in Laye's L'Enfant Noir and Dadié's Climbié, both of which treat the childhood, the education and (if one includes, as seems legitimate, Laye's Dramouss with the former) the post-education disillusion of an African inhabitant of a French colonial territory. These two are typical in the sense that the hero of neither work has any unusual attitudes, such as those of Bakary Diallo, or any particular individual problem such as the alcoholism of Mamadou Gologo, and that their main elements are common to much of the field. There are, however, important differences of treatment and approach relevant to the use of autobiography. Dadié, in Climbié, presents an outspoken criticism of the colonial situation, Laye, in L'Enfant Noir, an idealised picture of traditional African life and in his Dramouss a criticism of the dictatorial successor to the colonial regime. Climbié may be seen as a more direct autobiography, and Laye's work more stylised. This tentative distinction may serve as in introductory point of comparison to a consideration of both works in more detail.

Climbié opens with the narration of a typical childhood experience: the child's flight from school for some misdemeanour. The reader is taken straight into the reflections of Climbié:

> Est-ce une faute bien grave qu'écrire sur le mur de l'école? Si l'on ne peut écrire sur les murs de l'école, sur quels autres murs pourrait-on écrire? Vraiment les grandes personnes, d'habitudes si réfléchies, ne le sont plus lorsqu'elles ont affaire à des gosses.(1)

Dadié succeeds in conveying the living texture of the child's experience as it occurs, largely through his mastery of this interior monologue technique, which, combined with the omniscient third person point of view, enables him to encompass the relevant aspects of a situation, while retaining the immediacy of the otherwise limited first person point of view used by Laye. Thus he switches from the flow of the child's consciousness to the external situation:

(1) Op. cit., p. 98.

> Climbié court toujours. D'un côté l'océan enfle sa voix pour l'effrayer, parce qu'il voudrait aller s'y jeter, et de l'autre, ce sont les cases, les ruelles.(1)

He is able to follow this with a description of the child's life at his uncle's farm; the following extract illustrates Dadié's evocative skill:

> Climbié au campement aide son oncle N'dabian dans chacune de ses occupations. Auprès de lui il apprend son métier d'homme. Lors des feux allumés pour préparer les cultures, jetant des brindilles dans le brasier, il aime voir la fumée monter, noyer la forêt et là-haut entendre chanter l'aigle lorsqu'il est midi et tout flambe.(2)

By means of description, narration, interior monologue, reflection and dialogue, Dadié succeeds effectively and economically in giving a satisfying insight into the mind of the child, the beliefs and customs of his social environment, the physical environment in terms of the agricultural process, the flora and fauna, and so on, before going on to evoke the school experience of Climbié. Thus, from the above extract the work moves to a scene in which the uncle N'dabian relates to the child a traditional legend about God, Sickness and Death. From this to the episode of the villagers' killing of a local marauding panther is but a short step and the narrative moves forward to the arrival of Climbié in Grand Bassam for his first school. A feature of Dadié's technique is his ability to develop a scene which has no immediate narrative significance and yet is valuable in creating an overall impression. The narrative oscillates between the experiences of the child and the social setting, creating economically a wide variety of scenes. A single page suffices for the decline and death of Uncle N'dabian; the impact of this upon the child, the gathering of the relatives and the departure for the cemetery, are all recreated as through the child's eyes:

> Climbié baissa la tête comme sous un orage: son oncle . . . si bon pour lui . . . mort . . . jamais ils ne se parleront.(3)

(1) Ibid., p. 98.
(2) Ibid., p. 99.
(3) Ibid., p. 110.

So also with Climbié's move to the Ecole Régionale. The author's interest in the social scene takes up the arrival, activity and departure of a White conjuror and the plight of his abandoned female partner. He portrays the general life of Grand Bassam, the Saturday evening dances, the Sunday morning services, well attended by Africans, less well by Europeans, the music in the factories on Mondays, the busy street scenes, the activities at the harbour, funerals, in a word the observable life of a city, making full use of the freedom of his omniscient third person point of view, and yet able at any time to place himself in the centre of the child's consciousness.

The free-ranging technique enables Dadié to stand apart from the narrative and present his own authorial comments, for example in the following passage:

> Une optique spéciale sur l'Afrique et ses hommes semble imposée par l'Europe: l'originalité de l'Afrique, c'est l'homme nu; son génie, c'est une femme à plateau . . .
> Le pénible effort de tout un peuple qui lentement change de moeurs, rejette son fonds; les soubresauts d'un génie qui étouffe, se débat, la lutte incessante, constante, avec soi, avec le passé, avec le présent, avec les vieux, avec tout, ça ne se compte pas.(1)

Dadié's concern with this problem is, however, not allowed much direct expression of this sort at this stage. Rather, the didacticism of the work is implicit in the situations and experience of Climbié.

Dadié's dual partition of the work serves to underline the twofold nature of his experience, that of the childhood and education, a period in which conflict and disillusion were minimal, and that of the mature Climbié who becomes aware of social and political realities which will encroach upon his free development to the point where he is arrested as an agitator by the colonial power.

The second part demonstrates Dadié's range more extensively than the first part does, treating as it does a wider area of experience. In this part he

(1) Ibid., p. 137.

is providing the material for a judgement on broad national and politico-philosophical issues, material which has, to be successful, to present a picture of society in its conflicts and living reality, as it is perceived by a mature, well-educated adult. So it can be seen as the political education of Climbié, and it is this which determines the structure and composition of the part. Dadié makes free use of the discussion technique, whereby interested parties develop at length their views on the colonial situation. Climbié meets a Togolese artist, with whom he holds a lengthy discussion on the role of African culture and upon the difficulties in the way of inter-racial comprehension. As the work moves to its conclusion, and its didacticism increases, this technique is more fully used, preparing the reader for the declamatory apostrophe of the closing lines in which the tom-toms of Africa are exhorted to ring out the message of African identity.(1) This element could be seen as an inartistic intrusion. On the other hand it is in keeping with the purpose and spirit of the work.

Unlike many other writers of the field, Dadié does not rely much upon discussion and authorial statement in order to convey his ideas: these emerge strongly from the situations and experiences of Climbié. So, his political education is dramatically initiated at the scene of the murder of an African in a bar, where the main concern of the onlookers was to avoid wrongful arrest. The repercussions of the World War are felt in Dakar, and these also give rise to reflections about the hitherto largely unquestioned superiority of the White races. A meeting of strikers is overshadowed by warplanes and encircled by armed police. In this way, Dadié moves his work on to a broader plane, giving substance to the ideological theme.

While the external orientation of the work is more evident in this part, the inner pilgrimage of Climbié is also kept before the reader's mind. The

(1) Ibid., p. 222.

White religion of love for one's neighbour appears hollow as Climbié reflects upon the social scene. The sense of bitterness and injustice increases through Part II, until, after his wrongful arrest, he arrives at a wholehearted commitment to political action to achieve African independence.

In respect of its evocation of a life and its context, Climbié may appear as one of the more effective autobiographical novels, , creating as far as autobiography may the illusion of an independent world for much of the work. The illusion seems to decrease towards the end as the author's polemical concerns become more pressing.

L'Enfant Noir contrasts with its successor Dramouss in compositional balance, and may be considered separately from it. Nevertheless the latter provides a sequel which, together with L'Enfant Noir, creates a whole narrative illustrating the author's reliance upon the stereotyped 'hopefulness of youth - disillusion of maturity' theme. In this case the first stage is the subject of much greater attention than the second.

Camara Laye's L'Enfant Noir moves in a different plane from that of Climbié. There is no suggestion in it of anti-colonialist feeling, no movement for African independence, and indeed no attempt to paint the sort of broad canvas of contemporary society found in Dadié's work. Rather Laye seeks to recreate the salient features of a rustic childhood which is steeped in traditional practices, beliefs and family atmosphere, and yet in which the threat of separation through European education increases to the point of realisation and the departure with which the work closes. The author's approach to this recreation may be seen from the following extract from his address to the 1963 Dakar Conference on French African literature:

> Et puis, assis devant ma table, une toute petite table éclairée par la lumière chiche de la lampe (les chambres d'hôtels ont toujours de ces lampes qui abandonnent la lumière comme à regret), j'écrivais, je me souvenais, je regagnais par la pensée mes amis, mes parents, le grand fleuve Niger - et il suffisait: j'étais abandonné, il me semblait que ma

> mère, que mon père vivaient à mes côtés; je leur parlais et ils me parlaient...
> Ma plume courait. Les souvenirs affluaient, j'étais débordé de souvenirs...(I).

This is the basis of L'Enfant Noir - memories of a happy childhood recollected in a cold and uncongenial Paris. From this raw material the task of selection and organisation is undertaken at the instigation of a friend:

> Et tout mon travail, toute ma rêverie de ce temps-là, n'était pas du tout un livre: c'était un invraisemblable tas de feuillets et de notes hâtives, sans ordre, sans suite; des choses écrites au gré du souvenir et avec la fantaisie même où les souvenirs affluent en nous. Il aurait fallu une inconcevable indulgence pour reconnaître, dans ce désordre, un effet de l'art. (2)

The basis of the selection process was an attempt to preserve what Laye calls 'le Mystère Africain'. (3)

> Je n'exposerais, par conséquent, d'autres souvenirs que ceux qui relevaient directement du mystère. (4)

But he discovers that he cannot separate this mystère from the reality of love:

> Il n'y a pas non plus de claire, d'intime perception du mystère sans un minimum d'amour pour les êtres et les choses. (5)

From this he arrives at the idea of the reality and spirituality of all true civilisation:

> Oui, je voulais en venir, en écrivant mes souvenirs d'enfance, à l'ineffable - à cette patiente et infinie recherche où nous sommes tous de l'ineffable; celle qui nous fait regarder par dessus les écrans de l'âge mécanique et nous lie, ici et là, au même sort, au même destin, à ce qui est notre destin même. (6)

The ensuing references to the supernatural powers of traditional Africa leads Laye to talk about his own father's work. He was a

(I) Op. cit., p. I22.
(2) Ibid., p. I23.
(3) Ibid., p. I25.
(4) Ibid., p. I25.
(5) Ibid., p. I26.
(6) Ibid., p. I26.

smith and sculptor, a man endued with supernatural power to call forth expressions of the immanent mystery.

The combination of personal and metaphysical concerns thus outlined largely explains the character of the autobiography. These central ideas of mystery, love and rhythm are keys to the selection of material and its presentation.

Laye has imposed a pattern upon his material which brings out the idea of a rhythmic movement in the life of the boy. The work moves through a succession of separate areas of interest, enclosed in organised chapters, areas of interest which alternate between the regularly recurring and the occasional, for example, a chapter on family life is followed by one dealing with a specific occasion at school and with the phase of Fatoman's school life. The boy's life is seen as a rhythmic pattern of experience: a typical stay with relatives at a country village provides the background for description of the rice harvest. The Konden-Diara ceremony provides a preliminary movement to the rituals of circumcision, and one can see a balance of emphasis between the happy, secure life of home and the new, exciting, but potentially distressing life of school. The boy grows up against a background of the rhythmic flow of nature, and takes his place in the annually recurring ceremonies of initiation.

Love, love of mother, of family, of young girls, of friends, appears as the main emotion of this traditional pattern of life, providing much of the narrative interest. The love of mother for son is, however, the strongest of these, and it is her distress at the different stages of the boy's progress in education, up to his departure from France, that affects him most strongly, making the outward movement from hearth and home a matter of deep conflict. The mother of L'Enfant Noir plays a major role in the work by virtue of her central family position in a familial society. The father also, in this work

perhaps more than in others, is given prominence because of his craft as a mystical process more than because of his role as titular head of the family.

A major feature of this autobiography, however, is the importance in it of the evocation of African traditional life and practices as with mystery and the supernatural. The boy's early experiences are of his father's work and workshop, almost a religious activity, an impression heightened by the matter of fact acceptance by the author of the importance of the attendant snake, or familiar spirit, which communicates with the father, and heightened also by the ritual which accompanies the production of the smith's artefacts. The mother also has supernatural powers and a crocodile totem. The customary practices of the harvest, the importance of the rituals of circumcision, all contribute to the creation of a picture of a society dominated by mystery, a society which has moulded the boy's outlook: hence the reality of the conflict, which will take Laye not only from the bosom of his family to an alien ambience, but also from one way of thought, to which he is accustomed and which has undeniable truth for him, to another which does not share the former's premises and frame of reference and yet which is also demonstrably true in its control of the material environment(1).

The patterning of experience exhibited by the organisation of the autobiography contributes to the suggestion of a mystical, poetic reality underlying the phenomena of observable existence. This suggestion is reinforced by Laye's adoption of a mannered prose style. Whether he is describing the evening countryside, or the ritual of circumcision, or the harsh treatment the younger pupils suffered at the hands of the older, the prose remains balanced, rhythmical and 'literary':

(1) There is an important difference in this respect between this work and Kane's L'Aventure Ambiguë, in which the crucial conflict is also a spiritual one. Kane's hero is torn between Western rationalism and Moslem mysticism, while Laye has to leave an African animism. Kane's mysticism is essentially morbid, Laye's more a celebration of natural life.

> Les fleurs, que l'approche du soir réveillait, exhalait de nouveau tout leur parfum et nous enveloppaient comme de fraîches guirlandes. Si notre chant avait été moins puissant, nous eussions perçu le bruit familier des fins de journée: les cris, les rires éclatants mêlés aux longs meuglements des troupeaux rejoignants l'enclos; mais nous chantions, nous chantions! Ah! que nous étions heureux, ces jours-là![1]

The mannered prose of this extract is in fact a feature of much of the work. So, with the circumcision ceremony, for example, a similar care for the balanced phrase is evident:

> La haie que les hommes formaient sur notre passage était épaisse, était compacte. Les femmes, derrière, ne devaient guère voir que nos hauts bonnets, et les enfants n'en apercevaient évidemment pas davantage: les années précédentes, je n'avais fait qu'entrevoir le sommet des bonnets. Mais il suffisait: le 'coba' est affaire d'homme. Les femmes . . . Non, les femmes ici n'avaient pas voix.[2]

The author's concern with the effect of rhythm of phrase, impact of verbal euphony and 'literary' vocabulary may well detract from an impression of sincerity - indeed, artifice and artificiality are hard to distinguish in such a passage as this:

> Voyant que le travail n'avançait pas comme le directeur l'attendait, les grands, plutôt que de s'y atteler avec nous, trouvaient plus commode d'arracher des branches aux arbres et de nous en fouetter. Ce bois de goyavier était plus flexible que nous ne l'eussions souhaité; bien manié, il sifflait aigrement, et c'était du feu qui nous tombait sur les reins. La peau cuisait cruellement; les larmes nous jaillissaient dans les yeux et tombaient sur l'amas de feuilles pourrissantes.[3]

It is not certain how far the work succeeds in combining the two main elements, the idealisation of Africa and the narration of his early life. The first relies upon imaginative recall of memories shaped in the mature author's philosophy, the second could only succeed by recreation of the day to day inner reality of the life, which is not entirely achieved.

Dramouss, the sequel to L'Enfant Noir, operates at a different level, and its form results from a different approach to the African situation.

(1) Op. cit., Cambridge University Press, 1966, p. 66.
(2) Ibid., p. 115.
(3) Ibid., p. 82.

The overtly political concerns of the author, on his return from Paris to Guinea, are firmly based in the contemporary situation. They are, specifically, the issues arising from the post-independence power problem. It is possible to discern three main elements in Dramouss: an autobiography, an evocation of the values and traditions of primitive Africa and a dramatisation of the political problem. The order of priorities is indicated in the author's foreword:

> En témoignage de solidarité et d'amitié à tous, en formant le voeu que ce récit, écrit d'une plume rapide, ne serve pas d'exemple, mais plutôt de base à des critiques objectives, profitables à la jeunesse, avenir du Pays. Que cet ouvrage contribue à galvaniser les énergies de cette jeunesse; et surtout celle des jeunes poètes et romanciers africains, qui se cherchent, ou qui, déjà, se connaissent, pour faire mieux, beaucoup mieux, dans la voie de la restauration totale de notre pensée; de cette pensée qui, pour résister aux épreuves du temps, devra nécessairement puiser sa force dans les vérités historiques de nos civilisations particulières, et dans les réalités africaines.(1)

In effect, Laye is maintaining his presentation of pre-colonial Africa, the inspiration of L'Enfant Noir and of Le Regard de Roi, considered elsewhere in this work.

The racial concern affects radically the realisation of character. Much of the material is presented by means of conversations held by the hero with friends, acquaintances and particularly members of his family. In this way he talks with Tante Aline about the position of the African and colonialism in general(2). A conversation with an acquaintance, Stanislas, a stranger who befriends him in Paris, raises large questions of human solidarity(3). The condition of the state of Guinea is the subject of lengthy discussion with the subject's friends, Bilali and Konate(4). Laye relies heavily upon this device to present his political ideas, his characters and action. It does not, however, succeed in conveying a sense of experienced life, largely

(1) Op. cit., p. 8.
(2) Ibid., p. 106.
(3) Ibid., p. 62.
(4) Ibid., p. 116.

because of the unnaturalness of the exchanges. One might expect conversations to suggest and indicate relationships and personalities before political views. Laye is weak in this area, as witness the exchange between the returned student and his fiancée upon their reunion. At the moment when the two reunited lovers, declared man and wife, retire to bed, a few words about the importance of prayer is thought adequate:

> Après le traditionnel Salam Alaikoum, elle risqua:
> - Je préfère rester au bord du lit, tu te mettras du côté du mur.
> - Comme tu voudras.
> - N'éteins pas la lumière.
> - Cela m'est égal, dis-je pour l'apaiser.
> Les draps du lit enroulés sur moi, j'étais à présent au lit, avec elle près de moi, bien près de moi. Je ne crois pas que nous causâmes longtemps. Et je m'endormis à poings fermés . . . (1)

There are, in Dramouss, certain departures from the usual pattern of autobiography, in particular the inclusion of a griot's tale(2) and the creation of the climax of the work by using a dream. Of the former, the link with the narrative is tenuous. Mimie and Fatoman have considered the role of jealousy in a love-relationship. This leads Fatoman to have a griot relate a relevant tale of some five thousand words' length. The nature of the tale has some bearing upon the relationship of the hero and his wife. The dream(3) which provides the focal area of the work is also a product of this ideology. The writer introduces it as the outcome of a supernatural operation, the use of a sort of fetish - the father's powers have survived from the previous work - and from this the novel comes to its conclusion. The dream is a warning to the hero to leave Africa for the time being. The dream itself is composed of diverse elements drawn from contemporary political ideology, legend and local geography. One may possibly see in it a development of the dream-world technique of Le Regard du Roi(4).

(1) Ibid., p. 128.
(2) Ibid., pp. 128-154.
(3) Ibid., pp. 197-231.
(4) See pp. I62-I66 below.

While giving expression to his cultural and political concerns Laye has not succeeded in maintaining the reality of the personal basis of the autobiography. However, one could maintain that Dramouss, for all its shortcomings as autobiography in the general sense of the word, is an important achievement in its mode of expressing a political vision. The communal premise of African thought finds here a new statement in the European genre of autobiography, combining the two poles of Western individualism and African societalism in a new form, such as, for example, Dramouss with its framework of personal reminiscence and its substantial elements of traditional conte and mystical dream-allegory. In this later work one finds an extension of the experimental work of Laye's Le Regard du Roi which also expressed a particularly African view of life as part of a greater synthesis of philosophies through an innovatory form. It is, however, when one mentions Le Regard du Roi in comparison with Dramouss that one has to make the reservation that the latter work has far less textual fullness than the former. Its imagined situations are far fewer, and much less imaginatively developed; it is, so to speak, only a nucleus of a novel, while Le Regard du Roi fulfils much of its potential.

A more complex use of the autobiographical form is illustrated by Le Rescapé de l'Ethylos, which presents the African situation at different levels. The work consists basically of the experiences of a native of Mali who achieves the position of doctor in the French administration. Before taking up his first post, however, he falls prey to the machinations of a woman and to alcoholism. After a disastrous marital and professional experience he is cured of his alcoholism and freed from his wife, and the work ends with his taking up a new medical post and facing a hopeful future.

The Foreword considers the difference between the Mali of the present time (1963) and that of the events and situation of some ten years previously, presented in the book:

> En effet, si la description des structures politico-administratives faite dans ce livre ne correspond plus à la réalité actuelle, il n'en demeure pas moins évident que le problème social auquel s'attaque l'auteur demeure posé et demande une solution, une solution urgente d'ailleurs, dont la recherche dépasse largement les limites de la République du Mali.(1)

The Foreword develops this difference as a source of pride for Malians in that they are now the masters of their own fates, but returns to the pernicious neo-colonialist influence of certain murderous weapons:

> En effet, il reste encore à combattre le colonialisme dans un domaine plus subtil, celui où a été construit son arsenal doté de ses armes les plus perfectionnées et les plus meutrières . . . Le salut de l'Afrique dépend des dispositions qu'elle prendra pour détruire ces armes d'autant plus dangereuses qu'elle parent sa vie contemporaine, corrodent, partiellement sa raison, son psychisme. Joyaux d'une société 'primitive' africaine qui tire sa force justement de sa morale encore vierge.(2)

The author does not indicate the exact nature of these weapons at this stage: one of them emerges later as alcoholism. One could infer from the Foreword that the work has as its purpose to reveal the secret weapons of **colonialism** and thereby to protect the future of the new independent African states. This inference is to some extent borne out by references in the work itself; in particular, the closing sentences:

> A toi qui ne connais pas l'alcool, fuis-le afin de ne jamais le rencontrer sur ton chemin.
> A toi qui en consommes, que cette lecture te serve d'avertissement.
> A toi enfin qui te sens vaincu par l'alcool, pense que tu peux, que tu dois prendre ta revanche. La victoire n'est pas au-dessus de ta volonté, et ton ennemi, c'est celui qui te dira le contraire.
> Ton devoir surtout, c'est de ne jamais mettre en balance ton sort et celui de la Société africaine.
> L'Afrique doit vaincre l'alcoolisme, héritage du colonialisme.
>
> Fin. Novembre 1952.(3)

The narrative is presented in the light of a cautionary biography. It is, however, possible in the light of this tale, to detect a certain confusion between the evil intentions of colonialism and those of Satan direct, in the author's mind; one might also question the assumption that **alcoholism** is of

(1) Op. cit., p. 7.
(2) Ibid., p. 8.
(3) Ibid., p. 377.

specifically colonial origin and that there is a valid contrast between the sophisticated corruption of modern Europeanised society and the primitive innocence of pre-colonial Africa. Yambo Ouologuem's Le Devoir de Violence, discussed later[1], presents a contrary view. So, in the chapter entitled 'Le Corridor de la Tentation' the first steps of the hero's decline are described:

> J'avais achevé mes trois premières années d'études à l'Ecole de Médecine, sans jamais avoir eu l'occasion de connaître le goût de la bière ni celui de la femme. Je ne connaissais ni l'alcool ni les filles d'Eve.
>
> La bière est couramment citée comme le type de boisson alcoolique anodine, dont le baiser chaste, tel qu'on le conçoit, ne peut, paraît-il, faire de tort à personne! Moi, j'avoue que la bière, comme le premier baiser volé à une femme, sont tous deux bien en tête de la liste des tentations de Satan.
>
> Un verre de bière pris dans l'enthousiasme, fut à l'origine de toutes les misères que j'ai vécues . . .
>
> Le Destin frappa à ma porte par un soir d'août mil neuf cent quarante sept, alors que j'entamais ma quatrième année à l'Ecole de Médecine.[2]

This moralising tone, referring as it does to women as much as to drink, increases confusion given by the work, insofar as it conflicts with the anti-colonialist emphasis of the Foreword and concluding statement of the novel.

To this element of the work must be added the attempt to depict the milieu. Thus the work opens with an extensive reproduction[3] of the legends associated with the origin of the author's native village. Gologo narrates later the historical background of one of his posts[4]. While this has its own interest, it conflicts with the autobiographical purpose of the work by introducing an element of the conducted-tour-of-Africa approach. Its justification in the autobiographical work may be that it suggests the primitive African society of the Foreword which should provide the contrast with corrupt modern

(1) See pp. 86-98 below.
(2) Op. cit., p. 89.
(3) Ibid., pp. 10-29.
(4) Ibid., pp. 249-254.

Westernised society. The somewhat arbitrary introduction of these particular elements remains, however, difficult to see as other than incongrous. The curing of the hero by the native healer is, however, different. Here the author succeeds in making a clear statement through the narrative itself of the superiority of traditional Africa over Westernised society. The hero has come to the end of his own resources and those of Western medicine. He returns to his mother, another significant African figure, who encourages him to make the necessary journey to visit the healer, with the result that he starts to recover.

Le Rescapé de l'Ethylos, however, exists in another mode than those of milieu-depiction, moralising and anti-neo-colonialism. An important element is the author's presentation of the hero's self-analysis, particularly in connection with his feelings towards his wife and with his struggles to escape from alcoholism. The hero is able to reflect dispassionately upon the way alcohol acts upon his mind:

> L'alcool rend un sujet particulièrement réceptif. Aux yeux d'un homme soumis à la flagellation de l'alcool et placé à la limite de la 'gaieté' et de l'ivresse', tout devient magnifique ou extrêmement laid. C'est à ce moment-là justement que le buveur dit nettement son opinion sur n'importe quelle question, sans se préoccuper le moins du monde de ce que l'on pourra en penser. Et il le fait vertement. Je pense qu'à ce stade, l'intéressé jouit d'un avantage certain sur son entourage, et tout cela peut être à l'origine de l'étreinte progressive du vice sur sa volonté.(1)

The effect of this auto-criticism is occasionally heightened by the personal style. Using the first person, Gologo adopts a familiar conversational style:

> L'Ecole William Ponty est, quoi qu'on en puisse dire, le meilleur internat de la Fédération. Je crois vous avoir déjà dit que c'était Monsieur C. B. qui la dirigeait de notre temps (de 1941 a 1944).(2)

However, while the bulk of the work uses a functional prose, there is a frequent self-conscious over-elaboration:

(1) Ibid., p. 147.
(2) Ibid., p. 51.

> Evitez même de chasser les moustiques qui prélèvent vaillamment sur les réserves de votre organisme les substances nécessaires à la composition de leur menu journalier, parce que, dans ce pays, boire du sang jusqu'à la gorge reste pour cette tribu ailée un droit héréditaire, inaliénable et inexpugnable, à l'ombre du fascisme le plus rigoriste qui puisse exister.
>
> Messieurs les moustiques, je vous l'apprends, ont une devise particulière, tracée en lettres de feu sur une bannière noire dont la couleur se confond avec celle des plus sombres nuits tropicales.(1)

Often, the author lapses into such verbosities as:

> La chaleur étouffante en cette période de l'année acheva de me plonger dans les cavernes de Bacchus. J'étais devenu un éminent spéléologue de ces paysages fantasmagoriques . . .(2)

This confusion of style, of colloquial, functional and elaborated, is indicative of the structural diffuseness inevitable in a work of such diverse aims as outlined above.

The work offers a unique variation of the general hope-disillusion basis of the field by the addition of a moralising element to the customary anti-colonial protest, and by the author's endeavour to portray the effects of an intrinsically non-political subject, alcoholism. The stereotype remains centrally formative, however, and is reinforced by the discovery of salvation from a colonially-originating evil at the hands of a native healer. Its execution, despite certain individual differences, follows the usual method, a unilinear, chronologically simple account of the experiences of an almost undifferentiated person in society, who exists in terms of the milieu.

A different method of fictionalising autobiography, and so bringing it closer to social observation, is followed in Cette Afrique-là. The subject, ostensibly the author relating his life, is placed in a position to observe and comment upon the historical development of his own country. The theme of the work is the impact of the Europeans upon the local situation and upon the narrator.

(1) Ibid., p. 10.
(2) Ibid., p. 187.

The work relates the experiences under, and observations upon, German and later French colonialism of an educated Cameroonian functionary, Franz Mômha. There is a narration of the education, travels, professional life, private married life, sufferings and imprisonment, later restoration and public eminence of one Franz Mômha. The life is related in the first person as recollections being imparted orally over two evenings to a circle of villagers. The personal thread of the biography is secondary to the social history of which the subject is assumed to have had first-hand knowledge. The author claims to be presenting Franz Mômha 'tel qu'il a vécu'(1) and the data collated has the ring of authenticity in such circumstantial accounts as that of the opening of the first railway in the Cameroons, or that of the defeat of the German forces during the First World War, culminating in the description of the battle of Ngwei. One may discern the reaction of the eye-witness in the following description, for example:

> Le plus beau spectacle auquel j'assistai durant mon séjour à Edea fut l'inauguration de la voie ferrée . . . La gare, ses fontaines, ses aiguilles, ses voies de garages, ses lignes secondaires, son dépôt, son immense château d'eau, tout cela formait autant de nouveautés merveilleuses aux yeux de l'assistance éblouie. Chacun quitta sa place pour les contempler de près. Les uns admiraient ses rails, tâtaient l'acier qui les constitue, se tenaient sur les traverses pour en mesurer la résistance, faisaient jouer l'eau des fontaines, maniaient les aiguilles fraîchement peintes sous le regard amusé des ouvriers, allaient voir la grosse horloge qui sonnait de quart d'heure en quart d'heure.(2)

In the account of the battle between the French and the German forces at Ngwei, the occasional personal reference suggests the experience of a participant:

> C'est à Ngwei qu'une nuit blotti entre deux arbres, je vis venir un officier armé. A sa vue je voulus courir, mais il me dit en allemand: "N'ayez pas peur. Je ne vous tuerai pas. Nous passerons la nuit ensemble." Nous nous étendîmes sur sa couverture(3)

The author has endeavoured to fulfil the promise of the Avant-Propos:

(1) Op. cit., p. 13.
(2) Ibid., pp. 100-101.
(3) Ibid., p. 127.

> Ce livre est un document. C'est un récit authentique. L'auteur a voulu faire parler des voix d'outre-tombe. L'ère de la colonisation est révolue. C'est maintenant le temps des bilans, des mémoires, des plaidoyers pro domo . . . Tout cela est nécessaire pour éclairer le grand public et faciliter le travail des chercheurs.(1)

The device, however, is difficult to operate successfully, particularly within the narrow confines of a short work like this, of some 70,000 words, and with a period of fifty years to cover; works with similar aims in the European novel, such as, for example, Barbusse's Le Feu, or Jules Romain's Les Hommes de Bonne Volonté, are able to succeed through limiting the periods taken and developing the work at some length. Consequently, Matiba's work does not achieve perhaps its aim as a fictional biography, its success as a documentary account appears limited to some occasions only.

The difficulty inherent in the task of amalgamating fiction with history is illustrated in this work by certain improbabilities and weaknesses in handling the point of view. The reader may be disturbed by the assumption he has to make that the hero is able to narrate orally some 40,000 words to a circle of peasants in an evening, remembering with accuracy details of conversations and events that happened many years before, and then to repeat the tour de force the following evening - a technicality of some importance if fictional vraisemblance, in particular the need for consistency of point of view, is to be maintained. One notices, for example, the weakness of the narrative when the Matiba is dealing with Mômha's birth and provides a circumstantial account of the moments surrounding the event:

> Un soir, ma mère se sentit fatiguée. Elle envoya chercher Sugan, l'accoucheuse. Kileba vint aussi. Les deux honorables vieilles dames veillèrent longtemps auprès d'elle, étendues à côté du feu. Elles fumaient tranquillement leurs pipes et parlaient d'accouchement. Ma mère avait de terribles douleurs. Elle criait, elle se demandait si sa fin s'approchait, si elle devait survivre. Vers le matin, elle accoucha d'un enfant, très gros, que Sugan reçut dans ses mains, et qui était un garçon, auquel on donna le nom de Mômha Bipu. J'étais né.(2)

(1) Ibid., p. 11.
(2) Ibid., p. 34.

The sequel to the birth maintains this detailed circumstantiality, the author apparently unaware of its inconsistency with the point of view from which the material is supposedly being seen. The work shares with most of these autobiographies the author's inability to seize and recreate the inner life of the hero. The hero is essentially a witness. He sees his importance as that of being able to relate events, to describe situations, peoples, scenes, in their social significance. His own emotional and spiritual life is peripheral in the world. So, Franz Mômha's relationship with Greta receives very limited treatment:

> Mais elle était si jolie que ne ne pouvais pas m'empêcher de l'emmener. Je capitulai. Greta partit avec moi et nous passâmes la nuit ensemble.
>
> Le matin, quand le jour commença à se faire voir à travers les embrasures des fenêtres, elle me dit en souriant:
>
> - Alors, es-tu satisfait?
>
> Apres le thé, je la laissai partir.(1)

The hero is able to say proudly, on reflection about his life:

> J'ai, depuis quarante ans, connu beaucoup d'hommes, admiré beaucoup de visages. J'ai eu beaucoup d'amis . . . J'ai cherché à étudier et à comprendre certains caractères . . . j'ai suffisamment d'âge pour ne plus avoir beaucoup d'illusions sur les hommes.(2)

He appears as the archetype, almost, by virtue of the length of his experience, of the many hero-witnesses of the French African novel, whose lives consist of observing and commenting upon social phenomena, and of enduring change without ever initiating it. For all its distinction as a historical reminiscence, Cette Afrique-là stands firmly in the mainstream of the field's technique of social observation.

(1) Ibid. p. III.
(2) Ibid. p. 165.

CHAPTER 2

The Unfinished Fictional Life

A second group of biographical works (I), constructed upon an unfinished life, in which the hero arrives at a sort of maturity by the close of the novel, and yet which differ from the autobiographical works in being ostensibly fictitious, accounts for about one third of the biographical group, the final third being novels which present a total life leading to a significant death.

Here again a strong rhetorical influence is exerted on the choice of subject matter. The work, centred upon the one figure, usually a young man, depicts the hero in a succession of social situations, and thus comments upon social relationships. For example, David Ananou's Le Fils du Fétiche may be compared with Bakary Diallo's Force-Bonté in its commendation of French civilisation as a superior alternative to African. Fetishism, polygamy and superstition are seen in Ananou's work as reprehensible aspects of old Africa. A similar clash of values, with a more ambivalent outcome, is presented in Emile Cissé's Faralako discussed later (I); Tante Bella similarly takes up a social issue, this time the condition of women in Africa. The general tendency in fictional biographies is to make a socially significant point.

This is not entirely the case with the more personal Maïmouna.

(I) See p. 36.

This depicts the social implications of the influence of city life upon morals and may be seen as a biographical fiction in its own right, treating the experiences of village-girl Maïmouna from early childhood through to her life in Dakar, her disappointment in love and her final, matured attitude of stoical realism.

The field contains two more works, however, which use the unfinished-life unit to an original effect, in contrast to the stereotyped pro- or anti-colonial depiction of social problems. Ouologuem's Le Devoir de Violence[1] builds a panorama of African history and a philosophical discussion around a partial biography of an educated African in order to reassess the culture-contact question, and Oyono's Le Chemin d'Europe puts the stereotyped situation of the African going to Europe for his education in a different light from the usual one, in that the hero has no illusions about Western values.

The open-ended nature of the works of this group underlines their contemporaneity. The lives are described up to a fictitious present time, and thus have a strong likeness to the ostensible autobiographies. This gives an effect of actuality in that the form is a direct product of rhetorical intention, which says that this is what society is like at present. The future, or remaining life, of the hero is left undeveloped, either for lack of invention, since the interest of the work had been in the crisis of adaptation, or for fear of anti-climax. The heroes of the African novel usually die violently or not at all.

This particular area of the field presents the challenge of fictionalisation within the limits of didactic intention. This is met with varied originality.

(1) See pp. 86-98 below.

In general there is little original invention, merely an arrangement of situations to demonstrate certain points according to the viewpoint of the author. The rhetorical limitations severely affect this group's fictitious potential. By restricting themselves to socially significant situations and by emphasising those aspects of the situation which are ideologically significant, the authors ignore large areas of potential fictitious material, not least in the exploration of the personality and of personal relations. This impression of superficiality is heightened by the longitudinal range of the biography, which attempts to provide impressions of a person's childhood, maturation and social education within the framework of a comparatively short book. A further occasional factor is the author's desire to operate at several significant levels, as for example in Cissé's Faralako discussed below, with the result that the unity and depth of the work suffer.

Most of the works of this group present a chronological progression through the life up to the open-ended conclusion by means of a succession of dramatised dialogues against a background of third-person authorial summary and occasional comment. The group has, however, to some extent, used the opportunity of an advance upon the autobiographical substratum of this kind of work by venturing into new formal structures. Two works have developed significantly new approaches to the novel itself: Ouologuem's Le Devoir de Violence and Nokan's Le Soleil Noir Point. It is proposed to consider these in more detail. It is thought necessary first, however, to consider a novel which shows more overtly than most the dominant principle of utilising the form for ideological purposes.

The ambitious aims of the author may be first discerned in the preface to Cissé's Faralako, provided by Diallo Saifoulaye:

> Autour d'une intrigue aussi enfantine que captivante, l'auteur soulève toute la série de graves problèmes politiques, économiques, sociaux et culturels qui se posent de nos jours dans tous les pays coloniaux ou dépendants. (1)

To these far-reaching national and international considerations Cissé adds the problem of the half-caste child, product of a white father, since departed, and an African mother - a theme which inspired a novel in itself in Sadji's Nini, Mulâtresse du Sénégal.

In common with the majority of the authors of the field, the author bases his work upon the experiences of a young and maturing Europeanised male. This one returns from Paris to his African home at the outset of the work, renews a romantic relationship which brings him into conflict with local traditional marriage custom, experiences at second and then first-hand the power of the diviners and then loses his fiancée by her death. His attempt to import his European attitudes ends in disaster. The raising of a whole series of political, economic, social and cultural problems is attempted largely by means of discussions and also by reported reflection; the intrigue provides its own comment upon the conflict of cultures.

The composition of the work lacks coherence. The author's attitude suffers from a fundamental ambivalence. The following analysis of the work will illustrate the systematic progress that is made through the ideological areas in question in a succession of short chapters:

(i) An idyllic description of the countryside of Faralako; the hero Nî reminisces about his childhood, and about his departure from Paris on receipt of a letter from his mother; a discussion with a fellow student about his return.

(1) Op. cit., p. 7.

(ii) A discussion with the local taxi-driver about the political situation in Guinea.

(iii) A group of dialogues: Nî and his mother on the relative merits of European and African religious beliefs; Nî and Makalé, his rediscovered sweetheart, about his return; Nî and Tidiani, village elder, about African and European philosophy. The intrigue is propelled by the threatening behaviour of Modou, Nî's cruel step-father, the problem of the situation of half-castes being also raised here.

(iv) Intrigue developed in a scene where Makalé is threatened by her mother Fanta, about an arranged marriage.

(v) Discussion about the conflict of philosophies between Nî, Na his mother, and friend Sory; the author's own reflections given here.

(vi) The intrigue further developed; Nî and Makalé are betrothed through the ritual blood-pact: the event turns into a gloomy forecast of the future disaster as Nî draws Makalé's attention to a shooting star - a traditionally evil omen; the evil omen is confirmed by a dream.

(vii) Discussion of Nî and Sory: the coming Dance of Sabres, significant for the next year's marriages; Nî reflects upon his civilising mission to Faralako.

(ix) Thematically relevant episode in which the power of the fetishers is demonstrated in the destruction of a house by lightning, the housewife also being killed.

(x) Plot development in the sickness of Nî's mother as a result of fetisher's spell.

(xi) Lengthy discussion of Nî and village headman on the economic and social implications of colonialism and the political future of Guinea.

(xii) Thematically relevant episode: Makalé shows her power to hypnotise a viper.

(xiii) The romance between Nî and Makalé further developed.

(xiv) Narrative complication with the wooing of Makalé by Samaké favoured by her mother.

(xv) Discussion of Nî and Tidiani, grandfather, on the merits of polygamy.

(xvi) Narrative development: Kaufila's spell causes the death of Nî's mother.

(xvii) The village preparations for the Dance of the Sabres.

(xviii) The fetisher Kaufila blamed by the village Court of Notables for the death of Na; Makalé's father refuses consent for her to marry Nî.

(xix) Cissé's own account of the now discontinued Dance of Sabres, with reference to its celebration of marriages to take place that year; the evil influence of alcohol on these occasions deplored by Cissé.

(xx) The climax of the narrative: the Dance of the Sabres takes place: Makalé rejects her arranged fiancé, Samaké, and offers herself to Nî, who is attacked by Samaké; Makalé kills the latter and the two lovers flee.

(xxi) The evil omen of the shooting star is justified: Makalé, bitten by a snake, dies; Nî, found later, is crazed by grief.

(xxii) An epilogue in verse form laments the death of Makalé.

From the foregoing summary it can be seen that the possibility of giving expression to the ideological material as an integrated part of a fiction is realised only to a limited extent. Much of the work amounts to little more than a framework for undramatic discussions and authorial comment on a very wide range of issues.

Faralako illustrates, moreover, the field's general low level of characterisation, which is made to serve the ideology. For example, Kaufila, the evil fetisher stands for all that is retrograde in Africa, while Nî, the central figure, represents the forward-looking movement towards an amalgamation of what is good in both cultures for the benefit of the new Africa. The importance of the mother, to the hero, and to the action, is typical of the field.

It is apparent that the author's management of the intrigue is entirely dictated by his ideological intentions. Here, moreover, the reader meets a fundamental ambivalence of attitude. The basis is simple and clear: a story of lovers, whose clash with custom leads to disaster. However, the disaster is presented as an act of supernatural power: the shooting star's 'message' at the lovers' betrothal was confirmed by a dream. Evil forces have cosmic power as seen in the destruction by lightning of the woman's house, who was disobedient to the fetishers' command, and in the death of Na through a spell. In effect, the tragedy vindicates the claims of the fetishers and of traditional custom. Makalé dies through an apparently fortuitous snake-bite, but the implication is clearly that the lovers were punished for crossing the wishes of the elders and parents of Makalé.

This reading would be unexceptionable were it not that the work in other ways points, if uncertainly, to the opposite implication, that is, that Africa must now move with the times.

The clash of cultures forms the ideological basis of the work. Nî, on return from Europe, considers the abundant local flora:

> 'Quelle différence avec la nature famélique et agonisante d'Europe!' (1)

The traditional life of the district is spoken of eulogistically:

> L'on peut dire qu'en ce coin inconnu et obscure du globe la nature en parturition parle un véritable galimatias que peuvent débrouiller les seuls enfants de Faralako vivant la vie bucolique et mystique de leurs ancêtres, évoluant dans l'écheveau inextricable d'une coutume antédiluvienne demeurée égale à elle-même par delà les incursions du temps. (2)

From the start of the work Europe is presented as remarkable but inferior to Africa:

> Tous les mystères de la vieille Afrique gonflent maintenant le coeur de Nî. Ses frères de Faralako sont des êtres en proie à la puissance de cette sentimentalité qui marque, à maints égards, la supériorité du Noir d'Afrique sur le blanc affadi, déformé et denaturé par la civilisation mécanique.(3)

In his return to Africa, Nî rejects the values of European education:

> Comme il regarde toujours Faralako avec la stupéfiante piété d'un pèlerin abordant la terre de promission et que le gigantesque fromager de son ancêtre maternel semble étirer ses énormes bras pour lui souhaiter la bienvenue, tout ce qu'il croyait normal, vrai et universel, toute sa culture livresque s'écroule dans sa malheureuse cervelle. (4)

(1) Ibid., p.12.
(2) Ibid., p.13
(3) Ibid., p.16.
(4) Ibid., p.14.

But Paris continues to exert a fascination upon him:

> Paris est un coeur qui bat, un cerveau qui produit de précieuses pensées. Paris est un immense musée historique. Car Paris, c'est le berceau de la liberté: Paris, la cité des hommes-sans-couleur, Paris la généreuse et maternelle reine du monde.
> Mais Nî veut ignorer ce Paris-là! (1)

Nî seeks to reject the Paris of culture, in favour of the Paris of administration:

> Nî veut penser à Paris: Capitale de la France et de l'Union Française, Paris-la-rayonnante, Paris des ministères, ce Paris qui intime des ordres au nom de Paris et de la France entière, un Paris-des-saluts-abrupts-et-des-décorations posthumes, pour le NOIR d'Afrique, c'est bien cela Paris! (2)

This rejection of Western culture seems too facile to his friend Demba:

> 'Que feras-tu de ta culture?' interroge Demba.
> 'Je l'oublierai dans un coin de ma valise, je vivrai la vie de nos villageois.' (3)

At this stage Nî wishes to readopt the life of his native village, but his political views are likely to lead him into conflict with authority:

> Je souhaite, et de tout mon coeur, que mes frères soient libres et heureux. J'y travaillerai de toutes mes forces. Mais je ne souhaite pas que notre pays tombe un jour sous la domination d'un individu ou d'une minorité d'individus. (4)

In the matter of religion, the mother, typically, voices the traditional view:

> La vie n'est pas telle que vous la voyez à travers les séduisantes lignes de vos livres..... La vérité échappera toujours à ton intelligence. (5)

(1) Ibid., p.20.
(2) Ibid., p.20.
(3) Ibid., p.26.
(4) Ibid., p.35.
(5) Ibid., pp.41,45.

The mother's simple statement of faith is developed more fully by the grandfather:

> Nî est noyé dans un univers où les astres et les planètes n'ont plus de noms, où les phénomènes trouvent leurs causes dans le mystère. Désormais, l'étoile filante lui annoncera la mort d'un chef de village, d'un grand notable, ou d'un prestigieux féticheur. L'arc-en-ciel ne sera plus le résultat d'une dispersion lumineuse, mais la manifestation énigmatique du Ningui-Nanga. (1)

The culture-clash in the religious area is clearly expressed by the grandfather:

> Oh je sais que tu es très intelligent, mais nos fétiches auront toujours raison de votre science. (2)

This incident prepares the reader for the dénouement in which Makalé dies in tragic and apparently fortuitous circumstances, the beliefs of the diviners being thus triumphantly vindicated. The author reinforces this impression by showing the destructive power of the fetishers in action, harnessing the power of natural phenomena, in this case, lightning, to make an example of a disobedient member of the community. Nî's mother is brought to death through the practice of sorcerer Kaufila. It is against the background of this sort of event, forming the narrative basis of the work that one has to try to fit into the novel as a whole the considerable element of ideology which points towards accepting the best of the Western tradition. This constitutes the substance of the lengthy discussion between Nî and the village headman:

> Derrière la technique des Blancs il faut apercevoir autre chose, une certaine manière de penser et de raisonner.... Nous devons surtout apprendre à nos frères à raisonner tout en ne perdant point de leur cordialité et de leur générosité africaines. (3)

(1) Ibid., p.57.
(2) Ibid., p.60.
(3) Ibid., p.II9.

It is difficult to see how the two interpretations of life can be reconciled, and yet Cissé suggests, by the structure of the work, the intrigue and the discussion, the validity of both. The position of the author is ambiguous on this central point: so, he supports the primitive view in an authorial descriptive comment:

> Le crépuscule est le moment du Salam, mais il est surtout le passage d'une vie à une autre. Car le crépuscule annonce la nuit où le monde entre dans un nouveau contexte.
>
> L'intelligible du commun des humains concède volontiers l'univers au mystère du sorcier et du féticheur.... La terre ouvre ses entrailles pour permettre aux morts de se tourner vers le couchant; ils attendent l'aurore pour présenter à nouveau, au soleil, leurs fronts, où sont gravés des versets du Coran. (1)

Nî's attempt to reach a compound of faiths ('Allah n'est-il pas le Dieu chrétien, et Mahomet le Christ des Blancs?'(2)) fails because he has not taken the animists and diviners into account, and the author by the intrigue demonstrates that it is they who have authority over the experience of the dwellers of Faralako. Nî and Makalé go through the betrothal ritual of blood pact and vows, during which process Nî points out the sight of a shooting star to the girl, a fatal action in local belief for the girl:

> - Le sort en est jeté! Il ne me reste plus qu'à attendre de pied ferme. Demain? Après-demain? Qui sait?
> - Ne pense pas au pire. Dans les livres les étoiles filantes.....
> - Laisse ces livres de mensonge aux blancs..... La mort respire dans mes seins' (3)

(1) Ibid., p.72.
(2) Ibid., p.82.
(3) Ibid., p.83.

The novel illustrates the weaknesses of the ideological use of the form: the characters have no apparent autonomous or rounded existence, and the intrigue exists to prove an ideological point, although this seems at variance with that of the discussion element of the work. The open-endedness of the work, by which the hero is left to forge a further stage of his life in the light of past experience, reinforces the impression of uncertainty which it is perhaps the author's design to convey. In this respect it achieves an effect of social significance of the same sort as do most of the other works of this sub-group as well as most of the autobiographicals. By not terminating the narrative conclusively, by bringing the hero to a disillusioned maturity and leaving him in a world of conflict, these novels make perhaps their strongest point about the position of the African in contemporary experience.

Faralako illustrates a common weakness in the field in the creation of consistent fiction, a weakness largely due to the ideological motivation of the author, shown in an inability to amalgamate theme, character and intrigue into a coherent whole. The unwillingness or inability to attempt to create free, complex characters from whose motives and relationships intrigue may develop, and with whom other characters may relate in changing and complex ways, the imposition of an ideologically determined narrative and point of view are factors which militate continually against any development of fiction in the Western tradition.

Attempts at formal development seem to be the only appearance of innovation in this novel field. Ouologuem's Le Devoir de Violence follows the tradition of the field in dealing with the socio-political problem of the African in relation to his masters, and particularly to the issue of colonialism in Africa.

The novel also owes a large debt to the commonly used narrative base of the African student who goes to France and returns to Africa in a state of disillusion, at which point the story is left. Like other works of the field such as Le Crépuscule des Temps Anciens[1], Le Devoir de Violence incorporates considerable historical material as a supporting background[2]. The development of this initial donnée, however, distinguishes the work in a variety of ways. Its purpose is to explore the theme of violence in politics through the experiences of an African race and of various fictional contemporary individuals.

The author works towards this in different approaches made in the four parts of the novel. Thus, the first part, La Légende des Saïfs, opens with a cursory account of the sufferings of the negro population of Africa and proceeds to describe the origin and history of the ruling dynasty of the fictional Nakem empire from the 15th century. This rapid historical review is slowed down from time to time to allow for accounts of particular incidents whose common feature is horror: burnings alive, cruelty of slave trade, incestuous acts, cannibalism, murder, tortures, all serve to build up an initial background of violent suffering which has been the lot of pre-colonial African peoples at the hands of their own ruling class, since legendary times.

(1) See pp. I96-205.
(2) For discussion of Ouologuem's supposed plagiarism in writing Le Devoir de Violence see: - Eric Sellin, 'Ouologuem's Blueprint for Le Devoir de Violence', Research in African Literatures No. 2, 1971, pp.II7-I20; - (unsigned) 'Something New out of Africa?', Times Literary Supplement, 5th May 1972, p. 52, and Robert McDonald, 'Bound to Violence: A case of Plagiarism', Transition No. 41, 1972, Volume 8, pp. 64-68.

This general historical framework is brought into contemporary focus with a closing reference to the role of the local ruler of Nakem in the new colonial situation which indicates that the reader is to see colonialism in an entirely different light from the customary one:

> Les Blancs, définissant un droit colonial international, avalisaient la théorie des zones d'influence: les droits du premier occupant étaient légitimes. Mais ces puissances colonisatrices venaient trop tard déjà, puisque, avec l'aristocratie notable, le colonialiste, depuis longtemps en place, n'était autre que le Saïf, dont le conquérant européen faisait - tout à son insu - le jeu. (1)

The author maintains the approach of the omniscient historian in the second part, also short, L'Extase et l'Agonie. This part attempts a more closely focussed view of the history than the previous one, this time covering the much shorter period of the conquest of the Nakem empire by the French. The main emphasis of the novel is now made clear in the narration of the activities of the Saïf Ben Isaac El Heït: his abortive resistance to the French by means of cynical manipulation of the superstition and fanaticism of his subjects; and his skilful diplomacy resulting in the visit of his son to Paris as an heroic figure and in the consolidation of his own power behind that of the French conquerors.

Both these parts serve to provide historical and thematic setting for the main part, La Nuit des Géants. Two main narrative threads are developed here. The first deals with the courtship and marriage of two servants of Le Saïf and the birth of their son Raymond-Spartacus Kassoumi, his education in Nakem and Paris, his marriage to a Strasbourgeoise and his return to the African state to play a role of elected Deputy. The second relates the highlights of the Saïf's struggle with the French authorities as they tend to encroach increasingly upon his power.

(1) Op. cit., p. 31.

The position of the African student is here seen as much more the result of local political decision than in other works. A more universal dimension starts to appear in this part in the person and role of Bishop Henry, distinguished from other Westerners, in that he devotes himself to the welfare of suffering negroes through extreme self-sacrifice. In this character the author prepares for the last part of the work, where the novel explores issues of general references.

Having presented an alternative view of the accepted history of pre-colonial Africa, and put the conquest of the colonies in a new light, as background for a rejuvenation of the stereotype of the returning African student, the author proceeds to set the whole work in the wider context of a philosophical discussion between the representatives of a new Machiavellism and of an unworldly self-sacrificial Christianity about violence in the political sphere.

The combined use of these four different approaches is unique in this novel-field. The author seeks to control the reader's response to the central block of material, La Nuit des Géants by placing it between prologue of historical interpretation and epilogue of philosophical discussion.

Within these broad confines, the author has brought an individual approach to the development of the themes of the work. The effect of the main narrative, La Nuit des Géants, is to show that the Saïf is successful in maintaining his power in relation to the French colonialists by any means possible. In the descriptions of the main killings for which the Saïf is responsible, the political struggle is presented in terms of violent events which are singled out for dramatisation.

In effect, the political history of the struggle between Saïf and successive French governors and the personal history of the Kassoumi family, particularly of Raymond-Spartacus, provide the narrative threads for a succession of vividly presented and realised scenes where cruelty and violent sexuality are given full scope. The other work of the field which incorporates violence to an important extent is Hazoumé's Doguicimi, where the scenes of cruelty and torture are strongly realised and an important part of the work. However, they belong there to the texture of the narrative which seeks to show the heroine's bravery, and to the sociological depiction of a people's barbaric customs and stoical character(1). The scenes of cruelty of Le Devoir de Violence are of a different order.

The points of the narrative which the later work presents in fully dramatised form at some length are of two kinds, those of which the interest is sexual and those of which the interest is morbid and sadistic; occasionally the two interests are combined in the one scene. The importance of this element may be seen by the following accounts.

Those of the first type are listed here with mention of the particular emphasis or aspect stressed:

(a) The courtship and lovemaking of Tambira and Kassoumi, parents of the student-hero; this is presented as an idyllic, natural and good relationship(2). It provides a point of reference and contrast for the ensuing sexual scenes which depict a variety of perversions.

(1) See pp. I92-I96 below.
(2) Op. cit., pp. 52-57.

(b) The lovemaking of Chevalier, the new Governor, and his African mistress Awa, fiancée of Sankolo the agent of the Saïf; this contains sexual perversions(1).

(c) The intercourse of Sonia, daughter of Shrobenius the visiting anthropologist, with Madoubo, son of the Saïf, described in detail; to this is added the voyeurism of Sankolo, maddened by desire to the point of a paroxysm of auto-eroticism. This scene leads into that of the murder of Awa by Sankolo(2).

(d) The enforced seduction of Tambira by the sorcerer Dougouli as the price of his forecast of the academic success of her sons(3).

(e) The orgy in Montmartre of the African students and Parisian prostitutes, quite fully presented, in which Raymond Kassoumi has intercourse with his sister Kadidia, discovering the fact of this incest by conversation after the event(4).

(f) Raymond's pederastic intercourse with Lambert(5).

(g) The intercourse between Raymond and his wife Suzanne(6).

A systematic approach to the sexual relationship question is clearly discernible from the above, by which the author seeks to present the range of sexual activity by devoting a scene to each different kind, with the omission of lesbianism; the common feature of all except the first is that of a violent abuse of the other person.

(1) Ibid., pp67-71.
(2) Ibid., pp. 104-106.
(3) Ibid., pp. 147-149.
(4) Ibid., pp. 160-168.
(5) Ibid., pp. 173-178.
(6) Ibid., p. 192.

There is a significant linking of sex and the infliction of pain and sometimes death, as for example with the murder of Awa[1] closely linked with the Sonia-Madoubo act and Sankolo's sexual frenzy; the sadistic practice of the Saïf to insist upon the droit de cuissage being accompanied by infliction of pain upon the bride[2]; the death of Kadidia from a cut caused by a client[3]; the murder of Tambira by the agents of the Saïf, Kratonga and Wampoulo, in particularly disgusting circumstances, after their repeated rape of her[4], as an act of revenge for her husband having informed upon their associate Sankolo for having murdered Awa.

The detailed description of sexual activity is another feature of this work which distinguishes it from the rest of the field; very few authors seek to present this aspect. Most prefer to pass over the reality of the sex relationship in silence or with a brief reference, the silence often disconcerting the Western reader, for example, as in Camara Laye's description of his wedding night in Dramouss[5].

The kind of scene dramatising experiences of extreme terror and of violent death accounts for the remainder of the material of La Nuit des Géants. They cover a range of violent treatment and methods of killing, with little repetition, and provide a counterpoint to the sex-scenes, with which they occasionally coincide, throughout the work.

(1) Ibid., pp.108.
(2) Ibid., p. 61.
(3) Ibid., p. 169.
(4) Ibid., p. 150.
(5) Op. cit., p. 38.

Apart from the inner logic, so to speak, of the necessity to show man both predator and prey, this element belongs to the central train of the work in that it springs directly from the Saïf's secret reign and combat of terror, providing thus the embodiment of the idea of the success that attends ruthlessness in the struggle for secular power. The following list of scenes indicates the range and importance of this element:

(a) The killing of the governor, Chevalier, by the Saïf at an official reception, in reaction to the attempt to poison him by the governor(1).

(b) The terrorisation of one Barou by Saif agents into agreeing to murder the Bishop Henry's only witness of the Saïf's involvement in a modern slave-trade of 'zombies'(2).

(c) The murder of Awa by her fiancé, Sankolo, by disembowelling(3).

(d) The terrorisation and murder of the governor Vandamé by the Saïf's agents with viper and pistol, the murder, with that of Madame Vandamé, to be attributed to Sankolo(4).

The narrative summary commonly refers to other acts of political murder without elaborate dramatisation.

The texture of the work recalls the material for a kind of film - the rapid movement from one situation to another, the concentration upon visual effects, the development of group action and the use of extended scenes of a tense conflict nature.

(1) Op. cit., pp. 72-79.
(2) Ibid., pp. 82-86.
(3) Ibid., pp. 107-109.
(4) Ibid., pp. 126-133.

In the words of de Leusse:

> Ouologuem est un visuel - disons plutôt un 'visionnaire', et, maniant sa langue à la perfection, il nous restitue les scènes dans tout leur éclat ou leur cruelle crudité. De ce fait il parvient à créer une atmosphère, celle d'une Afrique étrangère et sauvage. (1)

This impression of one critic is supported by the reference made by Bishop Henry in the work to the history of Nakem:

> Hier j'ai marché, commença l'évêque Henry au bout d'un moment. Cinq minutes. Un cinéma. Un film, 'Zamba', inspiré de l'histoire du Nakem-Ziulo. Je m'avance. J'entre. La séance avait commencé. J'arrive en pleine tuerie: un coup de feu à l'écran. Non. Il n'est pas mort: c'est le héros. (2)

The Bishop develops the comparison between the melodramatic film and the history of Nakem as he had seen it, with its apparently confused intrigue and killing. This view of the work as raw filmic material is sound, and underlines the impression of apparently meaningless violence which besets Nakem society.

The author has in this case been able to extend the technique of dramatisation from its previously limited use in this field to one in which an imaginative realisation of situations is brought to serve the thesis of the novel. These scenes, set in the flow of ironical authorial comment and summary, constitute the central artistic achievement of the work. It would not seem possible to sustain a charge of pornography, given the integration of the scenes into the general atmosphere and purposes of the work. The scenes of sexual activity contribute to the idea of the violence at the centre of human relations: Kassoumi and Tambira commence their relationship in Edenic fashion(3), after which the sex relationship in the novel is the arena of perverted passion.

(1) Hubert de Leusse, Afrique Occident, Heurs et Malheurs d'une Rencontre, Editions Orante, Paris, 1971, p. 94.
(2) Op. cit., p. 199.
(3) Ibid., p. 51.

This personal turbulence is the corollary of the public indulgence in hatred and cruelty, and the two sets of emphases are mutually supporting. Moreover, by maintaining up to the present time a continuity of the violent practices of bygone times, the scenes of sex and violence serve as contemporary survivals of the hitherto supposed extinct customs of primitive and savage Africa. In the structure of the novel, however, these depictions appear as objective correlatives to the general reality of violence which is the central concern of the work. It is in this light that one may best see the strange episode of Sankolo's experience as a zombie, in which he suffers the complete loss of his personality through drugging and becomes a sub-human slave(1). This episode has some narrative significance in that, his escape coming to the ears of the governor, the latter's death becomes a political necessity and motivates a major scene of the work. It also throws extra light upon the contemporary survival of the slave trade - still generated by the local tyrant; but the effect of the description by Sankolo of his treatment after his supposed death supports the theme of the work - the abuse and depersonalisation of the weaker by the stronger, of Africa by its own rulers, to the extent that Sankolo may be seen as an objective correlative of the domination of Africa by ruthless potentates.

A further illustration of this ability to refurbish old methods of composition is the scene of the discussion between the Saïf and Bishop Henry, in which the usual ideological debate of colonialism is far transcended into a philosophical consideration of existence in society as such; not only so, but the author provides the objective symbol of the chess game and combines this with the oscillating figure of the viper poised to strike between the two men(2).

(1) Ibid., pp. II3-25.
(2) Ibid., pp. I99-207.

The work also extends the range of achievement within the ideologically imposed stereotyped narrative framework of the French-educated African student who returns to Africa. The author takes this basis for the novel but uses it to serve different purposes from those it usually serves in this area. The cause of the stay in France is the political foresight of the Saïf; the experiences of the student, superficially similar to the Layes and Faras of previous works, differ basically. Raymond endures bitter failure at first only to gain a brilliant success, a success which is poisoned by the knowledge of the destruction of his family in Africa by the Saïf. He undergoes emotional disruption in a homosexual relationship, suffers danger and privation in the World War, makes a disastrous misalliance with a working class woman who cannot understand him - briefly his education, at home and in Europe, is little more in the novel than a means of increasing his position as a victim in a world of suffering and exploitation, a position ensured by the Saïf's control over his fortunes:

> Ainsi, mon pauvre Raymond, vous n'avez pas le choix. Vous ne l'aviez plus, du jour où vous vous êtes assis sur un banc d'école. (1)

So speaks Bishop Henry at the return of Raymond to take up political office. The education stage of the hero's life is used, then, directly to serve the ideological purpose of the work, in an original manner.

The characterisation is also subordinated to the requirements of the ideology. Sacrifice is made of inner analysis and development of the complexity of a person's psyche. Relationships hardly exist.

(1) Ibid., p. 196.

The effect is of a succession of shadowy, faceless and characterless entities whose sole function is to occupy certain positions in the ceaseless struggle for power and in the oppression of weak by strong. Raymond lacks the spirit of Candide, but one may compare Voltaire's approach to the violent world of his time through the experiences of the cardboard figures of his *contes* with that of Ouologuem. Ouologuem's characters have certain thematic roles to fulfil. The central figure, the Saïf, is one of the most shadowy, and is known, like God, only through his acts. The chess-game with which the work concludes symbolises this conception of people as forces and functions being played rather than playing on the chess-board of history.

In the words of the Saïf:

> Mais voyez! les carrés, la ligne des pions qui se dressent comme autant de fantassins dans la nuit Nakem, les deux fous tels Chevalier et Vandamé, les deux cavaliers, Kratonga et Wampoulo, les deux tours, Kassoumi et Bourémi. Voyez! la reine, tenez! est le plus puissant atout: elle va dans toutes les directions alors que les autres n'ont qu'une direction. Et tout ça, ce bagage, c'est uniquement pour sauver la tête du roi - votre conscience - pièce immobilisée. (1)

In the cause of his thesis the author also reshapes certain elements of the traditional picture of Africa. The visit of the anthropologist Shrobenius (an evident reference to the real Frobenius) is used to satirise the Western appraisal of African history through its art: not only does the Saïf take pecuniary advantage of this visit and other similar ones but Shrobenius himself gains a Sorbonnical chair and a *château* out of the exercise. There has been considerable exploitation of Africa to the profit of a small minority of Westerners and Africans(2).

(1) *Ibid.*, p. 204.
(2) *Ibid.*, pp. 110-112.

The use of this episode serves also to contrast the romantic stereotype of the noble savage corrupted by colonialism with the harsh reality of Ouologuem's conception.

Physical environment is irrelevant to the theme. Of Nakem the dominant feature is the river Yamé, beside which killings take place, which carries down the bodies of soldiers killed in the colonists' wars, which breeds the crocodiles that devour Bourémi, and which, by contrast, witnesses the idyllic wooing of Tambira and Kassoumi. The depiction of village life common to many other works is significantly absent from this work; instead, there is the portrayal of the daily life of the domestic slaves of the Saïf[1]. The activities of sorcerers is given a sharper focus than in other works: so, Bourémi plays a significant part in the work as a murderous and opportunist double agent of the Saïf, and who suffers a violent fate[2]. A less important person of the same kind, Dougouli, contributes to the last stages of the life of Tambira in a scene of enforced seduction as the price for foretelling the academic success of her sons[3].

In the context of the other biographical fictions, this work must be seen as one of the outstanding romans à thèse of the field in its range of reference, its inventiveness, its restatement of the stereotypes of this field of fiction, and its effective transcendence of the African biographical form.

The novels so far considered display a traditional unity of form and presentation. Nokan's Le Soleil Noir Point stands as a specific attempt to create an African form of novel with which to continue the ideological struggle. The author maintains this approach with a second work Violent Etait Le Vent considered later[4].

(1) Ibid., pp.47,48.
(2) Ibid., pp.95-99.
(3) Ibid., pp.146-49.
(4) See p.112 below.

The formal originality of Le Soleil Noir Point appears in its presentation of the material by means of sixty-four short units of from a dozen to two hundred and fifty words, in a range of kinds of prose, and verse, and from different points of view. The fragmentation of material does not extend to the element of time in which the events follow in traditional progression. Occasionally the fiction is developed in verse form, and more often also in dialogue presented in playscript form.

The work exists mainly as an ideological plea and has its roots in the actual political situation, witness the words of the author:

> Cet ouvrage a été composé en août 1959, au temps où un grand conflit existait entre la jeunesse étudiante et les dirigeants de la Côte d'Ivoire....
> Tanou, mon ami, Kofi, toi qui ne viens que d'être libéré, vous tous, Somre, Dibi, la belle Sophy, notre tâche n'est pas achevée! Il nous faudra réaliser un socialisme purement africain et donner à notre pays un patrimoine culturel convenable. (1)

The persons named here appear in the work, and may be assumed to correspond to real people; the customary disclaimer on this is absent. It is also fair to assume that the phrase un patrimoine culturel convenable is meant to convey the idea that this work is intended to be part of a new, purely African literary heritage, with implications for form as much as for content. It is in this light that one may consider its formal originality.

The ideology has determined the content here, as in Nokan's other work Violent Etait Le Vent, in the use of the narrative stereotype of the returned student hero.

(1) Op. cit., p. I5.

The usual elements reappear: the Paris education, the manual labour to support the studies, the conflict between love for a distant African girl and a present Parisienne, Sarah, to the disadvantage of the former, and the return in disillusion to a new Africa, where conflict now exists between the African rulers and the young generation of students.

Unlike its successor, this work concludes before the death of the hero, so leaving the future open for his efforts in the construction of an African socialism. While this common narrative pattern determines the work's broad structure, the ideology has led to certain developments of it: the hero's sex-life is suddenly terminated at the height of his romance with his landlady's daughter when his flat-mates return from pleasure seeking and he is unfortunately the victim of a misplaced footstep in the dark; this turn of events leads to his greater devotion to the cause of African development, and can be seen as an unusual restatement of the stereotype's attitudes to woman. He later loses the love of his French mistress because of his new disability and also releases his first love from any sense of obligation. The poem he writes to Sarah[1] suggests that all is for the best, as he would have become bored with her anyway, and he now has happy memories. He develops later a working relationship with the daughter of the local chief, and they then commit themselves to the task of commune-building, to the anger of the local notables. So the returned-student is idealised as a determined, devoted and brave builder of a new African society.

(1) Ibid., p. 115.

The foregoing indicates the range of the work, suggesting, perhaps, that the narrative is properly the basis for a longer work. This impression is strengthened by the work's inclusion of still more narrative material than seems strictly required for the theme. Tableaux 1 to 27 present the sentimental education and involvement of Tanou up to his farewell visit to the now married Amah. This first movement of the work is mainly concerned with the hero's romantic relationships, his ideas and those of the two women concerned. The second movement, Tableaux 28 to 39, introduces the experiences of another woman, Aube, the displaced successor to the headship of Gnassé, who is obsessed by love for a visiting European, Ramao. This love is frustrated by his love for a Nicole who visits him just before his death, and Aube steals some of his ashes as a keepsake (Tableau 39). The narrative relevance of this movement is not immediately clear, except perhaps that her experience of romantic heartbreak makes her a fit partner for Tanou. Now both may go forward to the main task facing Africa. The third and final movement is centred upon the work of Tanou in teaching the ignorant Gnasseans politics, through the works of Rousseau, Marx and Nietzsche, to create a new community and to combat the hostility of the Notables. A new range of characters is now brought in, mainly young people with similar ideals to Tanou's, but also a European, Julien, a university teacher at Abidjan, who sacrifices his life to support Tanou, being killed by Notables and other Whites. Another supporter suffers: Kofi is jailed for his activities, and it is with his name to the fore that the work ends.

The work refers to a wide range of time and people, and raises several substantial themes - adolescent and mature love, the relationship of public and private lives, politics in emergent Africa, the clash of tradition and revolution, the decadence of European philosophy, in the person of Ramao, or of the Existentialists of Paris and so on.

It could be argued that this extensive reference, based largely in the world of prosaic experience, requires the full treatment of an extended prose work, and that anything much less must increase the risk of superficiality. The part of Aube's lover, Ramao, is puzzlingly obscure: questions which occur naturally to the Western reader remain unanswered. What is his background? What is the origin of his poem of revolt? What is the significance of his sexual promiscuity?(1)

The break with tradition is, however, only partial. The work's form is superficially original, but the substance continues to be dominated by the pattern of the field. The material, essentially suited to the traditional form, seems to be incompletely presented by the disjointed method and style.

To consider, for example, the third movement of the work, the subject matter covered comprises the hero's educational activity (one Tableau), the new character Julien's ideas on colonialism, his involvement in Tanou's struggle with the Notables and Julien's death at their hands (10 Tableaux), and the life of the commune (14 Tableaux); the whole treated in some 2,500 words.

(1) Ibid., p. 41.

The brevity of the treatment may not be seen in itself as inappropriate, as in some forms, for example, narrative verse, this could be sound. The impression of superficiality arises from the author's use of units of material which, by their nature, call for continuation and appear as truncated extracts from a larger work. The attitude of one Dossios, a Notable, towards Tanou appears hostile, but unexplained. The person of Julien arrives without preparation or satisfactory development. The education of the villagers undertaken by Tanou is illustrated as follows:

> Il faut avoir vu, dans le hangar éclairé par la lueur des lampes à huile, ces adolescents, ces vieux penchés sur les pages de Rousseau, Marx, Nietzsche, pour comprendre qu'il se passait quelque chose de grand dans ce village éburnéen. (1)

A similar curtailment is apparent in the presentation of Julien and his discussion of colonialism with a certain François:

> Au pied d'un manguier, sur un banc sont assis Julien et François.

Thus the interlocutors make their appearance in the work. François challenges Julien:

> FRANÇOIS
>
> La tempête que tu as déchaînée est parvenue à son paroxysme; il semble maintenant difficile d'arrêter son cours terrible.
>
> JULIEN
>
> Qu'elle me soulève comme une feuille morte! Qu'elle m'emporte puisque l'amour est le frère de la mort! (2)

and so on. Such succinctness leaves the character at the stage of a mere mouthpiece. This could be acceptable if the work were seen as a poetic drama, perhaps, and several passages give this effect, but much of the work is also on a level of prosaic narrative.

(1) Ibid., p. 45.
(2) Ibid., p. 47.

The incident of Dossios' discussion with his wife illustrates clearly the general failing of the work in its attempt to use the selective unit approach, that is, the apparent inconsequentiality of much of the material. The argument between Dossios and Madame Dossios moves from an exchange about Julien to generalities about love, woman, Armstrong's jazz and Paradise. To Madame Dossios's lyrical fantasising about the delights of heaven, Dossios replies:

> 'Foin de ton Paradis!
> Moi, je veux vivre ici-bas. Mon âme seule luttera pour gagner l'autre monde,,,,' (1)

It is difficult to see the point of this exchange in view of the developing clash with Julien and Tanou; at all events it raises thematic questions which are not further developed.

It is not easy to accept that this method sufficiently overcomes the reader's disbelief. The technique of changing medium and point of view in an apparently arbitrary manner adds confusion to this difficulty. So, the movement under consideration opens with a unit of authorial narration, heavily orientated towards the work's ideological theme, but still ostensibly the traditional third-person omniscient author speaking. From this the reader is taken to a brief monologue by Julien, and thence to a sequence of eight dialogue units containing exchanges between Julien and François, young Africans sympathetic to Tanou, the Notables discussing the new threat to their position, Dossios and wife, and between Tanou's supporters at a stage when Julien is about to be killed. The Julien episode is closed by a unit of verse lamenting his death. These units may be seen as constituting a treatment of the Julien episode, mainly in dialogue form, with an opening in monologue and closing in verse.

(1) Ibid., p. 59.

The sequel, the life of the commune, is presented in twelve units of author's narration, a letter from Tanou to a former French colleague, and a final dialogue unit which becomes a choral speech item to provide an emotive finale to the work. It is, then, possible to discern a patterned treatment of the main areas of the material, and so the work appears as illustrating the mélange des genres. The critic has difficulty in discerning, however, the artistic motivation behind the actual choice of genre at a given point: why, for example, dialogues are thought preferable to narration at one stage and not at another, since there is little distinction to be found in the actual material that would dictate or suggest such choice. For example, Ramao, the disillusioned European intellectual, commits his final thoughts about life to verse(1), without much apparent justification for the choice of genre. These points lead one to question the value of the technical innovation as it has been treated here.

It could be thought that the suspension of disbelief is frustrated by the necessity for the reader to adapt from one convention to another, particularly in view of the different modes of communication implied. The transfer from dramatic dialogue, presented as playscript for acting, to authorial narration, as reading material, and to verse, which essentially, it could be claimed, requires declamation, seem to offer serious difficulty to the reader. Nevertheless, Le Soleil Noir Point presents a significant attempt in the French African novel to advance from traditional form, and one which has not been taken up and developed by later authors.

(1) Ibid., p. 41.

The fictitious incomplete biography provides the framework for a substantial proportion of the novels of the field. Works in this sub-group restrict their aims to variations of the 'Black Narcissus' social emphasis, and the choice of this particular narrative base seems largely dictated by the thematic suitability of an outline which enables a fictitious treatment of contemporary life through the experience of a young male character, for the most part: the authors are able to import freely into an established stereotype fictitious material which will support an ideological viewpoint.

The restrictions adopted are, nevertheless, severe, and the fictitious potential of the biographical basis is far from being realised. The inner life of the people involved is not freely developed. The intrigue is often heavily controlled. Invention is often sacrificed for the sake of a social reality which is only lightly portrayed. The most original of these works, Ouologuem's Le Devoir de Violence, is the one which adopts its own thematic and technical approach even within the general stereotype of subject-area and narrative basis.

CHAPTER 3

The Death-orientated Life

An important number of works are constructed upon the basis of a premature death (I). Thematic and narrative structure in these generally mirrors that of the open-ended biographical fictions and of the autobiographies: so, the 'happy childhood-hopeful adolescence-disillusioned adulthood' syndrome underpins them all, with the exception of Les Soleils des Indépendances and Sur la Terre en Passant. Unlike the autobiographies and open-ended lives, which proceed to a present time in which the hero's existence is, and is likely to continue to be, unsatisfactory to himself because of the racial question, the group under discussion objectivate the awareness of defeat into the hero's physical destruction, so providing a development of the dominant structural stereotype.

This development may be considered in three areas: one in which ideological emphasis and novel form are inadequately integrated; a second in which the authors have achieved a more thorough fictionalisation of the stereotype; and a third in which the material is confined to a short period before the hero's death, and the childhood and preceding life is implied. It is proposed to consider the main works of these groups.

Mirages de Paris, O Pays, Mon Beau Peuple, and Violent Etait le Vent demonstrate different ways in which the fictionalisation of the stereotype presents certain problems for their writers.

(1) See p. 37 above.

The whole group face the problem how to present a character-plot unity leading to a climactic death-termination which will be not only humanly convincing but also illustrative of the racial syndrome.

Mirages de Paris exemplifies the weakness of the field as a whole in this respect: the work follows the usual pattern, in its brief evocation of the happy rustic African childhood, which serves as a contrast with a tormented Parisian maturity, via an initiatory passage of amazement at the superficial appearance of France. A particular feature of this work, however, shared with L'Aventure Ambiguë, is its suggestion of artificiality in European civilisation:

> Il eut de l'Europe l'impression de quelque chose d'artificiel. Il ne fallait pas gratter la façade des choses, sinon, comme les visages des femmes, on en faisait tomber le fard. On était ici au pôle opposé de l'Afrique, où tout était rude, élémentaire, mais naturel.(1)

Part of Paris also is his love for Jacqueline, so that it is impossible for him to love her as herself, but as a Parisian:

> Il me faut, désormais, Vous et Paris, Paris dans Vous, et Vous dans Paris.(2)

Like his fascination for Paris, his love for Jacqueline, the author tells us, is un rêve insensé de bonheur(3). At a social level, moreover, the African society of Paris is seen as a futile and unrealistic mingling of members of tribal groups, races, classes, quite inappropriate to their origins:

> Ainsi leurs vies journalières... tournaient autour d'un même cercle illusoire plein de musique et de rêves.(4)

(1) Op. cit., p.47.
(2) Ibid., p. 73.
(3) Ibid., p. 110.
(4) Ibid., p. 117.

The central reality of the work, however, is the effect of the idea of Paris upon the mind of Fara himself; the prestigious exoticism of all things French, gathered up into the impact of Paris, as mediated through his childhood imagination and reinforced by a French-based education in Africa, upon a young man in the process of formation, undermines his personal integrity, substituting in his mind a romantic flight from reality for a realistic appraisal of his situation:

> Fara était atteint d'un mal étrange: le mal de Paris; la cause avait été son tempérament, son imagination vive, son enthousiasme facile, qui avait trouvé nourriture dans ses lectures. (1)

The effect of this is to render unbearable the prospect of leaving Paris for Africa at the end of his allotted time. His marriage with Jacqueline creates more problems, and it is this relationship, which to Fara meant his acceptance into, and possession of, Paris, which leads to the dénouement. Jacqueline's death in childbirth produces in Fara a nervous crisis.

The final movement of the work brings Fara back to a sense of purpose in a decision to return to Africa and to help build up its future. A happy ending seems appropriate: Fara has suffered and now seems purged of his fault. It seems, then, to conflict with this movement to bring about Fara's suicide by drowning upon 'seeing' Jacqueline beckoning him to join her; the death of the hero, supposedly one might say the climax of the work, seems quite inadequately explained or prepared, and at the same time fails to support the author's thesis, in a work which is overtly didactic.

(1) Ibid., p. 74.

African heroes have a free attitude towards women, except their mothers, and transfer affection from one to another easily: Fara's suicidal attachment to Jacqueline requires more than sexual explanation, that is, she symbolises Paris, However, with Jacqueline dead, Paris was still available, and the possibility of other attachments, for the thesis of the work does not require that the mal de Paris should be animated by an individual sex-relationship of an intensely monogamous kind. If, on the other hand, the suicide were to be seen as the result of a hallucination induced by a depression resulting from deep personal grief, the story becomes a personal romance, in which the mal de Paris is no longer central but rather Jacqueline as a person; but this interpretation is at odds with the dominant socially-orientated emphasis. The composition of the work has not integrated the death of the hero into the work.

A different weakness appears in O Pays, Mon Beau Peuple where the hero is presented in the role of a martyr; here the socio-political and ideological implications of the colonial situation are explored and exploited to the point where the novel as a living fiction ceases to exist. The idealisation of the hero is one aspect of the didactic approach in a work based upon the question of the exploitation of Black native by White foreigner:

> Faye, sur de nombreux points, avait parfaitement assimilé les modes de pensée, les réactions des blancs, tout en ayant conservé au plus profond de lui l'héritage de son peuple. Il avait beaucoup vu, beaucoup appris pendant ses années d'Europe; d'importants bouleversements s'étaient produits en lui, il en était même venu à juger sans indulgence ses frères de race. (1)

So, he displays his courage in the opening movement of the work, by attacking the White oppressor of his people.

(1) Op. cit., p. I5.

He defies convention in marrying a Frenchwoman, bringing her to his natal village. He withdraws from the traditional ties of village life and domestic obedience to his father and strikes out from the family vocation of fishing in favour of agriculture. He takes revenge upon the French administrator who tries to rape his wife and rebukes the administrator who withholds needed assistance from the peasants at a time of drought. The hostility he incurs from the authorities brings about his death, for they see a blow to their position in his plan to organise an agricultural cooperative, and thereby to challenge French commercial interests. A man of great energy, he is much loved by his compatriots, and his home is the centre for animated discussions with the progressive young set of Ziguinchor.

Over and above the conflict between colonialism and the local populace, that between progress and the status quo provides the dynamic of the work. The forces of European monopolistic exploitation on the one hand, and those of African traditionalism on the other, both present a challenge to the enlightened Faye. It is in the development of the different aspects of these forces that the work may be said to attempt to cover too much ground for a coherent lifelike fiction. The returned son's clash with family tradition about filial obedience, polygamous duty, marrying a White woman and bringing her home and family religious beliefs, the discussion about female circumcision, the mother's recourse to sorcery to effect fertility, for her own self and later for her daughter-in-law Isabelle, in general, the discussion of the whole range of problems besetting an African community in the immediately pre-independence era, under the stimulus of modernisation, dominates the narrative and characterisation.

The work may then be seen as a kind of parable, in which Faye incarnates the aspirations of an exploited people, and by his murder or martyrdom becomes an even more powerful symbol:

> Ce n'était pas la tombe qui était sa demeure, c'était le coeur de tous les hommes et de tous les femmes. Il était présent le soir autour du feu et le jour dans les rizières; lorsqu'un enfant pleurait, sa mère lui racontait l'histoire de ce jeune homme qui parlait à la terre et, sous l'arbre de palabre, on honorait sa mémoire. Oumar n'était plus, mais son 'Beau Peuple' le chantait toujours.
> Il précédait les semences, il était présent durant la saison des pluies, et il tenait compagnie aux jeunes gens pendant les récoltes. (1)

A similar attempt to make a political point by martyrdom, Violent Etait Le Vent tries also to adapt form to function overtly, by creating a new form to express innovatory ideas. Nokan outlines his approach in his Préface , as an intention to use the biographical basis of an African student's experience of education in Africa and France, his emotional and social maturation, and of his return to a newly independent African state, to come into mortal conflict with authority, in order to propagate his (the author's) revolutionary ideas; so, after an exposition of his views about a deepening impoverishment of the masses of the Third World, he calls for a fundamental revolution of social structure:

> A tous ces maux il n'existe qu'un remède: la révolution, c'est-à-dire, la restructuration de la société. (2)

(1) Ibid., p. 233/-4.
(2) Op. cit., p. 7.

A marked similarity of conception to that of O Pays, Mon Beau Peuple is apparent in Nokan's remarks about the hero:

> Ayant voulu suivre les méandres de la vie de Kossia, j'ai peint successivement son enfance romantique, son départ pour la France où il pénètre la culture occidentale et ne prend de celle-ci que ce qu'elle a de meilleur, son retour au pays natal où il tente de trouver une solution aux problèmes posés par le temps nouveau. (1)

Surprisingly, in view of the major restriction that this purpose places upon his work's freedom, Nokan goes on to claim that he intends to depict the whole of existence:

> Il faut dépeindre toute l'existence, qui est à la fois poétique, romanesque, théâtrale et picturale, vulgaire, noble, mesquine et généreuse. C'est ce que j'ai essayé de faire en écrivant 'Le Soleil Noir' et le présent ouvrage. J'ai voulu que ces narrations soient courtes pour laisser au lecteur le temps de penser, de rêver. (2)

A technical development of this idea is claimed in the Préface:

> J'ai tenté ici de mêler la poésie à la prose, à la musique pour ressusciter les voix des tam-tams qui ont bercé mon enfance. (3)

While the form of the work may appear innovatory, like the author's Le Soleil Noir Point, the main conception remains closely tied to the didactic restriction of much of the field:

> Kotiboh représente le passé qui résiste, avec une force infernale, à la jeune Afrique; Kossia et ses camarades sont les flambeaux du présent. (4)

The formal distinction of the work is twofold: first, its sectionalisation, not only into five parts, each devoted to a stage in the hero's life (his childhood, his education, his compatriot Kotiboh's rise to power, his own reaction by revolt and his political martyrdom), but also each section being subdivided into several short sub-units, usually in prose.

(1) Ibid., p.8.
(2) Ibid., p.9.
(3) Ibid., p.9.
(4) Ibid., p.9.

For example, the childhood is presented in eight passages, of little more than a page in length. The purpose of this was in order to avoid the supposed danger of creating, in the author's words,

'un roman artificiellement très unifié et monotone'(1).

It is not clear what is meant by this view of unity of form in the novel. It seems to suggest that the author was seeking to create the interest of his work out of an unusual form rather than out of the substantial life of the work itself.

The second aspect of the work's formal distinction is its attempt at a mélange des genres. The considerations already outlined in reference to Le Soleil Noir Point apply equally well here(2). The work discussed does, however, make more effective use of the verse form as a heightening device than its predecessor: leaving aside the Prologue and Epilogue in the final section dealing with the execution of Kossia and its aftermath, verse is used importantly in nine of the fourteen Tableaux to present in emotive terms the response to Kossia's death at the hands of a reactionary régime:

> Je souffre au Congo,
> Au Mozambique, en Angola,
> Les balles du colonialisme et de l'impérialisme
> Ont brisé mon crâne et déchiré mon coeur.
> Je suis le prolétaire tombé devant son taudis
> A Saint-Domingue, en Algérie et au Viet-Nam...
> Je suis un Noir fier
> Qui dresse ses poings
> Contre toute oppression.
> Je suis Toussaint Louverture,
> Lumumba, Ben Barka. (3)

The use of dialogue, in the manner of a playscript [a technique of uncertain value as one expects a book to be used in one way, either read to oneself, out loud, or acted], is limited in this work to two pages of Part IV(4), without there being discernible any reason for selection of material to be so presented.

(1) Ibid., p. 8.
(2) See p. I02 above.
(3) Op. cit., p. I75.
(4) Ibid., p. I2I.

The attempt of Nokan to revolutionise the novel form affects only the surface of the work: the substance remains firmly unoriginal and derivative, a restatement of the central stereotype, with the development of the comment into post-Independence times, in meaning and organisation. Mouralis's comment seems to mistake surface for substance, and compares Nokan's work with that of writers of enormously greater maturity, freedom and complexity:

> Pour exprimer les contradictions du monde moderne, Charles Nokan lui aussi, dans Le Soleil Noir Point et Violent Etait Le Vent, use de la technique unanimiste.... Le livre obéit à une esthétique qui rappelle 'La Préface de Cromwell' de Victor Hugo et applique à fond la théorie du mélange des genres. (1)

The three works considered above, by developing the narrative pattern to include death as a result of the colonial or neo-colonial situation, achieve a greater definition of protest statement; however, for different causes, related to composition, none presents the rounded synthesis of fictional resources such as is to be found in L'Aventure Ambiguë, Une Vie de Boy and Un Piège sans Fin, all of which also concern themselves with the hero's death in the light of social or philosophical considerations.

In some respects, L'Aventure Ambiguë is one of the outstanding works of the field, in its achievement of coherence and objectivation, and in its raising the racial and cultural question to the status of a philosophical meditation. The composition of the work displays a closer control at all levels than most other works of the field, and it is proposed to consider the effects of this, in relation to the central narrative stereotype.

The prose style plays a major role, in lifting the narrative into the area of philosophical meditation, by its simplicity and balance of structure and vocabulary.

(1) Op. cit., p. II7.

For example, as the narrator describes the effect of his noble birth upon Samba Diallo, the grave dignity of the theme is established through the style as much as through the referential significance:

> La noblesse de son origine lui pesait, non point comme un fardeau dont il eut peur, mais à la manière d'un diadème trop encombrant et trop visible. A la manière d'une injustice aussi. Il désirait la noblesse, certes, mais une noblesse discrète, plus authentique, non point acquise mais conquise durement et qui fût plus spirituelle que temporelle. (1)

The authorial tone carries through into the characters' speech, as, for example, in the following extract, in which Le Maître Thierno describes, to the chief's daughter, the death of the previous Diallobé chief:

> - Il a longtemps souffert seul, sans que nul n'en sût rien, car il n'avait rien changé dans son mode d'existence. Un jour, il me fit appeler. Lorsque je parus, après qu'il m'eût longuement salué, que nous eûmes causé à l'accoutumée, il se leva, alla à une malle qu'il ouvrit et en sortit une grande pièce de percale. 'Ceci', me dit-il, 'est mon linceul et je voudrais que vous m'indiquiez la façon rituelle de le tailler. (2)

The unusual past historics for dialogue, the frequent subjunctives, the slow, elaborate rhythm, serve to create an almost archaic, certainly an unworldly, atmosphere, in which the issues of life, meaning and death may be contemplated at leisure. The prose style is a major element of the composition of the work.

A similarly close control is maintained over the general organisation of material. The work is constructed in two parts of nine chapters each, the first part giving an account of Samba Diallo's apprenticeship as heir to the chieftainship of his tribe, and his indoctrination into an extreme Islamic asceticism, within the context of a French assimilationist policy, with its resulting racial clash of ideologies in the colony.

(1) Op. cit., p. 26.
(2) Ibid., p. 37.

The second part brings Samba into contact with European philosophy and Parisian life, with a consequent sense of spiritual dereliction, which finds its ultimate expression in his death at the hands of the mad attendant of his now dead spiritual mentor. Samba Diallo dies as a result of the influence of Europeanisation. Leaving aside the allegorical epilogue in which the spirit of Samba converses with God and attains peace in the next world, the author has designed the two parts to complement and contrast with each other. So, the chapters match in order between the parts, with, for example, the opening chapter of each part showing Samba Diallo receiving instruction in the reigning ideology, be it Islamic or European, this parallelism is maintained throughout, and contributes to the contrast between the two civilisations.

A similarly strict control is kept over the characterisation. This is representative to the point of symbolism, each character acting within a clearly defined social or philosophical role, to present together a total complex of viewpoints. The indigenous conflict of religious and social tradition is presented through the strong figure of Maître Thierno, the Moslem mentor, who opposes the seemingly inevitable compromise with Western values and practice being accepted by the hereditary leaders of the Diallobé tribe, La Grande Royale and Le Chevalier. A conflict between religiously motivated mortification and a desire for secular fulfilment is here foreshadowed, as Le Maître Thierno's dominance over his young pupil is contested by La Grande Royale. A young Demba, less spiritually orientated than Samba and hostile to him, will succeed to the Master's position, and so values of the new generation will oust those of the old.

The Madman occupies a significant place in the work, not only by his ideas but also by his action. Having returned from Europe with his senses deranged, holding a superficially unbalanced, but thematically coherent, view of European life, his comments provide an extreme statement of the supposed artificiality and spiritual deadness of the European way of life. It is he who pleads with the returned Samba to pray in the cemetery where his ancestors lie, to communicate with the God of the living, but mainly of the dead, and who, when Samba turns away, kills him to bring him back to spiritual life. Samba occupies a central position between the conflicting ways of thinking. His mind accepts the logical force of Western empiricism at one level, while at another he craves for the Islamic certainties of his youth. His death is the necessary outcome of two convergent influences, the life-denying, other-worldliness of Islam and the sense of spiritual death created in him by Western individualism and materialism.

The European characters are similarly created to fulfil representative function. The European schoolmaster, M. Lacroix, presents a European cultural view to contrast with the Afro-Islamic view of Samba Diallo's father. M. Martial, who befriends Samba Diallo in Paris, is significantly a failed missionary to Africa, while his daughter Lucienne seeks assurance in the abstractions of a fanatical Marxism. There is also a representative group of expatriate African Parisians who have adapted to French life, even achieving Western success, but are spiritually rootless.

The characterisation, being so organised, to an extent of abstraction unusual even in this field, brings together the few outlines of an externally uncomplicated experience. The discussion and speeches, which convey much of the work's meaning, depend upon this characterisation.

By virtue of a far-reaching insistence upon what is spiritual, representative and ultimately meaningful, and by imposing a tight pattern upon the experience, the author has developed the given narrative stereotype into a more significant, even universally relevant, work. The conflicts of Diallo are not only those of any African student in Paris, but also those of Everyman, in so far as the work objectivates the universal conflict of mysticism and secularism within the individual person. It is here that the death of the hero is more than a protest against colonialism, as with other works, but also a statement of man's anguished inability to reconcile the contradictions within himself. The artistic power of the work as a life story violently terminated lies partly in its coherent unification of the elements of that life's inner development. The causes of the adult's psychological malaise are established in the experiences of the child and the adolescent. The permeation of the mind by Moslem life-denial with its resulting mysticism precedes the equally irresistible impact of European secularism and so prepares for the schizophrenia of the latter stages. Samba Diallo is plunged into disarray because Paris has focussed, for him as for Faye in Les Mirages de Paris, the fascination of phenomena, a fascination not peculiar, however, in this case, to Paris, and which Islam has tried to destroy in young Samba. At this level, the conflict is international, Islam fighting Cartesianism in the mind of a young African noble.

The contradiction is insoluble, and Samba, personifying the paradox, can neither live and act, nor die and cease to act, without denying an important element of himself. As he turns away from the graves of the cemetery into which he has gone, his life is taken from him by the spokesman of Islam. Death is the main and lasting reality of life. Seen in this light, the work makes a statement of universal significance using the local and temporal form of the African's disillusionment with Europe for this purpose rather than to make socio-political capital out of it.

The attitude of the novelist towards the question of milieu in its concrete particularity and its role in his thesis finds an individual expression in L'Aventure Ambiguë, the milieu appearing more as a philosophical or social ambiance than as a physically observable reality, and so reinforcing the abstract nature of the thesis. With Bhêly Quénum's Un Piège sans Fin, however, a divergent juxtaposition of these two elements is used. This work raises the philosophical question of absurdity, and develops it through the experiences of a peasant as they are narrated in one of the most circumstantial and socially descriptive works of the field. The work is the only one to raise a philosophical issue of such abstraction at such length. Not only is the issue dramatised within the context of a wide-ranging concrete structure, but the construction of the work itself is considerably more complex than most.

The author has used a more sophisticated narrative framework than usual for the field. The work has an ostensible raison d'être in the person of a narrator, a M. Houénhou, a cultured amateur of African arts, well-respected and established, of a sympathetic and humanitarian outlook, who meets an apparently destitute peasant, Ahouna, and gives him shelter, listening to the story he has to tell of his life up to that time.

He discovers, after his guest's departure, that Ahouna is wanted by the police for a savage murder. M. Houénhou then experiences a prophetic dream about Ahouna's situation(1), and also, by remarkable coincidence, reads a portion of The Imitation of Christ speaking of life as a living death, just at the time when he sees Ahouna, now captured, being paraded through the town(2). He also has some part in the story in the discussions held about Ahouna with police and relatives later when Ahouna is imprisoned. The work dispenses with Houénhou's narration in the second part, and the omniscient author takes over directly, so widening the range of the events covered. A thematically relevant episode is developed at this stage, in which a fellow prisoner of Ahouna, Affôgnon, escapes and commits suicide on recapture(3). This latter episode is but the first of several events which combine with Ahouna's prison experience to establish in his mind a sense of despair and futility, resulting in a determined fatalism. At this stage(4) the narrative diverges into a development of the plans of the murdered woman's family to wreak vengeance upon Ahouna by obtaining access to the same prison and kidnapping him. This development brings the work to a close, as he is captured by the family and burnt alive by way of punishment. His ashes are to be taken to Mount Kiniba, where he spent his happy childhood and youth as a shepherd.

The work shows an ambitious complexity and range of narration. The role of Houénhou is perhaps ambivalent: as a narrator he seems inadequate, being discarded after Part One; his ability to recall the detailed confession of Ahouna, of which Part One mainly consists, may be questioned.

(1) Op. cit., p. I49.
(2) Ibid., p. I52.
(3) Ibid., pp. I66-84.
(4) Ibid., p. 2I4.

On the other hand, the switch from the personal narrator to the omniscient author - a switch used also in Nokan's Violent Etait Le Vent after the death of the first person hero - provides a stereoscopic perspective on the life of Ahouna.

There is a proliferation of thematically supportive episodes brought in to provide narrative and objective substantiation of Ahouna's claim to be a victim of Allah in a world of absurdity(1). Interest may be dissipated by such inclusions as the recollections of Ahouna's brother-in-law(2), or by his fellow-prisoners' experiences(3); or the narratively irrelevant and yet substantial Affôgnon episode(4). Apart from these, the experience of Ahouna himself may seem too tenuous to support a world-view, even though the work certainly lacks the significant simplicity of L'Aventure Ambiguë. Both works seek to philosophise, but Un Piège sans Fin tries to build its conclusions upon a much wider and readily observable base of experience.

This ideological emphasis has implications for the work's characterisation. It is observable that a very large number of names of people appear, and the impression is given of a crowded work. However, Ahouna alone exists at all substantially as a fictional person. There are nevertheless questions about his integrity, particularly the question whether he is insane or not, and whether he is right or wrong in his assessment of his position.

(1) Ibid., p. II2.
(2) Ibid., pp. 65-70.
(3) Ibid., pp. I94-97.
(4) Ibid., pp. I64-84.

The problem arises by virtue of the author's uncertain narrative control: while the reader may accept the objective reality of a person interpreting events in a personal manner, as for example when Ahouna witnesses the suicide of his father (I), the plague on his cattle (2), and the sudden and inexplicable hostility of his young wife (3), yet the author himself engineers events also in such a way as to suggest a maliciously motivated Fate. When Ahouna is trying to prove his marital fidelity to his wife his assertions are made to appear false by the coincidental appearance of the third person in question, as if by arrangement (4). Premonitory dreams of the circumstances of Ahouna's death, borne out for the reader by similar predictions from a diviner (5), are confirmed in the event. The experience of M. Houénhou, in dream and sign, tends to confirm Ahouna's analysis. The reader is thus forced to take note that the author is, so to speak, putting the weight of Allah behind the plot and thereby asserting that Ahouna is right in his condemnation of life as absurd and malicious. Contradictions immediately present themselves: for on the one hand Ahouna is seen as a homicidal psychotic, seeking relief from his depersonalisation experienced at the hands of his wife in the seemingly motiveless, but sexually inspired, murder of a strange woman, and on the other the idea of total absurdity emanating from his disordered mind is supported by the author.

The author's use of social backgound tends to conflict with the theme, in that he builds up an unusually full and complex picture of African life, as a firm and reasonable frame of reference, against which Ahouna is seen as an outsider.

(I) Ibid., pp. 51-53.
(2) Ibid., pp. 29-34.
(3) Ibid., p. II0.
(4) Ibid., p. II2.
(5) Ibid., p. 230.

The depiction includes the family of Ahouna, whose father, a village Notable, is particularly disgraced by the colonial forced labour system(1). His sister becomes the ex-mistress and the mother of the children of a White expatriate. The mother remains the pillar of strength generally encountered in the field's portrayal of the African family. Regional antipathies are evoked in the clash(2) between Ahouna's family and that of his wife, the former originating in the North, the latter in the South. The family of Kinhou, victim of Ahouna's homicidal mania, is also presented within its tribal context and under the pressure of a call for vengeance(3). M. Houénhou's way of life is suggested by reference to the world of culture to which he belongs(4), as much as by his civilised contacts with the local French administration(5), which is presented in its conflict over racism and in its views on the role of the European in Africa. The religious situation also figures largely in the Ganmé episode of Affôgnon, the Christian Church figuring alongside the college of diviner apprentices(6). The prison sequences(7) present a range of prisoners, mainly European, in a depiction unique in the field. The work, more than any other, evokes the society of pre-Independence Africa in a wide variety of manifestations.

It is not, however, a social novel in the sense that social depiction is its main purpose. The experiences of Ahouna form the central thread and focal point, and these clash violently with the established order of society, which, with all its faults, is clearly organised for the apparent good of the majority.

(1) Ibid., p. 43.
(2) Ibid., pp. I29-34.
(3) Ibid., pp. 2I5-232.
(4) Ibid., pp. I52-53.
(5) Ibid., pp. 236-242.
(6) Ibid., pp. I56-I76.
(7) Ibid., pp. I78-2I4.

The implied stability and cohesion of the social order is in marked contrast with the disorder of Ahouna's mentality and his interpretation of the world, and yet the author has lent narrative support to this latter view. The basic alliance of compositional elements, apparent in L'Aventure Ambiguë is only partially achieved in Un Piège sans Fin.

The work occupies a significant place in the group of death-terminated biographies, for, whereas Oyono's Une Vie de Boy has its hero killed as the culmination of colonialist brutality, in a closely organised composition, and L'Aventure Ambiguë depends upon the death of the central figure as the essential resolution of a neurotic schizophrenia springing from a divergent education, Un Piège sans Fin uses the 'life-death' unit as the means of a general philosophical/psychological statement about duality of meaning in life, proceeding through the psychological disorder of the main character to arrive at a rounded dramatisation of the human dilemma of choice and inevitability. To this dilemma the author provides an answer in the victory of a fatal inevitability prepared in the work not only directly by the narrative, in premonitory dreams and diviners' forecasts, but also indirectly with the hero's obsessive death-wish which the author declares to be justified:

> Le néant qui s'était ouvert dans son âme aussitôt après son crime lui paraissait se creuser davantage et cette sensation angoissante dont il avait l'air de ne pas se soucier parce qu'il se considérait comme un mort correspondait à une certaine réalité. (1)

Une Vie de Boy illustrates more thoroughly than any other death-orientated life fiction of the field the dominance of the general thematic stereotype of happy childhood-unhappy European experience.

(1) Ibid., p. 235.

It seeks to make no overt philosophical point of universal significance, neither does it attempt a broad social depiction. It confines itself to the portrayal of a native African 'boy's' experience of the French and particularly of his master and mistress, from his childhood to early death in manhood. Unlike the two previous works discussed, this one operates within a mode of commonplace realism, concentrated upon the thoughts of the central figure alone. Thus, the narrative gains in immediacy in comparison with much other work of the field.

The ostensible raison d'être of the work is found in a diary discovered upon the dying person of the hero, during the prologue to the work. The death is due to maltreatment at the hands of the Whites from whose prison Toundi, a 'boy', has escaped. From this appearance of the diary at the outset comes the reader's knowledge throughout the work that the 'writer', Toundi, will meet an early and violent end at the hands of his masters, a knowledge which contributes strongly to the ironical effect of the work. An extra dimension is added to one's appreciation of Toundi's naïve confidings to his diary as he progresses in service of the French master and mistress, since the image of the dying man is present in the reader's memory to invest those hopes and memories with a tragic pathos. The diary basis of the work ensures a unity of viewpoint and material, so that the work amounts to a running commentary on his employment, leading to his destruction. The division of the diary into two exercise-books serves to underline the antithetical structure of the work, the first part tracing Toundi's rise to success, the second portraying his decline and disgrace. The Whites, administrators and ecclesiastics alike, who provide the young Toundi with security and status, are revealed to be connivers in and practitioners of the most fearful and murderous brutality.

The nature of the hero, a hopeful, but not extraordinary, young African, puts the work on a different basis from those whose heroes are in some way special, such as Ahouna or Samba Diallo. His rôle and position in life, like those of Denis in Beti's Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba, are well chosen to observe both African and Whites at the point of contact, and yet observing and reacting in a simple manner, and his observations appear as the basic data for a condemnation of colonialism. Before his employment as the Commandant's 'boy', Toundi has had first-hand experience of the French religious presence as an assistant to the local priest, more particularly of Father Gilbert's kick, of Father Vandermayer's practice of obliging African Christians accused of fornication to undress in his presence, and of the amusement caused by the priest's unknowingly obscene attempts to preach in the vernacular. As 'boy' he enjoys a similarly private view of the social administration, of the domestic life of the Commandant and particularly of his erring wife. The death of Toundi results directly from the malice of this wife and the brutality of her lover, the Prison Governor, who enjoys complete freedom in beating Africans to death. The work stands as one of the most direct and tellingly circumstantial uses of the novel form, particularly in its use of violent death. The general stereotype is powerfully restated in dramatic form to protest against inhumanity in European colonial administration.

Two further works, Kourouma's Les Soleils des Indépendances and Evembé's Sur la Terre en Passant, while not belonging entirely to the group under discussion in that they do not undertake an overall life-view, yet do make a use of the untimely death for purposes of a socio-political nature, so it will be appropriate to incorporate ideas upon them here. In both of these works the death of the hero is the didactic and narrative essence.

The former presents the effect of post-Independence nationalism upon the traditional institution of the chefferie, while the latter deals with the question of social reform in a post-Independence state. Both fictions confine themselves narratively to a short period of time before the death, of which the significance is clearly indicated, and so are able to develop more deeply the personality of the hero. It is largely in this development that the works display a distinction from the other works of this sub-group, and so integrate the 'disillusion' syndrome into a less didactic statement.

Much of the achievement of Les Soleils des Indépendances lies in its creation of a complex and tragic figure, Fama, the last and sterile survivor of a Mali tribal chefferie which has fallen into a penurious decay under the new Independence rule. The central material of the work is the experience of the old man, obsessed with delusions of grandeur, cursing and blaspheming his way through a world which mocks and imprisons him, and drawn irresistibly towards his appointed death by prophesied destiny. His peripheral impact upon society is emphasised by the contrast of himself with his wife Salimata, whose experience of tradition has been mainly centred upon a disastrous excision followed by rape by a diviner, the resulting frigidity cured only by marriage with Fama, which brings her wrongfully under the stigma of a sterility belonging to her husband. She is a strong figure, who finds fulfilment in motherhood with another diviner, when Fama is finding his in death. The socio-political theme is expressed in the complex life of this couple, with their highly individual experiences and attitudes.

The work has much of the roman de moeurs, such as in Fama's activity as a Malinké celebrant at funeral-feasts, Salimata's experiences of traditional custom, and her attachment to the 'African mother' rôle, the importance of superstition in the diviners' part, and particularly in the idea of a conflict of philosophies exemplified by the train of the work.

From the African view, all has been foretold: the last chief of Horodougou will be killed by a crocodile, so says oral tradition. So, when the chefferie descends to Fama, sterile, the events that attend his taking on the position are fraught with ambivalence. Apparently a free agent, he is unconsciously fulfilling his destiny. So it happens, as he clashes with the frontier guards and finds himself on the riverside, among the crocodiles. The death of Fama is not an accident, but, by its fulfilment of prophesy, a climactic vindication of old Africa, acknowledged by earth and sky:

> Et comme toujours dans le Horodougou en pareille circonstance, ce furent les animaux sauvages qui les premiers comprirent la portée historique du cri de l'homme, du grognement de la bête et du coup de fusil qui venait troubler le matin. Ils le montrèrent en se comportant bizarrement. Les oiseaux: vautours, éperviers, tisserins, tourterelles, en poussant des cris sinistres s'échappèrent des feuillages, mais, au lieu de s'élever, fondirent sur les animaux terrestres et les hommes. Surpris par cette attaque inhabituelle, les fauves en hurlant foncèrent sur les cases des villages, les crocodiles sortirent de l'eau et s'enfuirent dans la forêt, pendant que les hommes et les chiens, dans des cris et des aboiements infernaux, se débandèrent et s'enfuirent dans la brousse. Les forêts multiplièrent les échos, déclenchèrent des vents pour transporter aux villages les plus reculés et aux tombes les plus profondes le cri que venait de pousser le dernier Doumbaya. (1)

The prose style contributes in a significant way to the composition: there is a continual effort to lift the narration out of the customary prosaic reference into an original expression of the vital, almost explosive, spiritual realities of the work: the texture of the prose is marked by rhythmical and forceful repetition, in itself or in accumulation, of verbs, usually in the Active Voice, of strongly associative adjectives or of unequivocal, concrete nouns; so, for example, Kourouma depicts Fama endeavouring to fertilise his wife:

(1) Op. cit., p. II6.

> Le ventre restait sec comme du granit, on pouvait y pénétrer aussi profondément qu'on pouvait, même creuser, encore tournoyer et fouiller avec le plus long, le plus solide pic pour y déposer une poignée de grains selectionnés: on noyait tout dans un grand fleuve. Rien n'en sortira. (1)

As the scene is developed, active forms give way to passive:

> Essoufflée, en nage, enfumée, délirante, elle bondissait et s'agrippait à Fama. Sur le champ, même rompu, cassé, baîllant et sommeillant, même flasque et froid dans tout le bas-ventre, même convaincu de la futilité des choses avec une stérile, Fama devait jouer à l'empressé et consommer du Salimata chaud, gluant et dépouillé de l'entraînante senteur de goyave verte. (2)

Few, if any, other authors of the field, approach the effectiveness of Kourouma's style, in holding theme and narrative in artistic suspension and creating an autonomous novel-world in which the subjectivity of Fama, and the objectivity of a social situation are taken up together into an imaginative, even poetic statement of the traditional African celebration of life on earth.

The death of Fama is, then, central to the work, but in a different sense from that of overtly politically orientated works. It is to be seen as an integral part of the totality of African life, which incorporates death, even to the point of absorbing and making use of intrusions such as Western-type dictatorships in its omniscience. The disillusion stereotype here receives a fundamental and deeply religious restatement.

With Evembé's Sur La Terre en Passant the death of the hero, Gilbert Iyoni, is kept present in mind from the beginning of the work which opens with the young man suffering the initial attack of an apparently incurable stomach condition; the work ends with the death taking place, off-stage, and with the narrator's comments about it:

> Iyoni est mort. Il est parti alors qu'il entrait dans la période féconde de sa jeunesse. Ce genre de personnes d'ailleurs ne vivent pas longtemps. On a l'impression qu'ils sont sur la terre en passant. (3)

(1) Ibid., p. 27.
(2) Ibid., p. 27.
(3) Op. cit. p. 97.

The idea is here presented of Iyoni moving through the world as an outsider, suffering through no fault of his own, looking at society through the eyes of a detached observer. His observations of society and general life lead to a Bonapartist political philosophy and a Christian religious one; hence his attachment to the rising political figure of Nkilviagah, who seems to promise a new era in post-Colonial politics. The death of Iyoni, then, just after taking office as one of Nkilviagah's assistants, is seen as the passing of a person likely to play a part in the reform of society:

> Iyoni est mort. Mais les problèmes qu'il se posait, ont-ils trouvé un début de solution? Quelqu'un avant moi l'a dit: That is the question! (1)

The reference to Hamlet, called by Divinity to purge society, in this authorial comment, clearly supports the suggested interpretation.

The integration of the death is not easily discernible: central as it is, it is not causally linked with the social material of the work, unless the author seriously intends the meaning of the comment:

> 'ce genre de personnes ne vivent pas longtemps'(2),

and that Iyoni is, as was Christ, 'too good for this world'. There seems to be a weakness here of composition, in the variance between narrative structure and thematic. It is noteworthy, however, that the disease of which Iyoni dies is the direct inspiration of much extended description of the processes of vomiting and defecation; this description serves to provide an objective correlative with an implied corruption of post-Independence society and of life itself; in an episode at his friend's flat he partakes of some anonymous lovemaking:

> Il renversa un fardeau sous lui, ce qui lui fit oublier sa maladie, et la terre, avec sa pourriture d'existence et son ignorance pourrie. (3)

(1) Ibid., p. 27.
(2) Ibid., p. 99.
(3) Ibid., p. 103.

The general stereotype here survives in an attenuated form. The earlier form of it, whereby the African suffered disillusion and worse from his initially hopeful experience of Europe has developed into a similar disillusion after an initially hopeful experience of Independence. The realities of modern politics, colonialist or nationalist, spell hardship or disappointment for the subordinate African; in this case the effect of the shock of socio-political reality is compounded by an inexplicably hostile fate. Idealism is expelled by pragmatism and by destiny as well.

In the subgroup under discussion, death serves a central purpose in the novel composition. It provides the uniquely suitable means of rounding off climactically the history of suffering or difficulty that the novel usually presents. Moreover, it makes the ultimate statement of protest in an ostensibly civilised world, and as such is important to these writers. The field seems in this subgroup to be only partially concerned with the subjective reality of life, as apparent in the death-situation, or with the dramatic or fictional possibilities of this ultimate challenge to man's certainties and being. The roman à these remains dominant.

PART II

Works Based upon a Situation

Introduction

The field is fairly evenly divided between the life-based works referred to in Part I above, and works based on a short-lived situation.(1) These situations are usually set in contemporary society and embody a conflict of attitudes and personalities arising from the meeting of African and Western cultures.

In the large majority of these, the African suffers from the encounter, and realisation and disillusion dominate these compositions. Beti's Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba has as its premise rather than its conclusion the disillusion of the African population after its experience of the Church and State. A similar understanding supports the composition of the same author's Le Roi Miraculé, while his Mission Terminée depends for its motivation upon the revelation of the inadequacy of Western education in dealing with the African situation. Ousmane's Vehi-Ciosane hinges upon a breakdown of traditional values associated with the impact of Western modernity. Oyono's Le Vieux Nègre et la Médaille creates its main effects almost entirely through the contrast between the illusion and the reality of the colonial situation. There is, however, in these novels a movement of assertion which is largely lacking in the biographical group: the pattern is sometimes developed beyond the point of disillusion into a stage of compensatory triumph. The White man is discomfited or made to appear ridiculous or his conduct otherwise reprehensible.

(1) See p. 37 above.

The thematic statement benefits in various ways from the situational form. The situation lends itself more readily than the biographical form to the dramatisation of a social conflict represented in a specific incident. Fuller characterisation, in range and sometimes in depth, is achieved. Events are prepared more fully and convincingly. The writers' powers of observation and invention may be more fully utilised.

The works operate as romans à thèse, of which the point is made in an irreversible change of circumstances or in a new and far reaching realisation. In Beti's Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba the Révérend Père Drumont accepts the failure of his mission and leaves Africa. The hero of Le Vieux Nègre et la Médaille, Meka, has his illusions about the French colonialists completely dispelled. The functionary hero of Dembélé's Les Inutiles has to abandon his promising career through pressure of family demands. Diaw Falla will never recover from the legal injustice which motivates Ousmane's Le Docker Noir.

The situation-novel is here, then, largely concerned with exploring the impact of contemporary social change upon individuals or communities. The situation is generally one of social significance, and one may describe the group of novels as fictional presentations of areas of social rather than personal experience.

There are, however, differing emphases which find expression in various kinds of compositions. The main emphasis is upon the social conflict as exemplified in the life of an individual, usually an African; and I consider some examples of this in a separate chapter. A smaller group of novels base their construction upon the experiences of a community in a time of social crisis. In a similarly small group, studied separately, depiction of contemporary or of past society shares the novels' emphasis with a presentation of a sexual-romantic relationship.

One work, also considered separately, explores a purely personal situation, standing apart from the field's general utilisation of contemporary social problems and attitudes for literary motivation.

CHAPTER 4

The Individual Person in the Social Conflict

I have taken five works to illustrate the features of the situation novel in so far as it is based upon social conflict exemplified in the experience of the individual.(1) Badian's Sous l'Orage appears as one of the simplest expressions of the field's use of the novel to expand a social problem, and to present a case for recognition of African social reality, through a personal crisis. Ousmane's Vehi-Ciosane, possibly as much a novella as a novel, dramatises a family and village conflict of broken custom, against a background of encroaching modernisation. Beti's Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba exemplifies the author's wide range of social observation, and ability to utilise it in a polemical purpose, through a succession of clearly realised episodes. In contrast to this breadth, the concentration of Oyono's Le Vieux Nègre et la Médaille upon a single individual's experience within a limited time at a critical stage of the hero's life, serves to present the harsh reality of the colonial relationship from the point of view of the colonised. A fundamentally similar motivation inspires Laye's Le Regard du Roi. Here an assertion of non-European values is taken to an unparalleled extreme by a combination of inversion and allegorisation: the emphasis remains firmly didactic, social and pro-African, in common with the large majority of the field.

With Sous l'Orage the problem of the arranged marriage in opposition to the desires of the romantically involved couple provides the narrative basis of the novel. The substance of the work is ideological, excluding free characterisation and imposing a systematic and simple plot. Thus while the

(1) See p.37 above.

work appears lifeless and obviously engineered to produce a study of a dying pattern of family behaviour in conflict with the aspirations of Europeanised African youth, it is nevertheless remarkable for the extent to which the author has utilised his means to provide a balanced presentation of the two opposing viewpoints.

Badian balances the two world-views by alternating the narrative material from one side of the issue to the other. So, after an opening chapter expounding the social milieu of the father, Benfa, and the conflicting attitudes of the old and new generation, the narrative deals in turn with the interests of the different parties. A typical official family meeting decides upon the marriage of Kany to a wealthy but unloved suitor, Famagan. There follows a passage about the mother, Téné, her anxiety and love for the rebellious Kany and her visit to the local diviner to seek comfort. The opposing views about the arranged traditional marriage are presented in an argument between two brothers of Kany, Sibiri for the traditional, Birama for the modern view. The narrative moves to a party of the politically and socially aware young group of the two lovers and their friends. The theme of the work is then illustrated by an incident during the party when a neighbour is interrupted in beating one of his wives. It is not until one quarter of the work has passed that the reader sees the lovers in a private meeting and discussion.(1)

The ensuing discussion between Kany and her mother demonstrates the debatable aspects of traditional African marriage - often loveless, and usually polygamous - as experienced by the wife, and the spirit of acceptance of the mother. The lovers meet again, to bewail their fate, and the first movement of the work ends with Kany's beloved, Samou, conferring with his mother, Coumba,

(1) Op. cit., p. 53.

who presents both sides of the issue, expounding the advantages of a wife well-versed in the traditional life-style, but at the same time seeing the desirability of a love-match.

The novel's second movement takes Kany and her brother Birama out of the modern urbanised setting utilised hitherto, and they spend some time in the village of one of the father's country cousins, Djigui; the journey itself is used to develop the theme by means of the conversations which take place in the train as overheard by Kany and Birama - conversations of business-men describing the life of an independent African state such as Ghana, contrasting the primitive subjection of the past with the rosy prospect of modernity. From this to the impact of life in the village is a short physical step into another world, one of secret societies crying in the night, of ritual dances, of scientific ignorance. These aspects are brought out, but only, it seems as a preliminary to a more comprehensive world-view. Djigui is given some effective speeches on subjects such as human solidarity, the traditional African respect for the person, a respect foreign to the White colonisers, and unity with the life of nature, exemplified by the place of the family lizard, and thus achieves status as a serious exponent of tradition. The movement concludes with the presentation of the views of another respected figure, one Tiéman, who, like others, has experienced European education and has returned to his village life disillusioned. To Tiéman is given the spokesmanship of the harmonisation of the two world-views. He writes to Samou, expounding his ideas at length. Samou, meanwhile, has been witness of an epidemic of meningitis in the town, a disease, the reader is told, unknown before the advent of the Europeans. The inclusion of this event in the narrative, concurrent with the idealisation of the village life, may be seen as a conveniently coincidental sign of the ambivalent influence of the White presence. The return of the young people coincides with a correspondence between Djigui and Benfa and Kany, whereby the

father has agreed to the daughter's continuing her studies at the instance of his elder cousin.

The final movement deals with the father's last effort to enforce traditional practice, by reneging on his agreement with Djigui and reaffirming his consent with Famagan. The young people react to this by enlisting the support of certain elders and by persuading Famagan to withdraw his suit. The person of Kerfa the fou is given importance in this movement, taking up the task of presenting the harmonising viewpoint.(1) The work concludes with the reluctant acceptance by Benfa of the freedom of Kany to continue her studies.

The broad narrative structure of the work, then, is clearly dictated by the desire to present an ideological confrontation. Events take place largely at the author's thematic need. The actual experience of such a situation is scarcely touched upon. The characters of the novel are representative of certain social forces operative in the conflict between European and African, old and new. The central character is Benfa rather than the lovers, who are scarcely characterised. It is Benfa's will that creates the conflict, yet that will is itself the product of age-old tradition, and Benfa hardly exists as a person. Benfa remains to the end determined to maintain tradition and is convinced of the rectitude of his views throughout. He accepts the situation because Famagan has withdrawn his suit, not because he has compromised with his principles in a compromis tragique. The work concludes in effect with Benfa and his traditional world view in possession of the field:

(1) One may compare the rôle of Kerfa with that of le fou in Kane's L'Aventure Ambiguë. See pp.II5-20 above.

> Famagan s'était retiré de lui-même. Le père Benfa n'avait donc rien à se reprocher. Et puis, Aladji et tous ces anciens étaient aussi intéressés que lui. Il ne s'agissait pas seulement de Kany et de Birama, mais de tous ces jeunes qui croyaient en savoir plus long que les anciens. Un jour, ils découvriraient leurs erreurs. Ils reviendraient alors vers leur monde, prêts à tout lui donner. Ce jour-là, ils comprendraient les Anciens et tous leurs gestes paraîtraient clairs, grands et beaux. Leurs enfants, à qui ils raconteraient leurs aventures, grandiraient dans une nouvelle sagesse.
>
> Sibiri, d'un geste, porta la main vers le gobelet d'eau.
> - Il est vide, fit Birama, je vais t'en chercher.
>
> Le père Benfa porta les regards vers Birama qui, d'un bond, avait pris le gobelet. Il le regarda de la tête aux pieds dans ses habits européens: il sourit.
> 'Et toi, aussi, mon fils, un jour tu auras soif', pensa-t-il.(1)

So the work ends with Benfa, not only unrepentant of past attempts to dictate the married life of his daughter, but convinced of his rectitude in this matter and in all other matters in which the young generation had clashed with his own; his concluding remarks about the future, when the present rebels against tradition would return to the Elders' wisdom, when they would feel a thirst for the values they now rejected, are consistent with the characterisation of the novel in that the social forces at play are represented by individuals, who remain true to their positions, the meeting of which must produce conflict and unhappiness.

The impression left by the work as a whole, however, is one of equivocation. It is possible without straining the text to read it as a plea for tradition, for modernity or for a compromise. It seems that this is the main value of the work, that it does not present a simple solution. The issue is left in the air, as Famagan, the unwanted suitor, conveniently withdrew under pressure.

In a similar situation Ousmane opts for the young lovers of L'Harmattan, whereas Cissé in effect leaves the field to tradition in Faralako. A similar

(1) Op. cit., p. I52.

situation provides the narrative inspiration for Philombé's Sola ma Chérie where the narrative takes the alternative route and the unhappy heroine is obliged to marry her aged suitor. She escapes later from her plight to join her young lover. Again the interest lies in the criticism of a social practice.

In Vehi-Ciosane the inspiring conflict springs from the clash between tradition and forces hostile to its values, such as the economic decline which draws away the youth of the village. Also suggested is the breakdown in moral values and religious beliefs, which underpin the social structure. The effect of distant colonial wars upon the village is illustrated in the behaviour of the crazed ex-soldier Tanor Ngoné Diob.

The work demonstrates an objectivated use of the episode basis: the author rigorously controls the intrigue to present the destruction of a family within the close confines of the village. The importance of the social framework is established early in the work, which opens with a sketch of the physical setting of the village, so leading to consideration of its social and economic life:

> A Santhiu, vu du haut de la dune, s'alignaient les cases selon une loi de l'urbanisme propre aux gens d'ici: l'alignement par famille et par rang. (1)

The central group of people, Guibril Guedj Diob, his wife Ngoné War Thiandum, their son Tanor Ngoné Diob, the daughter Khar Madiagua Diob, the young mother of her father's child, act out their drama in the eyes of the village, which is realised in the persons of Gnagna Guissé, the griote friend of the Ngoné War Thiandum, and of the village elders, These are presented as actively aware of the difficulties besetting their village, combatting the waywardness of the village youth and discussing the economic and spiritual decline of their society,

(1) Op. Cit. p. 25.

a discussion which leads inevitably to comment upon the act of their fellow, Diob. The private act of the individual is seen as the concern of the whole society. It is because of the social character of the act of her husband that the wife kills herself, unable to exist in a community vacuum. The madness of a son coming from the turmoil of a modern war leads to his killing of the father. The daughter leaves the village with a child whose existence affronts the social order, to seek a new life in Dakar, the symbol of modern, valueless urbanism. The tragedy is a village matter:

> La mère qui se suicide, un fils parricide, un enfant incestueux. C'est la fin de not' village. Yallah merci que je parte vite. (1)

The dramatic quality of the work is also partly the result of the ranging but economic use of the third person omniscient narrator, by which the tragic central narrative area is brought into focus from more than one angle. So, the reader is taken to the heart of the matter immediately with an omniscient, detailed perception of the shocked emotions of the wife as she considers her recent discovery of the true cause of her daughter's pregnancy.(2) Thence, after a recall by flashback (reminiscent of the earlier work of Sembène Ousmane, Le Docker Noir, in a free treatment of time which is unusual here) of the experience of puzzlement and suspense leading to that discovery, out to the elders and their deliberations, then back to the family, and so on.

The impression is left of a successfully objectivated work: the author has seized the moment, in the manner of Racine, when the conflicting attitudes of a closely knit group are at the point of collision, and has developed the situation to a dénouement wherein the group is purged of its offending members, and can return to an uneasy status quo.

(1) Ibid., p. 96.
(2) Ibid., p. 27.

The works of Mongo Beti also use the narrative episode to dramatise a culture-clash, while at the same time holding the White presence at an amused distance: Ville Cruelle, as its title implies, has for its theme the hasardous life imposed upon a young African by the nature of colonialism and its attendant urbanisation. This work contrasts with Beti's other works in the extension of the narrative through a succession of adventures, with unity provided by the social education of the hero Banda. Apart from the customary commonplaces of colonialism-criticism in a succession of dramatised scenes, the work also moves in the unusual fiction-area, for this field, of crime-fiction, to which is added a treatment of the hero's growing awareness of romantic love in contrast to the relationship possible in an arranged marriage. The fact that Ville Cruelle is less successful than Beti's other works may be due to its greater extension of subject matter and to its mixture of documentary and crime-fiction modes.

In his later novels Beti restricted the narrative range to the treatment of a chronologically much more limited episode: so, with Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba the narrative develops from a short tour through his parish of a missionary priest; with a bush village; and with Le Roi Miraculé from the effects of the 'conversion' of an African village chief upon the wives he is obliged to reject and the neighbouring communities whence they came.

The polemical effect of Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba is directly related to the measure in which Beti has succeeded in dramatising, in a concretely realised presentation of a social area, the several issues at stake in the colonial situation. The dynamic quality of the work, by which situations and attitudes are radically and progressively altered, contributes centrally to the dramatic strength of the work, which must be seen as one of the major works of protest.

Beti has found in the situation he has chosen the necessary elements for a wide-ranging review of current controversies and at the same time a potential for a fuller social observation than most other works. The pastoral tour of the Révérend Père Drumont through a previously neglected area of his parish provides a sound justification for a confrontation of White priest and African population which allows and even requires a succession of sub-episodes as the ecclesiastical party proceeds from one village to another, meeting different kinds of receptions and dealing with different areas of the conflict between the French Church and State and their subjects, the African populace. The timing of the tour has importance, in that the Father is confronted with a different social situation from the one he last knew and expected to meet again. Western materialism has made large inroads upon Africans' religious beliefs, and he has come to terms with a general indifference to the message of the Church. The area chosen to revisit also significantly offers a special challenge as it lies off the main road districts, and its inhabitants are more likely to show a truculent attitude towards the French authority, being less cowed by experience of forced labour than their roadside compatriots. This narrative basis not only has potential for the author's purposes in the episodic way in which it can be treated, but also contains its own realistic raison d'être.

Within this framework the polemical emphasis is continuously maintained, through an effective dramatisation of events. The exceptions are occasional discussions, for example, between Le Révérend Père Drumont and M. Vidal, administrator. Of several possible examples, one of the most striking is, perhaps, the occasion when Drumont disrupts a village dancing festivity,(1) breaking the xylophones and putting the dancers to flight.

(1) Op. Cit., pp.97-I02.

The ensuing confrontation with the Chief, furious at this destructive interference, gives the author the opportunity to present dramatically the clash of views about the place of the Catholic religion in Africa at all, resulting in a conclusion which gives Drumont much food for thought:

> Père, à mon avis, si Jésus-Christ avait vraiment songé à nous, il serait venu lui-même discuter la question avec nous et peut-être qu'il nous aurait laissés libres de danser. C'est vraiment ce que je crois; et toi?...
> - Justement, Jésus-Christ m'a chargé de vous le dire...
> - Oh! toi, tu es un Blanc, Père! (2)

The incident also serves to illustrate an attitude towards the Catholic Church, whose practices are only tolerated because it is supported by the civil power:

> Que veux-tu, il n'oserait pas nous provoquer ainsi, s'il ne se sentait appuyé derrière lui par tous ses frères. Avec ça qu'ils sont solidaires. (3)

This point is further made by the presentation of the priest in close conference and on cordial terms with M. Vidal on occasion. The tour thus brings out the point of view of the African subjects on aspects of the Church's policy towards them: from village to village, the Father meets frequent clashes over polygamy, bride-purchase, dues unpaid, the sixa institution by which Christian brides are taken into the service of the Church for a period of months, and the picture emerges of an alien ecclesiastical institution enforcing, through credulity of its subjects and force majeure of its administrative secular counterpart, an economic and spiritual exploitation of a populace which, under the increasing influence of cash-economy and with the realisation that the Church is no longer the means to worldly success for its followers that it was thought to be, becomes indifferent and even hostile to its pretentions when it cannot put them to practical use in the manner of Zacharie.

(2) Ibid., p. I02.
(3) Ibid., p. I00.

The chosen point of view from which the events are narrated is of major significance: the first-person continuous interior monologue of young Denis, the Father's acolyte, in theory committed to a diary, has considerable importance in the presentation of a personal view of events as they occur, as seen by one best placed to observe the central narrative flow; Denis occupies the same place between the two worlds as Toundi[1], though to much greater effect in terms of the extent and range of his comment. Denis is able to comment upon the gradual change that takes place in the Father, the growth of the germs of a tolerance that is to overthrow his mission. He is the source of our information on the people with whom the Father comes into contact, and, being scarcely adolescent, and somewhat naïve, the means of the irony which is one of the major effects of the work: this is, perhaps gratuitously, operative in his unbelievably ingenuous observations of Zacharie's relations with Catherine, and to more polemical effect in his descriptions of the Father's actions and attitudes during the tour; an outstanding example is his reportage of the death by accident of one of the villagers,[2] by a tree falling across his hips. The interest found in the incident by Denis is the use that the Father makes of the tragedy - how fortunate that he was able to make his last confession with his dying breaths, how necessary are such events as reminders of the brevity of life, - and the reader perceives what Denis unwittingly conveys, the almost cynical inhumanity of the apostle of the religion of love.

Ideological concern is evident in the characterisation of the work, which may be said to be one of the most densely populated of the works of this group.

(1) See p. I27.
(2) Ibid., pp. 50-52.

The narrative basis of the pastoral tour facilitates the introduction of a wide range of Africans to provide an extensive and often vociferous embodiment of anti-clerical protest. In closer focus the figures of Zacharie, Catherine and Denis himself afford a clear statement of the living humanity of the Africans, each one of whom is distinctively characterised in terms of his or her reaction to the ecclesiastical mission, Zacharie by his cynical and mercenary abuse of his position of trust in the organisation, Catherine by her assertion of sexual enjoyment, Denis by his simple acceptance of the Church's claims and his growing awareness of the conflicting claims of his own sexuality which he has been trained to see as sinful. The reality of the nature of the White presence is portrayed in the persons of Le Père Drumont, whose harsh and arrogant domination of those in his charge is presented as characteristic of colonialism, supported by the naive Leguen whose ideas of Africa are largely limited to gorillas. The force of Christianity is seen to lie in secular power rather than in the compelling nature of its message, through the presentation of Vidal, the administrator, as a close friend and partner of Drumont in the work of France in Africa.

The effectiveness of the characterisation and of the message of the work lies also in the dynamic nature of the presentation of the attitudes and ideas of Le Père Drumont and his African acolyte. The work is constructed upon the concurrent and related growths in awareness of human and African reality of these two central figures. That reality is the power and ubiquity of the procreative force, against which the Church is powerless to impose its restrictions. It is because of its unawareness of this reality that the Church is condemned to acting out a charade of ever-decreasing effectiveness while the life-force expresses itself with more open assertion in the life of Denis, and in the lives of the polygamous Africans and the inhabitants of the sixa. The crux of the drama is the growing realisation of this by the priest

who has to submit to its inexorable force and to leave. An enforcing correlative to this theme takes place in the similar growth of awareness of sex in the experience of Denis. The fully realised scene of his seduction by the insatiable Catherine may well be seen as symbolic of the main theme.(1) The work ends with Denis responding to the charm of Catherine; the Church has failed in the person of its most devoted African follower. The dynamic characterisation is integrated into the work as a major means of its social rhetoric, springing from and contributing to the intrigue and the social milieu.

Of this group of writers it is Beti who seems to show the greatest command of the traditional resources of the social novel, in creating a developing situation from the personalities of people involved in conflicts of an effectively suggested society. By letting a total situation speak for itself he more nearly achieves than others the objectivated creation of an autonomous novel-world.

This is to some extent demonstrable through comparison of Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba with a work which treats a similar subject, Philombé's Un Sorcier Blanc à Zangali. In this latter case the priest, accompanied by an African acolyte similar to Denis, undertakes a tour through heathen territory, and after several adventures and misunderstandings, is brought to realise the alien character of the Catholic mission to Africa, all the more so in that its position is buttressed, as in Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba and Le Roi Miraculé by the secular arm of the colonial power. It is, perhaps, significant that this theme should continue to appeal when it might be thought that Beti had treated it too well for succession or imitation.

(1) Ibid., pp. I47-58.

There are important differences, however, which could enable the work to stand alone. The work develops the suffering of the population of Africa under its African as well as its European masters, in a fashion reminiscent of Le Devoir de Violence. The self-interest at the heart of African adherence to Catholicism is more strongly emphasised in the experience of the acolyte's parents. The contrast between the official Catholic position with that of the devout, humanitarian individual priest, is clearly made by the willingness of the R. P. Marius to serve African suffering humanity despite its hostility. The harsh reality of colonial domination is given incontrovertible expression in the execution of the refractory, yet, to his own tradition, loyal, chief, with which the work ends. The technique of the novel is simple, relying upon a third person statement of an incident which throws discredit upon the French State and Church, at the same time showing the consistency of traditional African religious beliefs. The limited point of view of the work and the force of the author's frequent commentating presence in the text reduce the quality of objectivation of the work, however, to the point that the novel becomes little more than a demonstration of a certain ideological standpoint.

An exception to the pattern of polemic, while at the same time drawing its inspiration from the play of relationships within the traditional society, as does much of Beti's work, Bebey's Le Fils d'Agatha Moudio recreates the human reality of a polygamous society which vigorously preserves its beliefs and vitality. As with Beti, the life-force finds ample expression, but the clash it has with the new world in Beti finds little place in the village of Bonukwan. Unlike Sous l'Orage, which treats polygamy as a social problem, or Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba, which sees it as a challenge to the authority of the Church, Le Fils d'Agatha Moudio presents it as a part of the sentimental education of a young fisherman, one of the few 'man in the street' heroes.

Polygamy is seen as a natural part of life, which brings humour as well as trouble. The subject of the hero's marriages up to the birth of the first child of his first wife by his friend entails a diversification of interest into concurrent incidents of little universal importance and yet highly suggestive to the life of the village such as the women's gossip and quarrels around the new water-tap, the superstitious misunderstanding which leads to most of the older men being sent to prison, to be met with increased families on their return, the practices of the local wise-woman, the villagers' reaction to the Europeans' monkey-hunt, reactions which lead to the brief imprisonment of the hero, the row the hero has with the village hairdresser for suggesting his wife was a woman of easy virtue, all these contribute with the inconsequence of life itself to an impression of a real life, to be enjoyed rather than thought much about. In this way, perhaps, one is to read the conclusion in which the hero's second wife gives birth to a child looking just like a White baby. Le Fils d'Agatha Moudio is one of the very few works which eschew didacticism in favour of an enjoyment of life.

In Oyono's Le Vieux Nègre et la Médaille the vigour of the protest against colonialism of Beti's Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba is combined with the concentration of Ousmane's Vehi-Ciosane and the close social observation of both, to provide a work of which the outstanding original quality is its ironical quality. Few other works achieve such large effects by means of ironical contrast, effects which derive from characterisation, plot, narration, style, by means of which a continual contrast is presented between the hero's view of his world and the author's, between the Western and the African positions in the colonial situation, and between the physical reality of everyday life of the African peasant and the abstractions of politics and religion.

The irony results in a humorous effect which distinguishes the work in a field not notable for this. It also, and more fundamentally, removes the work from the realm of reportage, in which much of the group operates, into a fictional world organised by the author in such a way as to achieve effects by irony rather than by simple narration. In this world, the dynamic of the world springs from the hero's growing awareness of central facts about his situation of which the reader is aware all the time, together sometimes with a few other characters of the world. In this respect the work is similar to the same author's Une Vie de Boy, with the important distinction that, whereas the latter achieves effects through a First Person presentation, of definite and limited value in this respect of irony, Le Vieux Nègre et la Médaille operates through the wider scope of the Third Person, giving the reader direct access to Meka's mind, and at the same time counterpointing this inner life with concurrent narrative of related event and with authorial summary and description of Meka's situation and behaviour. The consequence is a richer presentation of a situation. Also Le Vieux Nègre et la Médaille achieves greater effect at less expense in terms of tragic narrative, in that Meka loses his medal and his respect for the Whites, Toundi his life. The apparent triviality of the central narrative event of the former enhances the success of the irony, in comparison with the tragic seriousness of the latter.

The work achieves much of its effects at the level of the prose detail of the narrative. The work has a density of statement which is shared by few others and it is thought necessary to consider some of its effects at this level. Thus, for example, it is possible to discern a supporting pattern of imagery here, suggesting an unusual sophistication of style.

So, there is frequent reference to les fesses in descriptions of the gatherings or activities of the African characters.(1) Physical imagery dominates the narrative texture; this particular important element is part of a cluster, other elements being found in reference to other parts of the body with similar associations, or to the same part in other terms.(2) The physical emphasis of this thread of imagery is an integral part of the thematic effect of the work, contributing to effects gained in other ways, such as the presentation of the medal ceremony, seen through Meka's mind, which is at the time taken up with a certain urgent physical excretory need, a concern which puts the whole ceremony with all its European stylish pomp, into an incongruous light. The author is concerned to present African life as closely and frankly related to the sort of physical reality that Western attitudes might hope to ignore.

(1) The following list of phrases illustrates the point:

Op. Cit., p.20 'Le bruit sourd des fesses sur un lit de bambou',
p.30,'Quelques-uns s'étaient assis les fesses nues à même le sol',
p.45 'Mbogsi laissa ses fesses choir lourdement sur le sol',
p.54 '...ses longues jambes posées sur les fesses de l'une de ses femmes',
p.6I '...le pagne qui avait pénétré entre ses fesses',
p.67 'les Blancs ont les fesses dehors',
p.68 'de voir un Blanc passer devant moi les fesses dehors',
p.96 'il lui ordonna de serrer les fesses',
p.I63, 'encalant de mieux ses fesses contre le mur',
p.I83, 'Nti, oubliant de tirer son pagne sur ses fesses nues',
P.I87, 'Nti, tirant son pagne qui etait entré dans la rainure de ses fesses',
p. 20I, 'Nous en avons assez de tes vieilles fesses',
p. 203, 'Pour s'asseoir les fesses nues sur le sol',
p 202, 'Ses fesses revinrent paisiblement sur la terre'.

(2) Ibid.,p.I03,'le derrière en l'air comme il en avait l'habitude',
p.I03 'quand tous les derrières furent en l'air',
p.I54 'Cache-moi ton vieux derrière'.

This juxtaposition of the physical realities of African peasant life and the world of abstractions in which the colonialist powers ostensibly operate is also to be seen, for example, in a dramatic presentation of the start of the hero's day in the opening movement:

> Meka était en avance sur 'le bonjour du Seigneur', le premier rayon de soleil qui lui tombait habituellement dans la narine gauche, en s'infiltrant par l'un des trous du toit de raphia pourri et criblé de ciel.(1)

The contrast of le bonjour du Seigneur with la narine gauche is typical of the technique of the work. A mock-heroic note is struck with Meka's rebuke of his wife which follows:

> 'O femme aussi faible que les apôtres du Seigneur sur le Mont des Oliviers!'(2)

because she has failed to wake up her husband early on the day he is to present himself at the office of the local Commandant. Their morning prayer is immediately followed by Meka's usual visit to the bushes behind the case, and in case the reader should fail to appreciate its significance, his wife is given some lines of severely practical exhortation:

> 'Pour ce que tu vas faire tout à l'heure, lui dit sa femme, tu devrais aller plus loin. Ça sent déjà jusqu'ici'. (3)

The sow which stands nearby waiting for him to finish has itself a valuable role in the book's effects, for it is the same animal which awaits him on his return from his humiliation and disillusion at the end of the work:

(1) Ibid., p. II.
(2) Ibid., p. II.
(3) Ibid., p. I2.

> Meka contourna son buisson-W.C. Il sourit quand il vit que la truie qui l'attendait tous les matins avait prolongé leur rendez-vous..... Meka demeura interdit. Où avait-il vu ce profil? ..... Meka se mit encore à rire.
> 'Je vois', haleta-t-il. 'Comment n'y ai-je pas pensé plus tôt? Ce profil est bien celui du Chef des blancs. Le monde vient vraiment de Dieu, répétait-il, on ne peut pas dire que ce n'est pas le même ouvrier qui a fait le Chef des blancs et ce cochon. (1)

The opening scene develops its ironical portrayal of Meka as he completes his preparations for the day, buttoning up a tattered khaki jacket. His major sartorial effect,

> son vieux casque de liège noirci par la fumée et qui pendait par sa jugulaire rapiécée, (2)

earns him high praise from an admiring wife:

> 'Tu es très bien, dit sa femme, on dirait un pasteur américain'.(3)

The narrative moves from the domesticity of Meka's home to the communal setting of a Mama Titi's drinking house, at which Meka calls on his way to the Commandant's office. Here further effects are achieved at Meka's expense, indicating yet wider perspectives of social comment in respect of the position and attitudes of the pro-White African as well as of his less co-operative compatriot. It soon appears in the conversation that Meka is considered a notable convert to Catholicism. He has donated his property to the Church, an action seen with devastating economy from two viewpoints, Oyono's ironical statement couched in religious jargon and the conversation of Mama Titi's clients:

> Il avait eu la grâce insigne d'être le propriétaire d'une terre qui, un beau matin, plut au Bon Dieu. Ce fut un Père blanc qui lui révéla sa divine destinée. Comment pouvait-on aller contre la volonté de celui-qui-donne? Meka qui, entre temps, avait été recréé par le baptême, s'effaça devant l'huissier du Tout-Puissant.(4)

(1) Ibid., p.I79.
(2) Ibid., p.I2.
(3) Ibid., p.I2.
(4) Ibid., p.I9.

and in the same context:

> 'M'est avis que c'est toi qui a filé ta terre au Bon Dieu!', dit le voisin de Meka.
> 'A la Mission Catholique', rectifia un autre.
> 'C'est la même chose...'
> 'C'est tout comme!', répéta Mama Titi...
> 'Alors, c'est toi', insista le voisin de Meka.
> 'C'est moi-même'.
> Un silence d'étonnement régna dans la case.
> 'Quel couillon', lança quelqu'un. (I)

The atmosphere of the drinking house is overshadowed by thoughts of the White presence. As a Catholic adherent Meka should not be drinking the Africa-gin consumed by Mama Titi's customers, a brew banned by the White administration in order to boost the sale of the European product, to which end police and priesthood combine their powers. Part of the answer for Meka at this moment is to suck an orange before visiting the secular arm of the colonial power, and to make confession as soon as he can be received by the spiritual one. The sinister implications of these realities are unobserved by their victims, who provide a hilarious conclusion to this scene:

> 'Un tam-tam vient du fromager!'.
> - En causant, buvons! répondit encore l'assistance.
> - Ite, missa est...
> Tout le monde se mit à rire. (2)

The effect of the gin upon Meka is to render quite evident the profound division of his mind, or at least the superficiality of his adherence to the establishment:

(I) Ibid., p. 2I.
(2) Ibid., p. 2I.

> Meka se mit à chanter...les paroles lui revenaient facilement:
>
> Ma bouche était salée
> En lorgnant tes aisselles;
> Elle fut encore plus salée
> En lorgnant ailleurs.
> Je préférais ce sel
> En lorgnant ailleurs
> A celui du baptême.... (I)

The sophistication of Oyono's approach is to be seen in the structure of this chapter for example: from the narrow base of the dialogue between Meka and Kelara, through the widening perspective of the journey of Meka to the Commandant's office *via* Mama Titi's, the chapter flashes back to a broad portrayal of the morning scene at village-life level, the effect being a communal view of the event which has befallen one of its members. The scene opens with the awakening of the village, the various sounds and smells, the early morning Catholic prayer-meeting and the ensuing conversation. These latter events are dominated by the presence and figure of the native catechist, a figure, it is to be imagined, of more than common interest to Oyono as the embodiment of servile sycophancy. This would at least explain the extraordinarily unsympathetic characterisation of this person, Ignace Obébé, whereby there is established some sort of association between his self-appointed role as catechist and his grotesque appearance which is but a foil to his apparent and notorious lack of virility:

> A entendre parler Ignace Obébé, on pensait à une voix d'enfant. (2)

Oyono makes much use of the contrast between the physicality of the African peasant and the abstractions of the colonial philosophy, and this is brought further home in the ribald comments upon Ignace:

(I) *Ibid.*, p.22.
(2) *Ibid.*, p.24.

> -Pourquoi em... -vous le catéchiste? demanda quelqu'un en se trémoussant.
> - C'est qu'il nous em..., repartit Nti; s'il n'a rien entre les jambes il n'a qu'à se temir tranquille!
> - Pour sûr qu'il n'a rien! dit Kelara, avec son gros ventre! Tout le monde riait. (I)

It is Ignace Obébé who tries to undermine Meka's childish enthusiasm for the award of the medal to be made on the forthcoming I4th July festivities. Meka, tragically unaware of the real cost of the medal in terms of two sons killed for the French cause and of his irreplacable patrimony of land, although his wife is seen later to be only too well aware of this cost (a distribution of awareness appropriate in a field where the mother is the central family figure and in keeping with most of the works), returns home to relate the announcement of the award, in terms which again heavily underline the gulf between thetwo outlooks:

> Comme je vous le disais, nous avons croqué une noix de cola. Je venais de curer mes dents quand le commandant apparut. Vous savez comment ça se passe. Le commandant arrive, le chef des gardes hurle. Tous les gardes et les convoqués saluent. Le chef des gardes hurle encore et vous continuez à faire ce que vous faisiez à l'avant. (2)

Is Meka pretending to be stupid? One has the contrary impression; the shouting and stamping and standing up seem to his un-military and un-Western mind so much meaningless gesturing: here, perhaps better than elsewhere in the field, the Westerner receives the same treatment he has accorded so liberally to African customs in his first contacts with them, such as the apparently meaningless dancing. Ignace Obébé's reaction to Meka's announcement is to raise the question of the atomic bomb and the end of the world, thereby, albeit temporarily, deflating Meka's excitement. However, for all Meka's notable adherence to the faith, he finds

(I) Ibid., p. 35.
(2) Ibid., p. 3I.

Obébé's doom-laden fulminations unbearable:

> - Et la médaille, si on vous la donne, est-ce qu'il faut la refuser à cause de la bombe à fumée et la fin du monde? (I)

Meka's own nature surfaces with his telling of a story of a catechist acquaintance of his who fell in love with one of the chief's wives and had difficulty in explaining his feelings. The conclusion of the story leaves little doubt that Meka's mind, Christianised though it may seem to be, still finds its enjoyment in worldly realities. The chapter is concluded by Oyono having a nightbird cry outside; the day is over, but a highly eventful day with which to open the novel.

While it is not ultimately possible to separate out textual from situational irony, it does seem necessary to point out other areas than the textual where Oyono has particularly succeeded in building up a highly charged situation.

At the possible sacrifice of inner intensity, Oyono has developed from the first-person narration of Une Vie de Boy to a wider-ranging third-person approach, which provides him with a facility which he uses economically. The advantage of the situation-novel being, perhaps, the ability to provide different aspects and focusses upon the central situation and character or characters, Oyono has built a narrative which shifts its viewpoints around Meka, but continually returns to him and eventually stays with him. Thus the reader obtains an idea of the communal life of the African through the direct picture of Meka's brother, Engamba, who now has to travel to Doum with his wife and goat:

> Ce matin-là, à deux ruisseaux, quatre villages, trois rivières de Doum, dans ce petit village où Kelara, par un coup de tonnerre, vit le jour au pied d'un bananier, son frère Engamba achevait son petit déjeuner. (2)

(I) Ibid., p.34
(2) Ibid., p. 47.

Engamba is also a converted pagan, but his feelings on the subject of monogamy have changed from his early enthusiasm, and he is now frankly envious of his polygamous fellows. The scene of the arrival of the stranger bringing news for Engamba is rich in personal and social observation - the crowded hut, the remarks of the villagers, the deliberate creation of suspense by the messenger, as he slowly passes snuff round to his hearers, all serve to suggest the communal quality of this village life. Against this warmhearted and malodorous communality is set the White colonialists' group. Despite some variety, mainly due to rank, they are characterised by a homogeneous hostility, often masked with courteous gestures, or at least superciliousness. Oyono devotes little effort to realising them as people, despite occasional touches such as Father Vandermayer's embarrassment at Meka's intoxicated state and persistence in joining the Whites, an embarrassment which he later regrets having revealed, but too late to prevent Meka realising the truth. To Meka and his compatriots they remain Les Oreilles-Rouges, and it is part of Oyono's polemic to construct a characterisation which maintains an external attitude towards a group of people whom he sees as military, commercial and religious exploiters.

The work has a slighter narrative base in terms of major events in people's lives than most other novels: an African proselyte, who has lost two sons in the French wars, and who has donated his land to the Catholic Church, is chosen to be the African to receive a medal from the visiting Commandant at a I4th July parade. The novel consists of his hearing the news, preparing for the ceremony, receiving the medal, the following celebrations, the loss of the medal in a thunderstorm, his arrest, ill-treatment and release by the police and his

return home, now disillusioned, to enjoy ribald jests at the expense of the French colonialists. Sembène Ousmane's Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu uses the theme of the colonialists' medals (I), and to make the same point, that it is, in effect, counterfeit blood-money, which does not even buy the African the Whites' respect. With Ousmane it occupies but a minuscule part of his wide-ranging compilation of personal dramas, whereas with Oyono the medal ceremony, with its precedents and sequel, exemplifies the clash of cultures.

It is in the light of these broader considerations that one sees Meka standing for hours in the blazing sun, awaiting the ceremonial condescension, proud of his dubious honour, standing symbolically on a solitary chalkmark between the watching Africans and the waiting Europeans. Oyono puts another complexion upon a tragic affair by faithfully portraying Meka's increasing urge to relieve himself. The gulf between the races is thereupon gradually revealed. The ensuing reception is enlivened by the drunkenness of the African guests. Meka has become an object of interest to patronising Frenchmen and ladies who pat him on the head and pass on. His spiritual guide treats him dismissively and he is left alone. The thunderstorm that wrecks the marquee of the occasion, nearly drowning Meka and depriving him of his medal, could suggest the forces of natural Africa asserting themselves against all the hypocrisy of the West. It certainly serves from the narrative point of view to lead to a lonely Meka, lost and drenched, being cast into the jail for African night-wanderers - a far cry from his glory of twelve hours previously. The humiliation and beating that he receives derives much of its effect from the identity of the sufferer, as Oyono develops a general protest against White injustice in Africa through the action of a brutal police.

(I) Op. cit., p.330.

Meka,who returns to his village, to his sow, to his wife and to his fellow-villagers, has matured. He could only with difficulty recast his whole philosophy of life, and there is a great deal he cannot alter. He is able, however, to join in the drinking and the jokes that are told against the Whites, particularly the one about the difficulty the Chief Commandant would have had in pinning a medal upon Meka clad only in a bila (cache-sexe). The work concludes on this humorous note.

This construction of a novel around one main character, who is representatively involved in a commonly known and observed experience of public contact at the most official level between races in a colonial situation, has given scope for one of the field's strongest polemics - a success deriving from the contrast of cultures, from the irony at different levels, from the economy of structure, and from the warmth of humanity which emerges from Oyono's treatment of his people.

Much of the work is informed with a compassion which emerges in the close reconstruction of the Africans' experience, for example, the scenes in which Meka prepares for the ceremony with the creation of a new dolman or jacket, by Ela the tailor. Ela comes to life in his desire to excel in the latest mode, and the result is certainly different. Even Meka has misgivings, which are slight in comparison with the reactions of his relatives when they see it almost completed:

> - Avec ta veste je me passerais d'un pantalon! dit Essamba.
> - Je n'ai jamais vu de veste pareille, dit Kelara, tu nages dedans comme un petit poisson dans la mer... l'habillement et toi, c'est comme un chien qui entendrait un phonographe, dit-elle. (I)

(I) Ibid., p.97.

The scene, rich in humour of close observation of Meka's emotive reaction to a new situation, moving from the tailor's shop to the crowded home, continues with Meka vainly trying on a new pair of shoes which have had to spend the night filled with sand and soaked in water. So the prayer of Meka finely combines and balances the contrasting elements of the whole work:

> Tu vois que mon plus cher désir en ce moment où j'attends la médaille et le chef des Blancs, seul dans ce cercle, entre les deux mondes - il ouvrit les yeux, regarda devant et derrière lui, puis les referma - entre deux mondes, Oh! mon Dieu! que tu fais totalement différents, mon cher et grand désir est d'enlever ces souliers et de pisser. (I)

The world of Meka is a fully realised entity existing firmly within the equally realised world of the African villagers.

The effects of the clash of cultures have so far been considered as fundamental in the composition of works using the everyday experiences of observable reality. The field does not usually depart from the world of the actual and commonplace.

The work of Laye draws much of its distinction from the fact that it moves away from the actual and commonplace. L'Enfant Noir and Dramouss relied heavily upon legendary and traditional material. Le Regard du Roi took the process further than either, and provided a unique restatement of the field's stereotype of the culture clash by its use of ideas and material relating to traditional African mysticism.

For all its unusualness of treatment, Le Regard du Roi remains representative of the field in general and of this situation-novel group in particular, and I have included discussion of it here.

The narrative may be seen as a mirror-image of the usual story of the hopeful African who goes to Paris and is

(I) Ibid., p.II2.

disillusioned by colonialism: the process of disillusion from the student's high hopes through a middle passage of bewilderment to a conclusion of despair, and sometimes death, is reversed by Le Regard du Roi. The hero, Clarence, starts in despair, moves into a new world of incomprehensible people and bewildering experiences until he achieves salvation through a revelation of divine grace, a sort of immortal life. The African in Europe now becomes the European in Africa, and where the former suffers spiritual disequilibrium, the latter finds fulfilment. (I) The extent to which the reversal is merely a restatement of the usual theme - while at the same time a sustained and complex restatement - depends upon the relative significance of the syncretistic element of the conclusion. On the one hand, the contribution Clarence makes to the improvement of the living standards of the village of Aziane, the shower, for example, and his increasing of the village population with a crowd of half-caste children, suggest that the nationalistic or ethnic assertion of most of the other work has been transcended. On the other hand, however, the bulk of the work is devoted to the re-education of a Frenchman into an alien culture, and it is only when he has recognised his own worthlessness and the value of the mores he has hitherto despised that he is afforded the redemption with which the work concludes.

The uncertainty of the conclusion, whether Clarence is supposed to die or not, indicates the way in which the work is to be read, as a metaphorical statement about Western and African philosophies. The work progresses through a series of situations and experiences designed to strip Clarence of his Western conceptions: at the outset, a soporific atmosphere settles over

(I) See D. Killam, Africa in English Fiction, I874-I939, Ibadan University Press, Ibadan, I968,:
'Most of the European novels of Africa in which the European characters play a major role have one common theme: the re-education of the White man in thejungle purgatory of Africa', p.I3.

the hero and he becomes strongly aware of a pervasive odour, the sleepiness suggesting a dream-like experience, the narcotic odour conveying the overpowering nature of the environment disconcerting to a Westerner who seeks to control his environment and work in a clear frame of mind. His logicality, for example, is shocked by the way the crowd has the tall men at the front, or by the ignorance he is kept in of the time when he can expect to see the King. Events occur precisely in order to develop this anti-European theme. Clarence expects to be offered a job in the King's employ, not realising his beggarly condition. Led by a beggar who dominates him and eventually sells him, Clarence fulfils a role the nature of which is clearly implied to the reader long before Clarence realises it. Confusion in the events creates confusion in Clarence, to undermine his confidence in the evidence of his senses, the basis of Western empiricism. The two boys Nagoa and Noaga personify this confusion, in a work where every personage has a thematic role to play. Problems of communication between the races are symbolised in the court-room scene. The mental chaos of the Westerner immersed in a totally alien culture is presented metaphorically by the seemingly circular journey through the dense jungle or bush, ending in the sale of Clarence like that of a slave, a symbolic reversal of the the first stages of the old slave trade.

European prudery about sex is next stripped from Clarence, who has already had to resist the suggestion that he walk about trouserless. He now has to accept the fact of his driving sensuality, unchained by the narcotic of the flowers and the continual supply of Aziana womenfolk desirous of fertilisation by a White. This narrative item effectively suggests the idea of interculturalism in the procreation of a large number of

half-caste children. Clarence now walks about naked. Two further episodes are significant in this context as stages in his total regeneration. Firstly, he begins to realise his shortcomings after a conversation with a smith, and in the ensuing dream he overcomes allurements of mythical fishwomen, a dream which suggests his struggle to escape from sensuality. Secondly, his visit to a sorceress, Dioki, repels him by the sight of the snakes writhing on her body. The effect of these is to confirm him in his belief that salvation from sensuality will come with the arrival of the King.

The indirectness of the work, its metaphorical power to suggest more than one meaning, is borne out by the possibility of interpreting it as a universally significant allegory. Clarence in his search for the King is Everyman in search of God. His experiences represent an initiation into the state of universal manhood achieved only through the ennobling power of grace and love. His troubled conscience, the duality of his mental life mirrored in the two boys, the alien uncertainty of life, symbolised by the Cretan labyrinth of a jungle, the Freudian importance of the dream life and its connections with his sexual drive, all these elements of the work support the idea of its universality.

The work stands apart, then, from the mainstream in several important respects, and may be described as one of the most complex and artistically worked fictions.

Its originality, however, is superficial in terms of this enquiry, which is concerned mainly with the basic patterns of composition. It has in common with the large majority a didactic purpose, based upon the culture-clash of Africa and Europe. The narrative moves teleologically towards the conclusion required by the philosophy of the work. The characters

play their parts with no illusion of freedom. It does not seem possible to say that even Clarence becomes a living human being. The dominant element of this work, like so many , is the setting, which has its own meaning for the ideology of the work and its own effect upon the main character, Clarence. He, like the large majority of African heroes, makes a passive contribution to the work; perhaps of all the observant sufferers of the African novel, Clarence is one of the most passive, dominated entirely by outside influences.

Comparison may be made with the work of Charles Nokan, whose Violent Etait Le Vent and Le Soleil Noir Point present an attempt to renovate the form of the novel without any radical originality of substance, the result being a perpetuation of the dominant stereotype, as such with Nokan and inverted with Laye. For, despite originality or sophistication of work-style, the substantial form of both authors' works remains the product of a non-literary approach to fiction, and the broad principles of their composition differ little in essence from those of the large majority of the socio-political uses of the field.

Chapter 5

The Community Novel

It is possible to isolate a small group of novels whose composition is distinguished by a dispersion of narrative interest among several major characters, while at the same time using a comparatively short-lived situation of predominantly social significance as a structural basis. (I) The result of this dispersion is to raise the community rather than the individual to the status of the central figure. This seems to represent a logical conclusion of the characteristic process of the whole group, its trend away from the individual heroes, and its concentration upon community and upon the critical situation. The group consists of work by Sembène Ousmane and Olympe Bhêly-Quénum, both of whom demonstrate in this area the same concern with novel-construction shewn already in the latter's Un Piège sans Fin and in Le Docker Noir and Vehi-Ciosane by the former.

The works are concerned with a social crisis of fundamental importance. In Le Chant du Lac Bhêly-Quénum uses a bold combination of fantasy and actuality to suggest the death of the old traditional order, with its gods and miracle, at the hands of the new order of the political programmes, the creeds of the young people, in the experience of a fishing village. With L'Harmattan Ousmane presents the preparations for the French Government Referendum in Oversea France, from the point of view of a group of African political activists in Senegal.

(I) See p.37 above.

Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu undertakes the task of bringing to literary life the experiences of the African railway workers and their families in Senegal during the industrial strife of the six months' period from October I947 to March I948. The authors' work is individuated, then, in that Bhêly-Quénum has chosen a situation of historic significance but of a genuinely fictional nature, whereas Ousmane has maintained a close connection with modern historical facts. In choice of structural basis the former has moved more clearly towards the artist's position vis-à-vis the day-to-day world, one of re-interpretation according to his personal vision. Ousmane's fiction, on the other hand, derives its effect rather from the organisation of a wide range of human emotions and reactions springing from an actual situation. It is proposed here to consider Le Chant du Lac and Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu as illustrating two different ways of using the broad canvas available when the single hero is dropped and the social crisis becomes the theme, as it affects a range of people.

By virtue of this total orientation of these works towards contemporary society, the cultural, political or economic clash of races and generations becomes the main subject. The usual emphasis of the field is,however, absent here, that is, the defeat of the African by the colonist. L'Harmattan does partially reflect this in the departure of the central group of characters out of a country which has opted for a neo-colonialist régime, but Le Chant du Lac remains largely uncommitted, while Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu depicts a reversal of the usual thematic pattern, and exhibits a constructional complexity and elaboration unique in the field.

Le Chant du Lac attempts an ambitious purpose within a limited compass, the suggestion of the reality and conflicts of a society, in a work of some 40,000 words, one third the length of Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu, and, in any case, short for a novel. A surprising number of people inhabit its pages, in much the same way as Un Piège sans Fin by the same author is remarkably crowded, and there is little endeavour to create full character as such. The emphasis falls upon significant groupings of people referred to, and it is possible to show the work's social nature in the creation of these representative groups. So, the traditional African family, with its extensive network of relationships, is suggested by referring at different parts by name to the many relatives of the typical mother-figure Mme. Ounéhou. Inhabitants of the lakeside village also make usually brief appearances, such as two fishermen, friends of Mme. Ounéhou, and one of her debtors. The deplorably anti-social activities of a village drunkard serve, perhaps, to suggest that all is not well in the village, and he remains anonymous. A list can be made of another fourteen names or so, belonging to inhabitants of the younger generation, the students on holiday from their distant French schools. Other socially significant groups are suggested by giving the names of eight political candidates in forthcoming elections, outsiders to the community. Miscellaneous names, such as those of a Dahomey infantryman, or the doctor, are also brought in. The great chief is named also: Aziouton, one name against those of so many political candidates. Mentioned anonymously, but socially important, are the High-Priest of the Lake-Gods and his subordinates, and the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches are hinted at with a mention of Le Prêtre and Le Pasteur. Altogether some sixty or so people serve to embody, if only by suggestion, the communal entity of the work.

The characterisation of the work is purely functional. This de-realisation of the humanity of the situation assists in the narrative process itself: the conceptual world of names and social groups rather than of actual people is better suited to the challenge to the reader's credulity offered by the appearance of two fish-gods, male and female. These used to be lovers until their transformation into fish-gods, and their underwater conversation and various activities prior to their death-struggles and demise form the thematic substance of the latter part of the work. This world of poetry and the one of flesh-and-blood materialism could hardly combine without the sacrifice of some essential qualities of one or other or both worlds. In this attempt both have lost, it seems, the power to convince.

The community thus suggested is seen in relation to the question of superstition in its belief in nature-gods, worshipped in the forms of two water-monsters inhabiting the lake. These dominate the life of the fishing population, and it is with the intention of destroying these that one Houngbé returns to Wèse, it appears; his death before arrival may indicate at the outset the power of the gods. The death of the gods occurs at a time of socio-political change. It is carried out by the piroguier Fanouvi while taking Mme. Ounéhou across the lake on business, and it constitutes the narrative climax of the work. Fanouvi takes it upon himself to try to kill the monsters, when he realises that his own life and those of his charges are at stake. Mme. Ounéhou's thoughts before he does so point out the connection between unbelief and the death of the god:

> - Tuer le dieu s'il nous attaque! répliqua-t-il. Idée impie, insoupçonnable sacrilège de la part de Fanouvi. fils d'un grand prêtre, né sous le signe d'un dieu et vivant sous le signe de plusieurs autres... Alors le piroguier précisa son opinion en ajoutant qu'un dieu qui tuait les hommes et les mangeait ne pouvait pas être un dieu, mais un monstre. (I)

On the one hand, then, the work presents a picture of a society in change, politically, socially and religiously, by a range of representative people, and on the other a narrative of the killing of two lake-monsters, local divinities, a narrative seen from both sides. Expressed in terms of a familiar world the social depiction offers no problems of credibility, and the killing of the two lake-monsters is not in itself unfeasible, which is not the case with the creation of two beings who appear as monsters, but are, in 'fact', ex-human beings, who for some past sins, perhaps connected with their love for one another, are doomed to this lake existence, as lovers and instruments of fate. They have a power of human reason and discourse, so as to discuss their relationship, which the male wishes to terminate, and their impending liberation from their monstrous state. Their last hours together are marked by frenzied erotic activity and savage fighting. The difficulty does not arise from the use of le merveilleux as such, as other works, such as Le Regard du Roi in its visions and conclusion, or Le Soleil des Indépendances with its diviner's magic or its sense of destiny, have used it effectively. Rather it seems to spring from the grotesque incongruousness of the images presented within a framework of normality.

The primacy of ideological didacticism leads to several authorial intrusions to underline the direction of the work: for example, at the outset of the fateful day, the pathetic

(I) Op. cit., p.II3.

> Le ciel ce jour-là était d'un bleu terne, et l'horizon encore légèrement souillé du sang d'une aube assez perturbée par des forces mystérieuses. (I)

Towards the end of the work the author allows himself the following direct comment upon Mme. Ouněhou's beliefs:

> L'Africain renoncerait les multiples dieux pour lesquels il s'épuise et se ruine s'il percevait leurs secrets ou ceux dont leurs grands prêtres les entourent. Croire, mais en un seul Dieu ou en Dieu ou au Néant. Trop de remèdes à la fois ne guérit d'aucun mal. Mais c'était encore en priant, bien malgré elle, tous les dieux de sa famille que Mme. Ouněhou trouvait la force d'affronter ceux qu'elle tenait désormais pour de faux dieux. A chacun ses illusions. (2)

The work then exists as a statement about the religious conflict inherent in the modernisation in European style of Africa. This it does through an uneasy juxtaposition of allegory and social depiction, within a limited area, time-allocation and narrative development. By taking the emphasis off a central figure, despite Mme. Ounehou's apparent centrality, it has been able to suggest instead the life of a community at a time when its most hallowed beliefs are being abandoned by the rising generation.

In contrast to the concentration of Le Chant du Lac upon a fantastic incident at the centre of a superficial statement of a rural social order in the process of change, Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu conveys the day-to-day texture of life as experienced by a wide range of the African proletariat suffering and fighting for economic justice through the hardships of a six months' long strike of Senegalese railway workers. The attempt necessitates a sustained use of a wide range of material, so that the work surpasses in magnitude all other fiction of the field. The description of 'documentary novel' is applicable provided it is understood to imply a presentation in novel terms of an event of modern times which is true to life. The

(I) Ibid., p.35.
(2) Ibid., p. I28.

work is outstanding not merely for its magnitude, however, but rather for the means it uses to seize the lived experience of so many different people, in such a way as to convey their personal reality and that of the community. It is proposed to consider the work in terms of its characterisation, as it develops through the unfolding of the threefold narrative - threefold in that the novel works on three local centres important in the strike, concerning itself with these centres' inhabitants and bringing them together at the conclusion. The multiple placing of interest contributes importantly to the depiction of the total effect of the strike, and of course to the breadth of canvas populated. Three urban centres, Bamako, Thiès and Dakar, are dealt with to some extent in turn, so that the reader gets some impression of simultaneity of dispersed events.

Characterisation here lacks apparent system. Characters occur, play their part, and perhaps are little heard of again. Others are significant in the development of the actual strike, such as Bakayoko, the militant leader from Bamako, whose part in the strike is paramount. Others seem ambiguous, whether they appear as likely participants or as a symbol of some greater truth than appears, and Ousmane refrains scrupulously from authorial comment or overt direction. It may be argued that Ousmane makes use of spokesmen-characters, such as Penda the prostitute, who demonstrates the strength of 'liberated' womanhood in a way superior to that of her domesticated sisters in the service of the popular cause. There is also Mamadou Keïta, the old Moslem, who suffers maltreatment from the authorities and yet retains his pacific faith. The exchange of views between Bakayoko and Fa Keïta at the end of the strike

seems to be thematically significant; says Keita:

> Il ne faut pas que la haine vous habite.

But Bakayoko, who has seen the strike succeed because of his own emotionally inspired drive, replies:

> Mais comment se dresser contre l'injustice? Il faut haïr pour mieux combattre! (I)

One may conclude that the system behind the characterisation is based only upon connection with the strike, or importance in it, and certainly many characters fit into this category; but as the work is about the impact of the strike upon the strikers and families, this is not very helpful. Rather it seems that Ousmane has presented this event through the experience of as many different kinds of people, men, women, young, old, leaders and led, as possible, and for whom he could create interesting incidental material in which they could naturally figure, incidents or phases of the strike-life which could could convey the quality of that life. This seems to be the admittedly rather broad, but unusually unideological, basis of the choice of personages.

At Bamako, the family of Bakayoko - his mother Niakoro and his daughter Ad'jibid'ji - provide the introduction to the main event at its inception. Ad'jibid'ji, a child, is realised in her conversation with her grandmother, and in the interest she shows in the workers' meeting about a strike. She attends this meeting and brings back a report about it to her family. So the main issues and some of the personalities are introduced through the natural curiosity of a child in her family setting. Bamako is also the setting for the later significant event of strike-life in which one Diara is tried publicly by his fellow-railwaymen for working in secret, at a meeting where Tiémoko, a strong personality, influences the decision. This gives rise to a highly dramatic scene which ends with the 'blackleg'

(I) Op.cit., p.367.

and his son sitting alone in shame on the platform of a deserted hall - deserted except for the observant Ad'jibid'ji. Some of the implications of the strike for the development of the intellectual awareness of the African proletariat are indicated by the borrowing by Tiémoko of some of Bakayoko's books in his search for a political philosophy. (I) It is in this powerful scene that Fa Keïta makes his imposing speech advocating tolerance, restraint, compromise, creating reader-expectations for him which are soon harshly disappointed as the police arrive at his home and maltreat both him and Niakoro, with the result that the latter dies, while he is removed to a detention camp. His arrival at the camp is picked up later in the work (2) and leads to his display of fortitude under the most atrocious maltreatment. The suffering of Fa Keïta reaches its climax at the moment when the telegram of victory reaches the strikers' headquarters at Bamako, and he soon emerges to utter words of forgiveness in contrast to surrounding desires for revenge. Thus, while not at the main centre of the strike's activities, Bamako nevertheless localises important major figures and several minor ones. Much of the atmosphere and experience of the battle is felt, reflected and intensified by its Bamako development.

The main activity is evidently at the railway centre of Thiès itself, and it is here that the characterisation is more fully and originally developed. The eleven chapters concerned with this locality are constructed in a variety of ways, and so achieve a variation of focus important in creation of depth of social characterisation: the chapters La Cité, Les Apprentis, Au Vatican, Le Retour de Bakayoko, De Thiès à Dakar and Epilogue, narrate the action of the strike through the activities of a wide range of people, minor and major.

So, for example, the chapter La Cité opens with an authorial

(I) Ibid., p. I32.
(2) Ibid., pp.353-370

evocation of the sordid and poverty-stricken atmosphere of the town, the centre of the Régie des Chemins de Fer, before coming in close to the popular reality of the strike-to-be with the dramatisation of the sharp altercation between two African employees, Samba N'Dougougou in favour and Bachirou against. These men are on their way to the street buffet where a Dieynaba is serving bouillie. Soon introduced is Maïmouna, a young mother of twins, but blind. Significantly the latter recoils from Samba N'Dougougou's voice, and the reader is left to surmise that it is he who fathered the fatherless twins. Also brought into this minor background episode are Magatte, a young apprentice turner, and one Boubacar, trying to understand despite his illiteracy. Meanwhile, at the factory gates, another episode is in process of formation: Sounkaré, the aged depot warden, is also discussing the strike, and asks his interlocutor why the workmen are at the gates if they do not intend to work. There follow three pages of argument between the militants and the rest, in which Bachirou and Sow propose postponement while Samba N'Dougougou, particularly, demands present action. The episode gains in atmospheric tension with the keening of a traditional African song by the blind Maïmouna, the arrival on the scene of the union delegates and of troops and with the inevitable approach of the moment for the factory siren to summon the men to start work. The siren sounds, the workers hesitate, Samba N'Dougougou precipitates the clash by attacking the troops and in the ensuing mêlée injuries are caused on both sides, and in particular one of Maïmouna's babies is killed, ironically in a conflict in which its father played a leading role. So the stage is set for a long strike.

The preceding brief review of the chapter has been made in an attempt to show how Ousmane distributes his emphasis upon different incidents, conversations, people, in order to build up

a presentation of the life of a social situation within the confines of a chapter. The people are socially insignificant, briefly developed, but always individual, unstylized, real, with their own attitudes, experiences and wills to survive and to act upon their environment, with its harsh social and economic fact. The other chapters referred to in this context would be shown to have the same varying of focus and attention, carrying forward the central narrative through the actions and experiences of a large number of people, mainly African proletariat and to some extent, but far less so, the European administration.

The situation offers a range of potentially dramatic situations in which the usually concealed qualities of ordinary people might be overtly activated, and those of extraordinary ones enhanced. So, Ousmane singles out for special attention the role of the young apprentices, whose comparatively innocent search for food in the environs of Thiès leads to tragic misunderstanding and death at the hands of a terrified and over-reacting colonial, Isnard. This incident triggers a move forward to the abortive negotiations, related in the chapters Au Vatican and Le Retour de Bakayoko, and which are equally responsible for what follows, the march of the womenfolk from Thiès to Dakar, and the ensuing victory of the strikers.

In this connection Ousmane devotes considerable effort to creating in depth certain individuals, in depth according to their importance in the strike narrative. The chapter 'Sounkaré le Gardien Chef' is devoted entirely to the life of this one figure, a solitary reject from the communal movement of the strike. Opposed to the strike from the start, he withdraws to the empty railway workshop until his meagre food supply expires. He recalls the ruthlessness of the French establishment of the railway, and the 1938 strike and its failure. He is seen as a fearful survivor of a lifetime

of colonial exploitation. The writer dramatises his fruitless encounters with those who could sell him food but do not, because of his blacklegging: Maïmouna and Dieynaba and Aziz, the merchant, who ejects him while himself enjoying a succulent meal. He meets his coeval Bakary, a striker, who also rejects him. Saddened, starving, in pain from an old accident in the workshop (memories flood back of the disastrous fire blowback), he retreats to the workshop to try to survive on what rats he can kill. However, he is too weak even to do this, and, falling unconscious into an inspection pit, he himself becomes a prey to the starving rats, and his skeleton is discovered when the factory is reopened at the end of the strike. The Sounkaré episode is self-contained and narratively gratuitous. Nevertheless it contributes significantly to the multi-dimensional depiction of the total situation: Sounkaré is seen as a product of a life of service of French interest. His experience throws light upon various people's attitudes, such as those of life-long friends who reject him, uncomprehendingly, in the name of workers' solidarity, or those of the fat, well-fed Syrian merchant Aziz, towards his old customer, now starving, and of the women, who have suffered themselves but cannot sympathise with the suffering of an old man. It is particularly effective in dramatising the pathos which underlines the Third World's plight, a theme which the work amply bears out: the workers triumph, prisoners are released, and wages and conditions are improved. The cost is high: Maïmouna's baby has been killed, Niakoro-la-vieille killed, Doudou, N'Dougougou and Penda have died, Sounkaré has died through the strike, the prison camp remains, and so on.

A similar concentration upon one figure is effected in the following chapters, Doudou and Penda. It is not proposed to study these at length here, but they operate in similar ways.

Doudou is depicted in his role as an important union leader, particularly in the attempt of the French administration to bribe him, an attempt which he resists, to his great pride. The prostitute Penda is brought into existence frankly and sympathetically, through her major part in mobilising the strength of the womenfolk in support of the strike. That the victory of the strikers should be partly effected by the efforts of a social outcast is part of the irony occasionally operative in the work: she it is who is shot in the skirmish at the entry to Dakar, and, with her, Samba N'Doulougou, both of easy virtue, she openly, he secretly. In the closing stages of the work, when Bakayoko is being questioned about his relations with her by the young woman N'Deye Touti, who wants to become his second wife despite her advanced education, his reply suggests the importance which Ousmane would attach to her role in respect of the work's theme:

> - Tu n'arrives peut-être pas à la cheville de Penda, dit-il enfin. Je sais ce qu'elle valait. C'était une vraie amie et elle a donné sa vie. Il y a plusieurs façons de se prostituer, tu sais. Il y ceux qui le font sous la contrainte: Alioune, Deune, Idrissa, moi-même, nous prostituons notre travail à des gens qui ne nous respectent pas. Il y a ceux aussi qui se prostituent moralement, les Mabigué, les N'Gaye, les Daouda. Et toi-même? (I)

The third narrative centre of the work, Dakar, has a local importance in being the administrative centre of the country, where the struggle is eventually transferred and resolved, through Penda's initiative. The characterisation techniques are similar to those used in the depiction of the other two centres. The range is extended to include other union activists, such as Daouda-Beaugosse who uniquely withdraws from the struggle, and certain more fully developed female characters, particularly one Ramatoulaye, whose killing of a merchant's goat to nourish her family and friends provokes a train of disaster. A younger and even more vigorous woman, Mame Sofi, plays a major role in

(I) Ibid., p.342.

the confrontation with the authorities, and, connected with her development, that of N'Deye Touti, a young woman, single, French-educated and suffering from romantic frustration as much as from divided culture. At Dakar, the work develops the women of Africa more fully than elsewhere.

The climax of the work is reached here, with the arrival of the column of strikers' wives from Thiès, and the resulting mass meeting of the workers of Dakar to be addressed by the administrative leaders. Here Bakayoko enters into the limelight, having engineered so much behind the scenes, by taking the initiative and addressing the meeting with an emotional but closely argued demonstration of the workers' case; he wins the day. There follows a depiction of Bakayoko discussing his inner life with N'Deye Touti, revealing a deeply thoughtful and committed militant. He soon makes his way to another urgent appointment. He has played an important role at Thiès, and an even more important one at Dakar, and now he must return to his family at Bamako; thus this major character is distributed throughout the book without dominating the work as would the traditional hero.

It is necessary to take this study further than the observation of the wide variety of characters differently presented in three different localities, unique as this achievement is. Other relevant features may also be noticed, to bear out the importance of the work as a unified and coherent social realisation. Ousmane addresses himself to the total human situation to an extent unique in the field. He is alone in creating the French West African urban industrial novel, this work being foreshadowed by his Le Docker Noir, and the range of realised characters far surpasses that of any other novelist of the field.

Clerical and manual staff, trade unionists and management supporters, caretakers and operatives, apprentices and experienced hands, he runs the gamut of possibilities. These people are seen acting in their public and private capacities, as others see them and as they see themselves, and a powerful impression is created of a society as a whole. This is particularly effected by the inclusion and full development, to an unsurpassed extent, of the urban African's home life, and of his womenfolk, old and young, married and single, respectable and otherwise, grieving, waiting, working, planning, important in the social fabric. More babies and young children inhabit this novel's world than any other. The consequence is an impression of a unified social whole united by strong ties of common hardship and endurance and by common attitudes of solidarity and resentment at the French exploitation. One may derive from the work a character study of the African inhabitants as a whole, and thereby to suggest that they create a communal hero, urban Africa, in a way unseen in other works.

It is against this realisation that the French presence appears, playing a similar role to those it has in Ousmane's other works, particularly with reference to the French administrators' injustice in Le Docker Noir, their amoral brutality in O Pays, Mon Beau Peuple! and their cynicism and inanity in L'Harmattan.

Ousmane sets up a revelatory scene (I) in which the old African colonials, the Isnards, have other Frenchmen in Thiès as their guests. Isnard reveals his shallowness in his retelling for the thousandth time how he had to bite through the umbilical cord of a negress in childbirth. Victor, another old hand, retails his threadbare and superficial cynicism about the Africans to the newly arrived Pierrot, who wants to get to know an African

(I) Ibid., p.253.

family. This impression of baleful pettiness is relieved by the revelation of one of the party, a certain Leblanc, who is despised by the rest of the community as l'intellectuel du Vatican, that he sympathises with the strikers, having sent them 20,000 francs, and that he despises the French attitude towards the Africans. Even this concession to French humanity is tempered by the novelist presenting Leblanc as a chronic alcoholic and drunk on this occasion.

The breadth of characterisation balances 'background' people with intrigue-developers. Many characters are included who are not necessary to the central intrigue, but nevertheless are significantly developed in themselves, so creating the total effect. Characterisation and intrigue are closely welded, and the action of the plot is the direct result of character and situation. The events are prepared in terms of the experiences of the participants, as the narrative moves through the stages of the communal experience of the strike. In this work, character, action and setting form one indivisible block of material as the whole novel, and implications, ideological or otherwise, are left to be inferred.

Reference is necessary to the prose style: presenting as it does the felt experience of the ordinary urban African, the sociable being to whom lively dialogue is natural, the general narrative prose is overtly referential, with a simplicity which conveys surface appearance in its mundanity, and yet which occasionally creates startling effects by this very fact; so the description of the death of Sounkaré suggests horror by the flatness of the prose:

> Comme prévenu par un mystérieux signal, d'autres rats apparurent, toujours par couples, et descendirent eux aussi le long des parois de la fosse. Ils tournèrent autour du corps à petits pas cérémonieux, puis deux d'entre eux plus

> hardis escaladèrent le corps et se posèrent sur le visage. Ils commencèrent leur travail par les lèvres et les paupières. (I)

Whereupon the paragraph and chapter end.

It is not proposed to discuss Ousmane's L'Harmattan in detail here. It is a much slighter version of its predecessor, attempting to convey the social reality of the effect of the Referendum in French West Africa in I958. It may be noted that the inclusion of the African traditional element in terms of fetish-charms and African herbal lore here adds to Ousmane's social range, and the hospital events, with the expulsion of the chief doctor on political grounds, following the departure of his French predecessor for incompetency and worse, recall the similar element of Gologo's Le Rescapé de l'Ethylos and foreshadows much of Fall's La Plaie.

In these works the novel of the community suggests a certain transcendence of the thematic pattern. Le Chant du Lac has implications of regret for the passing of the old order, but registers little protest against colonial exploitation. Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu documents clearly, and more fully than any other work of the field, that exploitation, and presents a powerful protest, so following the traditional thematic pattern. It is, however, one of the few works to reverse the pattern at the same time, by depicting the discomfiture of the exploiting powers and the triumphant assertion of African strength and dignity.

(I) Ibid., p.2I5.

CHAPTER 6

The Love Story

A limited number of works[1] are constructed upon the progress of a love affair in itself rather than as an illustration of a social question. Nevertheless the social emphasis of the field appears in these in the importance given to the depiction of the social environment of the narrative. Different authors achieve different combinations of these two elements. The work of Felix Couchoro, for example, develops from a marked sociological emphasis in L'Esclave to one of simple love-intrigue in Drame d'Amour à Anecho; Ousmane Soce's Karim has little depth of characterisation or subtlety of intrigue, but remains of interest as an observation of traditional local courtship patterns.

This small group is generally early in the field, and its lack of any sense of injustice in relation to the colonial power may be related to its period. Couchoro's work was substantially created before the Second World War, and his subsequent publications repeat his achievement. Hazoumé's Doguicimi carries a pro-French message in so far as it carries any, and Boni's Le Crépuscule des Temps Anciens in its substance imitates Hazoumé's attempts at historical evocation through the device of a love-story. Le Crépuscule des Temps Anciens does utilise the historical event of the French military subjugation of the district, as the subject of the work; nevertheless this potentially polemical element is left undeveloped as such. A similar feature has been observed[2] in Diallo's Force-Bonté, of which the motivation is the

(1) See p. 37 above.
(2) See p. 50 above.

author's admiration for France and her mission civilisatrice[1].

Awareness of colonial exploitation and of the possibility of independent national existence was not to find expression until the late thirties, the time of emergence of African intellectual activity in Paris, and did not become urgent enough to find literary expression until the 1939-45 War had widened the horizons of potential readers and writers.

The generally early date of this group, which contains the only novels of the field of the pre-war years except for Force-Bonté, is also relevant to its technical achievement. The pre-war works fail to achieve the objectivation, the coherence, the realisation of tension of, say, a Beti novel, or of the inner life of Oyono's heroes. I propose to consider the group in two stages, the first containing studies of three works concerning themselves with a contemporary love story, the second with romantic episodes set in a pre-colonial period. The technical approaches displayed by the first stage offer more variety than do those of the second stage. The latter, however, contains the most complex and coherent compositions of the group.

The contemporary love-story is seen in three different forms, in Socé's Karim, in Couchoro's Drame d'Amour à Anecho and in Moukoury's Rencontres Essentielles. These are in chronological order and also in order decreasing in emphasis upon the social matrix of the narrative.

In Socé's Karim the insignificance of plot-and-character development is partly offset by the importance of the milieu. The main steps of the

(1) See also Fredric Michelman's 'The Beginnings of African Fiction', Research in African Literatures, Vol. II. No. 1. (1972), pp. 5-17, in which he draws attention to a children's book, Les Trois Volontés de Malic, by Ahmadou Mapaté Diagne, Larousse, Paris, 1920, and to a fragment of a work, Le Réprouvé by Massyla Diop. Chapter II of the later work appeared in La Revue Africaine Artistique et Littéraire, No. 6, (July 1925), pp. 335-340. These two works share with Force-Bonté a sense of satisfaction with the colonial African situation, according to Michelman.

narrative are presented with such a rapid superficiality of touch, and the whole plot rounded off with such patent authorial engineering, that the reader gains an impression of the irrelevance of the story to the work as a whole.

Briefly stated, the story is of a young clerk of Saint-Louis who woos one Marième in the customary style, is unsuccessful, and continues his amorous pursuits in Dakar, by successfully wooing a certain divorcee, Aminata, later leaving her as too costly, and taking up with a more emotionally committed woman, Marie N'Diaye; this liaison also breaks up when, upon her pregnancy, he realises that their difference of religion would prevent their marriage, and, emerging from hospital after a bout of malaria, he wishes only to return to Saint-Louis; there he renews his relationship with Marième, who has in the meanwhile broken with her cousin as being untrustworthy, and the work ends with the wedding of the reunited lovers.

Apart from the evident manipulation to produce the happy ending, the triviality of the plot is a direct function of that of the selfish and childishly ostentatious hero, stumbling from one affair to the next with little concern for the meaning of his actions. The reader is presented only with Karim's view of the situation, a severe limitation in this case, and interest is soon lost about his activities. The plot could, perhaps, have been given significance by being set in a wider context, arising for example out of Karim's Moslem faith, which might have given rise to a dramatic conflict of values in a more fully developed mind. The characters of the young women could have been rendered more autonomous and lasting, and interest thus derived from the reality of relationship. The lack of this kind of

exploration undermines the credibility of plot and character, and diverts attention to its social matrix, to which the author has brought greater observation.

A close functional connection is kept between the milieu and the hero. The latter's deep attachment to his native country and his conformity to custom give rise to some of the most effective passages of the work, describing, for example, his courtship of Marième in the style of the samba-linguère (the possessor of noble blood), with expensive gifts, elaborate and costly tam-tams, in the appropriate attire(1). The observation of his clerical occupation, and of his urbanised situation in Dakar, are central to the thematic contrast with the rustic idyll of an African infancy. Karim's reflections upon the atmosphere of an African noon find expression in a passage reminiscent of L'Enfant Noir:

> A midi lorsque le soleil embrasait tout de son incendie sans flammes; lorsque les arbres pendaient désespérément leurs feuilles vers leur maigre ombre pour y chercher de la fraîcheur, lorsqu'hommes et bêtes restaient immobiles de langueur; lorsque l'air surchauffé tremblotait et miroitait à l'horizon, pareil à une nappe d'eau aérienne; lorsqu'on entendait le bêlement grêle d'un mouton, les pleurs déchirants d'un bébé noir qui avait soif et la voix somnolente de sa maman qui lui donnait le sein et le berçait de chansons venues du fond du passé!
>
> La nostalgie vous prenait au milieu du néant troublant des midis africains; une nostalgie de tout; on croyait que la vie ne recommencerait plus à palpiter nulle part sur la terre, tant il y avait de l'immobilité(2).

The hero's experiences of work and love may be seen as a vehicle for observation of both the old Africa and the new.

The position is less simple with Couchoro's Drame d'Amour à Anecho. The work is realistic in the sense that it builds its fiction upon an existing and accepted social structure. It lacks the customary nostalgia for primitive

(1) Op. cit., pp. 38,39.
(2) Ibid., p. 181.

mores, or bewilderment at being thrust into the Modern Age dominated by White technology and economics. The setting is referred to in passing in the course of the narrative, rather than being singled out as worthy of separate or emphatic treatment, as in Karim. More importantly, from the implications of the narrative of a certain kind of society, an impression emerges which does not find much expression elsewhere in the field, its central features being its modernity and its acceptance of this. This seems to be an important element in the total structure of a work mainly dominated by a simple narrative carried forward by superficially presented personages through predictable difficulties to a happy ending.

The author summarises his idea of the work in a Preface: after referring briefly to his first novel, L'Esclave and its successor Amour de Fétícheuse and their success, he introduces Drame d'Amour à Anecho as having:-

> un titre plein de promesses et évocateur d'alléchantes images;

and of the work he says hopefully:

> Il va susciter la curiosité des lecteurs. Et c'est précisément cette curiosité qui fait la vogue d'un livre . . . C'est une aventure d'amour. Ce n'est pas un pamphlet destiné à faire de la foule des lecteurs deux camps et à les dresser l'un contre l'autre. C'est au contraire un petit livre d'agrément . . .(1)

The extreme simplicity implied by this introduction is borne out by the cursory narrative. Three young men arrive from Lomé to attend an Easter church service in Anecho; on leaving the church they meet three girls, and taking them on a picnic, one of the young men falls in love with one of the girls. The two arrange to meet next day. But when the girl tells her mother she is surprised by the violent reaction of the latter, until she realises that her admirer's family is Catholic, and her Protestant father will not tolerate the union. The following description of the girl, Mercy, suggests the literary level of the work:

(1) Op. cit., Preface (n.p.).

> C'était une créature qu'on eût dit 'coulée dans une moule' tant la nature s'était plu à faire d'elle un de ces spécimens de la beauté féminine devant quoi l'homme s'abîme dans une muette admiration. Elle réalisait l'idéal dont peut rêver chaque lecteur pour être la compagne de sa vie. Le modèle du visage, un nez fin, des yeux magnifiques, où se reflétait intensément son âme sensible, une brillante denture ornant une sourire charmeur et surtout les lignes du cou, de la gorge, de la taille mince et élancée, des pieds au dessin pur, tout cet ensemble parfait attirait irrésistiblement.(1)

This sort of characterisation of Mercy is matched by that of her father, whose reactions to the affair form the next major narrative development:

> Il était de ces êtres dont on dit qu'ils sont fabriqués d'une seule pièce, tout en nerfs: la moindre contrariété lui donnaient la migraine. Extrémiste et violent de par son caractère, qui était entier.(2)

The reader's curiosity and expectations about the effect of the news are appropriately and soon fulfilled:

> La réaction fut formidable. Le père, comme projeté par un ressort, bondit de sa chaise, les yeux fous, les poings serrés, claquant des dents. Un cri rauque s'étrangla dans sa gorge.
> 'Papa!'
> Mercy ne dit que ce mot. Mais ce fut dit avec une telle tendresse dans la voix! Et un doux regard accompagnait cette supplication. Cette voix, le magnétisme émanant des yeux magnifiques de Mercy, douchèrent l'explosion grondante. Son père se rassit, prostré.(3)

However, the work seems significant on two counts. Firstly, it is one of the very few works which deliberately eschew a didactic or sociological stance, and, by seeking simply to entertain at a popular level, address themselves to a growing Francophone African readership, rather than to the Western market of critics, or the African intelligentsia. Secondly, but following from the first point, the work builds upon a clearly defined and recognisable modern environment. The basis of the conflict is the clash of adherences to Western religions. Stanley is a Catholic, Mercy is a Protestant, and the plot springs from an attendance at an Easter Sunday Mass. Animism and diviners are absent, and the mother figure is a simple

(1) Ibid., p. 9.
(2) Ibid., p. 17.
(3) Ibid., p. 21.

housewife, anxious for the happiness of her daughter. The author depicts a setting at the outset, the station at Anecho and the arrival of the train from Lomé, the crowd, the noise, in such a way as to suggest acceptance. He even goes so far as to provide a symbol of this acceptance in the Chevrolet car in which the three young men arrive in Anecho, referring to the same vehicle in significant terms at the conclusion of the narrative, a conclusion which also bears out, in its depiction of the Westernised wedding and honeymoon attire, that the happy life is to be found in enjoying the materialism of western-style modernity:

> Le programme des réjouissance (sic) devait s'achever par une fête de nuit à l'Hôtel Toyeviadji à Lomé.
>
> A sept heures du soir les autos partirent, emmenant les amies.
>
> Stanley et Mercy devaient continuer sur Accra leur voyage de noces.
>
> Après être saluer leurs parents à Flamani et à Baadji, ils montèrent en voiture.
>
> Stanley était en habit sous pression pour la fête de nuit de Lomé; quant à Mercy, elle portait un magnique (sic) et châtoyant ensemble de peluche bleu pâle, des bijoux en or lui ornaient les poignées et le cou, des épingles d'or brillaient dans sa chevelure roulée en torsades noires.
>
> Et la Chevrolet grise que nous avons vue à chaque tournant de ce long et poignant drame d'amour emporta dans un nuage de poussière Stanley Kuanvi et sa femme Mercy Latré, vers leur commun destin.(1)

This idea of acceptance of the social ambience, and the role of its assertion are seen differently in Couchoro's other works. With L'Esclave, 1929, his earliest work, by depicting the life of a village on the Togo-Dahomey frontier, and at the same time a love-affair similar to those in Western life, within that tribal framework, he claims, in his preface, to be seeking to show that Western material civilisation has not succeeded in differentiating Africans from Europeans in respect of their essential humanity. With L'Héritage, Cette Peste, a feature of the local testation law is used to create a dramatic conflict and the suspense necessary for

(1) Ibid., p. 168.

another happy-ending love story. It is the same with Amour de Féticheuse, in which the circumstances and resolution of a romantic involvement are inspired by traditional custom. It seems that Couchoro has been uniquely successful, in his limited range of theme, in utilising the data of African traditional behaviour to create a succession of works designed simply to entertain in Africa at a popular level. The work of Couchoro has kept pace with the interests and abilities of a popular readership by its simple treatment of the love-story and by his subordination of serious issues, such as the survival of tradition in modern society, to the simple story. His books may be compared with the Onitsha Market chap books of Nigeria(1) in their concentration upon the popular love story and in their superficial characterisation and plotting. The latter are, however, considerably inferior, in general, to Couchoro's work in style and organisation.

The one work encountered in the field to concern itself exclusively with a romantic situation, with no reference to any ideological or socio-political thesis or attitudes, nevertheless, in common with the rest of the field, is also structured upon the hope-disillusion axis: Rencontres Essentielles, more of a récit than a novel, narrates the experience of a woman in her love, tracing the story of childhood, love and marriage, the growing disinterest of the husband, and the break-up of the union.

The classical simplicity of the work's emotional notation sets it apart. Operating in the subjective mode of a continuous present tense evocation of personal reaction, it concentrates attention upon inner mental-emotional reality in a seemingly realistic flow of one-remove stream-of-consciousness. In this it achieves an immediacy of human reality not approached by most other works of the field. At a critical moment in her marriage, tormented by jealousy, the narrator presents her imaginings and reflections:

(1) See E. N. Obiechina, Onitsha Market Literature, Heinemann, London, 1972.

> Mon amie intéresse Joel, voilà un point. Mais que possède-t-elle à ce moment précis de mieux ou de plus pour inspirer tant d'amour à l'homme qui me fuit? La jalousie, cette intrigante complice des coeurs aimants, le plus trouble des sentiments est de nouveau là. Mon coeur, comme un tambour, bat à l'annonce de malheur. Bientôt la peur de perdre Joel, cette fois-ci irremédiablement. J'ai maintenant beacoup d'espoir, mon plan va réussir. C'est un espoir amer, car je crains et je veux à la fois.(1)

So, for 20,000 words approximately, the developing mental life of the subject provides the material for the whole work.

It may be doubtful how far one may compare so short a work in general with other more sustained compositions. However, the work is unique in its concentration upon the inner life of the one subject, a woman in love. The isolated nature of this example of a work based simply upon an experience of personal emotion, with no social reference, serves to underline, by contrast, the general character of the field.

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The love story is used in combination with the evocation of the life of a pre-colonial society in Hazoumé's Doguicimi and Boni's Le Crépuscule des Temps Anciens. In these works social depiction is considerably more dominant than in the contemporary love-story constructions considered above. Doguicimi effects a far more thorough dramatisation of the central personal experience than does Le Crépuscule des Temps Anciens. Nevertheless the element of observation is of fundamental importance in both works.

The intention of the author of Doguicimi, according to his Avertissement, has been to show the common humanity of kings and subjects in a kingdom renowned only for its barbarity, in other words, to paint the customs, barbarous as they were, within a narrative of personal dimensions which will demonstrate the character and condition of the inhabitants of nineteenth century Dahomey. The work has, then, a humanitarian purpose beyond the

(1) Op. cit., p. 92.

scientific observation of tribal customs. Of the work as observation of customs, he writes:

> Cet ouvrage, qui traite des moeurs et coutumes de l'ancien royaume de Dahomey, est une ébauche de peinture d'une race conquérante à un tournant de l'histoire de ses guerres, de ses trafics et sacrifices humains qui lui avaient fait, dans le monde civilisé, une triste célébrité de barbarie.(1)

The attempt to convey the reality of Dahomeyan life even goes so far as to reproduce the lengthy speeches of leaders of the tribe, in the author's concern for, what he calls here

> un cachet d'exotisme et d'authenticité, constante préoccupation du vrai régionalisme.(2)

This leads to an attempted reproduction, by faithful translation, of the langage pittoresque, the parler solennel, of the Dahomeyans. The seriousness with which the author asks this aspect of the work to be considered is shown by the concluding paragraph of his preface:

> Nous espérons donc que le lecteur qui ne goûtera pas le côté romanesque de l'ouvrage appréciera, au moins, l'important document ethnologique et historique présenté ici et qui est le fruit de vingt-cinq années de commerce avec les 'anciens' de Dahomey.(3)

Dahomey is a race, he has found,

> pour qui la vie, c'est la palabre, la guerre et la fête, et qui fait de la nonchalance et de l'impassibilité la marque de la noblesse.(4)

and his work is largely constructed around these central features of the racial life.

He has chosen to develop a situation which is typical of the racial life, and from which a personal drama can be caused to spring. The work opens with a study of the tribal political pattern of action operating through a typical lengthy palabre in which interested parties contribute their speeches. In this case, the king, with powers as le maître du monde,

(1) Op. cit., p. 13.
(2) Ibid., p. 14.
(3) Ibid., p. 14.
(4) Ibid., p. 14.

in their absoluteness of appearance and their limitations of reality, has intentions of waging war upon a neighbouring tribe, the Hounrjotos, against the wishes of his nobles and advisers. Various regular rituals are described here, such as the daily beheading of a number of prisoners-of-war at dawn, as a token of respect to the king. The situation is then seen from a personal angle, in the second chapter, as one of the nobles, Toffa, returns to his wife Doguicimi, and complains about King Guezo's determination to fight his war, Doguicimi's devotion to her apparently unloving husband leads her to consult the devin about him, receiving an assurance that he will return. The army, however, returns defeated, without Toffa, supposedly captured, and Doguicimi risks death by publicly rebuking the King for his war-like behaviour, so attracting to herself the hostility of a powerful cabal of the King's wives, jealous of the mercy Doguicimi has received. The work moves back to its public emphasis with a major and detailed description of preparations and execution of the Grande Fête de Coutume[1], with its rituals and human sacrifices, the importance of the Feast shown by the fact that it takes precedence over the war with the Hounrjotos. The King, who now seeks to defend Doguicimi from the hostility of the Queens, is more fully seen in his various political activities. Having presented the picture of the socio-political structure of the tribe, in itself, but mainly in its typical functions of palaver, war and feast, a picture in which the darker areas of warfare and human sacrifice are seen as significant, but only traditional expressions of tribal life, the author devotes the second half of the work to drawing out the narrative implications of Doguicimi's situation. Attractive, young, noble, chaste, virtually widowed, she attracts hostility from the Queens and admiration from, among others, Vidaho, the Prince Royal, whose proposal of marriage she rejects. Next, a certain Zanbounou is the author's means of

(1) Ibid., pp 121-224.

introducing into the work a significant sociological subject, the blood-pact. Zanbounou has the possibility of visiting Toffa in prison, but the price to Doguicimi will be a blood-pact with himself. She sees this as a device to seduce her into Zanbounou's possession and is indignant, eventually dismissing him after an inner debate whether the freedom of her husband was worth her honour. Vidaho's wounded vanity inspires a plot whereby Doguicimi is falsely accused, subjected to the traditional, but this time rigged, trial by poisoning of cockerels, and flogged almost to death, before being imprisoned. Here she almost succumbs to Vidaho's renewed devotion. She is eventually released. The tribe make war, this time victoriously, upon the Hounrjotos, and return with the head of Toffa who had, in fact, been dead since the previous attack. The devin was correct but imprecise. The tragedy is taken to a heroic conclusion with the necessary application of Doguicimi to be accorded the rites of living burial with her dead husband's skull, and this is granted. Doguicimi demonstrates, in her self-imposed death, the unflinching endurance which she had shown in her life, and which, according to Hazoumé, was the national characteristic of the Dahomey peoples. Before she dies, however, she is able to make a plea to the King for a restraint to the brutality of his kingdom, on the occasion of the visit of an official French embassy to his court.

The visit is the occasion of a preliminary palaver, in which the untrustworthiness of the Whites is made much of. It is thought that there is little call to pay them much attention, so when they arrive they are served a feast by a group of attractive girls, and, having feasted, they are then presented with plates bearing the severed heads of these same girls. They make a hurried departure for civilisation.(1)

(1) Ibid., p. 375.

The Epilogue draws attention to the historicity of the death of Doguicimi, of the Hounjroto war, and of the European mission in the cause of humanity, and also to the invention of Toffa's anti-feminism, Doguicimi's grief and the slander campaign against her, and to the role of the French colonists in general, in bringing an end to wars, slave-trading, and human sacrifice as they established peace, liberty and humanity.

The socio-historical element of the work is fundamental. The author has attempted a general survey of the socio-political structure of his subject, which is presented as a factual reconstruction, and he has imagined the development of a personal drama within this firm, wide frame-work. Le Crépuscule des Temps Anciens offers important similarities with Doguicimi in respect of its socio-historical foundation. The author's intentions lack Hazoumé's concern to show the unchanging face of humanity in a different setting. It is rather an attempt to present in novel form the observable life of an African people:

> Pour fair connaître un peuple d'Afrique noire, hormis la technique de la pure recherche scientifique, la meilleure méthode consiste à le vivre, à le regarder vivre, à collecter ses vieilles traditions auprès de leurs conservateurs, les 'Anciens' dont les derniers survivants sont en voie d'extinction, et à transcrire le tout sans rien farder.(1)

So much for the lateral extension; the chronological is supposed to represent an era of three hundred years. However, attention is mainly directed towards the final period of this era, that of the arrival of the conquering Europeans; the work is not quite:

> la projection objective de la période d'environ trois siècles qui s'étale de l'apogée à la chute du Bwanu et empiète de quelques années sur les temps de l'épopée coloniale.(2)

This suggests a comparison with Le Devoir de Violence(3), but this is not borne out on closer study, as the historical extension of Le Crépuscule des

(1) Op. cit., p. 18.
(2) Ibid., p. 19.
(3) See pp. 86-90 above.

Temps Anciens is limited to the closing years of the pre-colonial era, apart from the introductory pages(1), which consist of poetically phrased reminiscences by L'Ancêtre about the legendary origins of the world, animals, and his tribe. By the third chapter, the reader is brought up to the time-subject of the work, and is present at a gathering of villagers exchanging anecdotes, and listening to the Elder, Gnassan, instructing them about the forthcoming funereal ritual of Diyioua, as well as recalling the history of their tribe. The time is given here as that of the near arrival of the Europeans to the town of Bwan. The terminal date of the narrative is given by the involvement of the hero, Terhé, in the battles which preceded the conquest of the tribe, shortly before his death by poisoning, near the time of the conquest in 1916, the fanatical resistance of the Bwawa being attested by official archive material.(2) The links between the events of the work and the work and historical records are frequent: one of the main personages, Kya, the béro, or recognised free-lance killer, is a historical character whose death is recorded as being in 1887, in circumstances such as described in the work.(3) As he is present and active at the outset of the main narrative, with the hero, it is reasonable to assume a certain amount of authorial licence with dates, since the main drame involves Terhé's romance with Hakanni, which is in motion at the time of the yumbéni or funeral feast, when Kya is also in his prime.(4) But it is Kya's father, Lowan, who, embittered by his son's death and the eminence of Terhé, brings about the death of the latter, in 1916, Hakanni soon dying also, by virtue of their blood-pact. The inference is of an actual narrative duration of some eighteen months, sufficient for the events to occur naturally and coherently, from the announcement of the yumbéni, through

(1) Op. cit., pp. 21-31.
(2) Ibid., pp. 110.
(3) Ibid., p. 211.
(4) Ibid., p.66.

the demonstration of Terhé's prowess, the disastrous floods, the union of the lovers, to Kya's death and those of the lovers, against the background of the daily social life of the Bwawa villagers, and the impending arrival of hostile White forces, which subjugate the tribe just when Terhé and Hakanni are, by their death, paying the price of romantic love to an envious and unsympathetic world. Unlike Doguicimi this work has a fictitious hero and heroine. Otherwise, Boni has been at pains to compose a fiction from evidently authentic elements as far as the socio-historical body of the work is concerned. The narrative moves between this and the personal drama with a greater emphasis upon the former than the latter.

A general view suggests that the work differs from Doguicimi not only in the proportionate extent of social depiction to the personal drama (which is, in fact the case, as the story of Doguicimi tends to dominate its work more than does that of Terhé and Hakanni), but also in the areas of society it depicts. Doguicimi presents the area of government and aristocracy, of high ritual and warfare; Le Crépuscule des Temps Anciens moves more in the sphere of the typical life of a Bwamu villager. While the former bases its sociological study upon the three aspects, la palabre, la guerre et la fête, the latter does so upon les sports, le flirt, la musique, et la danse(1). However, whereas Doguicimi creates a unified impression of dignity, severity and grandeur, by its positioning among people dominated by massive ritual and ruthless drive, a picture developed with meticulous thoroughness, Le Crépuscule des Temps Anciens offers a variety of tones and approaches, ranging from a concern unequalled in the field for authenticity in preserving the minutiae of daily life to a marked romanticism in the personal drama. It is necessary to consider the text more closely in this connection.

(1) 'Quatre choses faisaient le bonheur du Bwanii: les sports, le flirt, la musique et la danse'. Ibid., p. 30.

The author attaches importance to the evocation of the material world of objects, particularly those which are peculiar to the disappearing world of the Bwawa; hence the frequent use of Bwa words, followed by a translation[1]. The same method of creating couleur locale applies to special names of the Bwawa for natural phenomena, festivities, people of other tribes, and so on, together with a reproduction of the tribal chants and of their exclamation; these Bwa words appear in italics. Of the 240 pages of text, only 20 lack an italicised word; the average is between two and three per page.

This stylistic feature contributes to a realistic evocation, of which the main work is done by the description of the Bwawa in typical situations. So, the first full chapter, following a legend-based introduction, treats the nocturnal life of Bwan:

> Partout, du brouhaha, des appels, des lueurs. Bwan avait repris sa vie nocturne quotidienne.[2]

Music is heard, the evening meal is being prepared and eaten and villagers stroll in the labyrinthine street-system of the village. This leads to the gathering before the griot who causes much amusement with his suggestive jokes. A more serious note is struck as the Elder Gnassan comes to announce publicly the forthcoming ritual funeral of Elder Diouya and its festivities. From this the narrative moves to the domestic battle between Kya, the village béro or murderer[3] and his wife, the settlement of which brings the chapter to a close. The feast to come inspires the preparations which occupy much of the next chapter; this also presents a picture of the leisure-occupation of the women, who withdraw in a group, here and exchange ideas about their sex-lives and techniques employed. An impression of underhand promiscuity emerges, restrained by a rigid law on adultery.

(1) For example, the author provides an exposition of the Bwawa's taste in music, with a catalogue of musical instruments, in Bwa and French, on page 30.
(2) Ibid., p. 35.
(3) No other novel of the field features such a figure.

Kya again figures as the object of his wife's thoughts, and as the author relates the béro's exploits. Kya has more than a background significance, however, as it is he who will be the cause of the poisoning of the hero, Terhé and the ensuing death of Hakanni. The author develops his activities as much for the sociological picture, however, as for the personal intrigue. As the feast approaches, the figures of Terhé and Hakanni are introduced. Terhé's prowess in killing lions, among other things, arouses Kya's jealousy, and Hakanni's admiration. She becomes his mistress, and they hope for permission that she may become his fourth wife as well.

It is possible, then, to see the peculiarly local, domestic quality of this setting-evocation, in marked contrast to that of Doguicimi. The work goes on to describe the feast. The arrival of the guests, a description of the crowds, the games at which Terhé carries away the prizes, the music of the orchestra, the chants of the griots, the speech of the Chief, the dancing, the drumming, the singing, the furtive amorous encounters, the drinking and smoking of the Elders, all is brought to an excited climax in an accumulation of rapid sketches and apostrophes. Boni also catches the atmosphere of Bwan at work, surviving the floods and planting and harvesting the fields; the conflict of the generations is evoked in the episode of the field-clearing competition between the young and the old men of the village(1), a conflict in which the young take the lead. The romantic element is developed here with the prowess of Terhé determining Kya upon vengeance, and the marriage dance being prepared, for him and Hakanni. The local character of the Bwa marriage relationship is presented through the wedding of the two, in which the bride is free to leave her husband if she so pleases(2), and three days of festivities on the occasion of the marriage described in full(3). The

(1) Op. cit., pp. 109-129, 165-166.
(2) Ibid., p. 135.
(3) Ibid., pp. 133-148.

friction of a polygamous household is presented through the experience of Hakanni, hated by her fellow-wives[1]. The singularity of the local marriage custom which ratifies with the dance-ceremony a union, which still lacks the full solemnity of the Elders' approval, so that their offspring will be the property of the wife's uncle, is brought out in this relationship, apparently for its own sake rather than for that of a development of the plot; unless it is for the purpose of making a stronger case for Hakanni's request[2] for a blood-pact with Terhé, which will ensure their companionship anyway in Nihamboloho, the city of ghosts, after his death, the effect being to create a powerful death-wish within the woman. So it happens, and she wills herself to death shortly after that of Terhé. The hostility of Kya's father Lowan occasions documentation of sorcery[3], recalling the use of magic and extra-sensory perception in other works, usually in association with diviners(4). So, the communal life of the village of this particular region is evoked, mainly by straightforward, systematic description, a tenuous thread being provided by the rise and fall of Terhé. The historical climax, the reduction of Bwan by the French forces, occupies a section towards the end of the work[5], but there is little attempt to dramatise or personalise the events, which are linked tenuously to the personal narrative by the statement that Terhé fought valiantly in the battles, and his death, by poisoning, is presented as symbolic of the passing of the glory of Bwan.[5]

In contrast to the commonplace realism of the foregoing systematic exposition of Bwan society, the author evokes the legendary heritage of the tribe in the introductory movement of the work. In a short passage of some

(1) Ibid., pp. 149-153.
(2) Ibid., pp. 156-158.
(3) Ibid., pp. 169-171.
(4) See p. 221 below.
(5) Op. cit., p. 256.

600 words, brief reference is made to the myths of the origin of creation, of man and of Bwan:

> Les Bwawa vivaient dans la magique ambiance de tous ces êtres invisibles, mystérieux, qui peuplaient l'univers et auxquels leur prodigieuse imagination attribuait les formes les plus variées.(1)

The Elder who is being quoted sees the era of Antiquity as one of a mystical oneness of all nature:

> Un incontestable mimétisme existait entre la Nature et l'homme. Celui-ci et celle-la vivaient en symbiose, unis par une invisible force centrifuge. L'univers entier semblait tenir d'une seule âme, tant l'harmonie, ne fût-ce qu'en apparence, était parfaite entre les êtres et les choses.(2)

It is, then, possible to see the work as attempting a recreation of the spirit of the time as much as of the material data. The local beliefs are seen as a coherent body of reality in the Bwa mind, determining all practical and ritual activities, and, correctly obeyed, ensuring communal and personal harmony.

This view explains the nature of the personal drama, the characterisation and the prose style. Of the first it is only necessary to point out its extreme simplicity, the salient points having been already covered. Of the second, the characterisation, it is demonstrable that it does not exist in the sophisticated sense of the word, the personages being either shadowy representatives, such as the griot or the Ancêtre who introduces the work, or the anonymous populace whose behaviour is of more concern than their identity, or symbolic such as Kya, the béro filled only with cruelty and envy, like his father Lowan, the symbol of evil, Hakanni the symbol of romantic love and devotion, Terhé the symbol of the glory and power of Bwamu. In the latter some complexity might have been looked for as the main personage, but in vain: he wins all his contests, dominates his fellows in strength and courage,

(1) Ibid., p. 28.
(2) Ibid., pp. 21.

offers an unparalleled example of devotion to his beloved, is the cynosure of all the women's eyes and so on. The effect of this unreality of character and simplicity of narrative is to throw interest strongly upon the major element of the work, the life of Bwamu. This life being essentially religious, and strongly associated with the actual fortunes of the Bwawa, the work becomes, in a way, a religious one: behind practice and phenomena one may always discern the vital forces of the Divine. To express this concept, a style is attempted, it seems, which shares the same continuously active vitality.

The prose style of Le Crépuscule des Temps Anciens has individual qualities which could justify the above statement. There is apparent a wider variety of style than in most other works here; as the work moves from one level of approach to another so the style is adapted: the harmony, a regularity, flow, implied in the traditional Bwa religious view of life finds expression in a corresponding prose style; for example, the exposition by the Ancêtre[1] is couched entirely in periodic rhythmic prose such as the following:

> Il est vrai qu'on était loin des temps merveilleux où le ciel touchait presque la terre, où, selon la légende, les humains n'avaient qu' à lever la main pour cueillir tout ce qui leur permettait de vivre et d'ignorer la misère. Il fallut la négligence d'une femme, il fallut ô malheur! qu'une femme transgressât les recommandations de Dombéni pour que, furieux, le ciel s'envolât haut, très haut, très très haut, encore plus haut, emportât ses richesses et ce qui alimentait le genre humain.[2]

The period of change and loss of innocence is presented in the harsh staccato of successive short, simple sentences:

> Des villes avaient connu les ruines de la guerre. D'autres s'étaient évanouies.
> L'homme devenait moins naïf. L'inconscience battait en retraite.[3]

(1) Ibid., pp. 21-31.
(2) Ibid., p. 23.
(3) Ibid., p. 33.

The spoken intercourse of daily life is colloquially represented, in contrast to the set speeches of the Ancêtres. The prose setting of the dialogue, that is, the authorial narration of the flow of daily life, as part of which the inhabitants of the novel speak, is a composition of various elements. There figures largely the indirect anonymous monologue by which the author identifies himself with the Bwawa in commenting upon customs and occasions. For example, on the question of extra-marital relations, the author enters into the mind of the men of the village, who, in the belief that they are being cuckolded anyway, can apparently justify their surreptitious adventures:

> Céder aux sollicitations sensuelles en plein jour n'effleure l'esprit de personne. Ce serait commettre un stupre générateur d'une mort prématurée quant à ceux qui s'en rendent coupables. Mais on saura employer la nuit. On ménagera autant que faire se peut les étrangères accompagnées de leurs conjoints. On épargnera aussi les fiancées. Pour les autres? On osera . . . (1)

The excitement of killing is experienced by the children invited to assist in slaying the sacrificial oxen:

> Apprendre à frapper sans pitié, à faire gicler le sang. N'est-ce pas la meilleure méthode d'entraînement à leur rôle de futurs guerriers? Trancher les tendons d'un seul coup de 'woro', enfoncer dans la chair son poignard jusqu'au manche, rompre les entrailles avec sa sagaie voilà les actes qui fortifient le tempérament de l'homme! (2)

Also important is the more detached authorial approach, in which the author attempts to express the unique poetry of the pastoral moment:

> Mb'woa wi, l'Ancêtre Soleil, descend rapidement vers l'Occident. Il va dans quelques instants disparaître, non sans avoir en guise d'adieu offert à la contemplation du monde une merveilleuse vision.
>
> Par groupes triangulaires, les pique-boeufs étincelants de blancheur, fiers de leurs diadèmes, fendent l'air de leur vol éclair, s'abattent sur les cimes des fromagers, des mimosas et des nérés qu'ils parsèment de taches neigeuses. Kouan!..Kouan!..Kouan!.. ils se glorifient dans leur grotesque jargon. (3)

The muted restraint of the above gives way in a later description to a massive accumulation and confusion of natural phenomena to represent the ravages

(1) Ibid., p. 98/-9.
(2) Ibid., p. 88.
(3) Ibid., p. 73.

of the floods in a passage of some thousand words in which the author calls on resources of rhythm, multi-sensory imagery and exotica. The following extract is typical:

> Les vers gluants qui se tortillaient piteusement, les scorpions plats à la queue recourbée et à l'aiguillon crochu, les serpents froids au désagréable contact, cherchaient refuge dans les ordures, sous les tas de bois, les seccos, les morceaux de calebasses ou de canaris, les greniers, les jarres, voire sous les 'katas', dans les poulaillers et les bergeries. La sarabande des éphémères ne s'arrêtait qu'avec le coucher du soleil pour reprendre, plus frénétique encore, autour des lampes allumées.(1)

Such passages are few, and serve as part of the poetic framework for the functional body of the work, in its task of evoking the inner and outer life of the village at a certain period, but in such a way as to assist in seeing it as a multi-faceted, vital or dynamic totality which exists against a background, and in the context, of a living natural universe. The religious implications of the work are supported by the prose style.

It is possible to arrive at a general conclusion about the relative merits of Doguicimi and Le Crépuscule des Temps Anciens. Outstanding as this pair of works is in that they both seek to present a reconstruction of a particular historical milieu in conjunction with a tragic love-story, there appears a central contrast in terms of their success in harmonising the two main elements of their composition: milieu and drama: Doguicimi presents both in considerable detail, so that the drama lives in the reality of the heroine's reaction and consistency, and the milieu achieves an impressively full self-existence by dint of uniquely detailed and systematic documentation; each strengthens the other, but at a distance, and much of the milieu-data could be extracted with little immediate compositional detriment to the personal drama. With the latter work, the opposite applies: the milieu assumes a living reality which the personal drama, because of a lack of realistic characterisation, fails to approach; a unified fictional creation has been only

(1) Ibid., p. 106/-7.

partially achieved because of the primacy of sociological concern over against psychological realism. Doguicimi offers the fuller love story, Le Crépuscule des Temps Anciens the more human setting.

The group as a whole has succeeded in depicting a range of sociological matters, and in recording some facets of Africa at a turning point of its history; it provides further support for the views emerging from previous group-studies, that the novelists are relatively few who have been able, or have wished, to concern themselves with the idiosyncracies of actual people, still less to occupy themselves with the multiple and shifting realities of the sexual-love relationship, a topic which tends to be treated here with indifference or crude simplification. There are also few who have seen the novelist's task in terms of an artistic creation, using the experiences of life to express an aesthetic rather than a didactic vision.

A basic distinction between the works may be made in respect of their relation to the field-stereotype: while developing the virtues of Doguicimi's society, Hazoumé is at pains to establish the darker side of its nature: courage is cultivated, but at the expense of humanity; the advent of the colonial power is beneficial in its humanitarian mission. Boni reverses this emphasis by his evocation of a well-organised and closely knit society at harmony with nature and the gods, which will be destroyed in its social essence by the French army and administration. Ouologuem's Le Devoir de Violence(1) occupies a different position from both in its historical framework, saying in effect that the African population is bound to suffering regardless of the race of its rulers. The historical novel does not have a common attitude towards the colonial question; it does, however, share a deep concern with the sufferings of the African people, and in this may also be seen to have the same inspiration as the rest of the field.

(1) See p. 86 above.

CHAPTER 7

The Psychological Novel

La Plaie[1] is considered here separately as an isolated work of fiction concerned with suggesting the mental life of an individual person in a crisis of a particularly personal kind which owes nothing to the general source of critical situations used by the rest of the field, with the exception of Moukoury's Rencontres Essentielles.

The work is in two parts. The first twelve chapters cover the incarceration of Magamou in a lunatic asylum, because of his noisome effect upon the market, and his reflections, recalling his childhood, native village, departure for the town, the accident which led to his ulcerous leg condition, his meetings with the authorities of the hospital, and with visitors, and finally his escape.

The second part, also of twelve chapters, continues the narrative directly, still focussing upon Magamou, who consults various authorities about a cure, which he finally obtains from a native healer, but which robs him of his congenial identity as the wandering beggar of Dakar, admired because of his individuality but avoided because of his ulcer. Shocked by his new sensation of nonentity he is on his way to commit suicide when he is trampled by a mob and left for dead in a side-street. The emphasis then switches to the French Dr. Bernardy, superintendant of the Hospital, a man addicted to drink, a racist of doubtful moral quality, whose anti-African sentiments are inflamed by the supposed resurrection of Magamou. The latter, already once reported dead, is apparently dead again, but he shortly regains consciousness and starts a slow recovery.

(1) See p. 37 above.

For the remainder of the work, interest is divided between the Doctor's deterioration into madness and Magamou's spiritual development towards a climax at which he rejects suicide and opts for life, but life on the old, familiar terms. The work closes with his collapse into unconsciousness as he tries to inflict upon his leg a wound which will restore him to the condition which distinguished him as L'homme-à-la-plaie.

The episode in his life covers about four or five months, at the end of which it may be assumed perhaps that the status quo is in effect restored, with the difference that Dr. Bernardy has been removed. This interpretation depends upon a recovery of Magamou, however, and a contrary view may be held that Magamou is to be thought of as dying. While the author may have wished for uncertainty to hold the balance, the work itself seems to suggest recovery, as being in keeping with the final movement in which Magamou decides upon life, and at the final scene in the market calls out:

'Me reconnaissez-vous pour la vie?'(1)

To interpret this as a final ironical effect seems to clash with the general tone of bustling vitality which informs the work. Another interpretation may be held, that Magamou is to be seen as losing his sanity, as this seems to explain the attempted self-mutilation. Against this is the whole weight of the work which sets Magamou fully into a life which, as he belatedly realises, he can only accept in the identity he has had since his youth. To lose his ulcer was to lose his way of life; but he is in love with life, and therefore he must regain that ulcer-created identity. Magamou struggles with the alternatives of life and death, decides on the former and acts accordingly.

(1) Op. cit., p. 251.

Had the cure come twenty years before, he would have had the flexibility to adapt, but his tragedy is the product of the rigidification of ageing, and his act, far from being that of a madman, may be seen as the outcome of a courageous, original and farsighted mind.

In bringing about the dénouement, the author has controlled the narrative systematically. Magamou's experiences are tailored to fit into the pattern of the two twelve-chapter parts, the first bringing the reader into the background of Magamou and up to the moment when he acts against society and rejects the implications of his condition by escaping from the asylum. The second traces his misfortunes as he tries to escape again, this time from the ulcer, and again, from life itself, but foiled by the chance trampling, until he finally faces the ineluctable facts of his personality and of his situation and acts accordingly. The wheel has come full circle.

Focussed upon Magamou, the work sacrifices some unity by developing Dr. Bernardy, discussed below, but this is compensated for by Bernardy's thematic contribution in highlighting by contrast Magamou's rationality. Whether one has in the figure of Dr. Bernardy an anti-neo-colonialist shaft of satire is doubtful, in view of the neutral tone of the work. Within the narrative limits a uniquely free personality in African fiction emerges.

The author, it will be seen, uses the scope of the critical situation to develop the special character of Magamou, and this he does largely by use of the inner monologue, which develops sometimes into a dialogue of two inner voices, by which Magamou adjusts to external stimuli. The author also makes use of direct authorial statement on occasion to indicate an understanding of the hero, and he arranges situations in which Magamou is seen by, and in relation to a wide variety of people, embodying contemporary society. So a character is presented in a depth of inner detail and complexity, as a member of society and as a man in himself.

He exists as a person typical of no social group, who acts in a non-typical situation. Socio-politically neutral, he inspires a work which seeks to convey no message in the manner of the large majority of the field. It is proposed therefore to consider in more detail the means used to present Magamou.

The inner monologue is here taken considerably further than elsewhere. Comparison might be made with Faye's Le Débrouillard for its extended personal recollections in a living colloquial style, but the difference of approach, the latter being recollections rather than currently lived material, largely precludes this. There is more common ground with Kourouma's Les Soleils des Indépendances in its racy and vivid reconstructions of Fama's trains of thought, and this could be related to the similarity of the characters' positions as outsiders, resentful of the treatment they receive and anxious to regain some status. In La Plaie, with its concentration upon Magamou, the private trains of thought occupy the bulk of the work, largely because he is a total outsider, and has no companion through dialogue with whom his mind could be revealed. His ideas are, however, often accompanied by the commentary of the author. For example, in presenting Magamou initially we find a passage of personal insight:

> Magamou manifestait des signes d'inquiétude dès qu'on parlait d'hôpital. N'avait-il pas appris que rares étaient les malades qui sortaient de ce lieu, sains d'esprit et de corps? (1)

(1) Ibid., p. 21.

In the following paragraph, the author presents a character-summary of Magamou designed to cast doubt upon the validity of his ideas, assessing his thinking by standards of clarity, consistency and logicality:

> C'est contre nature, prétendait-il, de naître ou de mourir à l'hôpital. Sans doute, ne disposait-il d'aucun argument à opposer à qui lui aurait suggéré la vanité de son assertion. Cependant, fin limier, il aurait, au demeurant, échafaudé quelque vague réponse, se réservant, toutefois, une de ces portes de sortie dont il avait la clef: brouiller les cartes en usant des proverbes, ...Magamou vivait dans la fadeur de ses constructions mentales et élaborait d'autant plus aisément des théories abracadabrantes, qu'il avait, de lui-même une idée fort avantageuse. (1)

This tone of condescension provides some ironical humour, perhaps, but it also militates strongly against objectivated creation: the above passage is followed by two paragraphs of full interior monologue, in which, to prove the author's point about Magamou's own supercilious condescension towards superstition, Magamou decries the primitive belief in a spirit-world duplicating the human:

> .....j'aurais mon double, un certain homme-à-la-plaie, aérien et mythique ..... Je souhaite à ce Magamou-des-airs bon vent et bon courage. (2)

To drive home the point, the author picks up the coined phrase and ironically uses it to contrast the rhetorical Magamou with the actual:

> L'ambulance stationnée dans la rue, Magamou-de-la-terre eût détalé, malgré la morsure lancinante qui lui fouillait la chair. (3)

The occasion of Magamou's first experience of incarceration is presented as leading him to a revaluation of his ideas, and he is said to realise how empty and absurd are his words and thoughts:

> Sans acrimonie il évalua à ses dépens l'inanité de ses propos, l'absurdité de ses élucubrations. (4)

(1) Ibid., p. 22.
(2) Ibid., p. 23.
(3) Ibid., p. 23.
(4) Ibid., p. 25.

But this is only for a while: soon, he regains confidence and asserts himself against his enemies, and the reader is left uncertain how reliable or relevant are the guiding comments of the author. Towards the end of the first part, the author summarises Magamou's mental life.

> Ondoyant, fuyant, divers, Magamou était un véritable feu follet, écho fidèle de toutes les sensations, refuge de toutes sortes de sentiments. Il vibrait sans retenue, passionément, adorant ce qu'il avait sacrifié la veille, répudiant ce qu'il avait défendu, une heure auparavant, avec une conviction impressionnante. (1)

The inner monologue is used in different ways. It provides information on the hero's previous history through his reflections while in the asylum. It is also used to present Magamou's own inner debate, about the alternatives before him, and in this connection the author deposits a second voice in Magamou's mind. It is also used generally to present his reactions to situations. This may be illustrated by a variety of extracts, as in the following passage, presenting Magamou's reflections as he realises the implications of his new situation after recovering from his ulcer. Here is seen his persistent self-analysis as he explores relentlessly the alternatives open to him. The author catches the rapid switching of ideas, the hesitations, the expression of suddenly felt emotions of despair, the regret and hope, as they occur, in a way other writers of the field do not approach. Also evident here is the manner in which the author adds perspective by moving from the direct statement in the first person to the indirect statement of authorial description, still in the style of immediate thought:

(1) Ibid., p.105.

> Je pensais avoir échappé à la mort. J'ai eu raison de ma plaie, raison du cabanon, de Cheikh Sar et de Bernardy. J'ai eu raison de la solitude et de la misère. J'ai conscience d'être un homme, comme tout le monde. Et me voici plus près de la mort que jamais ..... A moins que mon analyse ..... Mais comment voir clair en moi? Toujours cette voix-ci et cette autre en conflit permanent. Je suis déchiré. Je ne sais plus où donner de la tête. Ah! si j'avais su!
>
> Pour une fois Bernardy avait vu juste. 'Il faut que l'Afrique marche, le petit doigt sur la couture du pantalon'. C'est la consigne idéale ..... Avec ça je serais probablement encore au cabanon numéro 7 sous mes douches et mes gravillons. Ou avec une paire de béquilles. Un fou, c'est intéressant; un unijambiste, aussi. Un homme comme les autres! Quel manque d'imagination! Mais alors .....'
>
> Magamou était ivre d'idées qui tanguaient, qui tournaient. Il se sentait sollicité de partout à la fois, tiraillé, indécis..... Redevenir l'homme-à-la-plaie? rien de plus simple: ses attributs extérieurs étaient à la portée de main. Le plus dur était d'opérer de l'intérieur un changement radical: n'est pas dément qui veut. (1)

This dual technique, having Magamou to speak out his thoughts and commenting upon them at the same time, provides the main flow of the work's narrative, in much the same way as in Evembé's Sur la Terre en Passant. However, La Plaie seems to convey a more continuous impression of the restless activity of an individual mentality, partly because the two heroes are different kinds of people, Magamou a volatile, neurotic, rebel and Iyoni as a more rational and reflective personality.

Social depiction in the work has at least two functions. Firstly, though not in order of importance, it provides a means of commenting upon Magamou, in the market-place, or in the hospital, where views about him are presented in addition to his own and those of the author. The market-place provides the setting for the opening and the closing of the work, and his special personality is suggested by the contradictory emotions felt about the noisome beggar whom nobody tolerated when free but everyone pitied when incarcerated.(2)

(1) Ibid., p. 177.
(2) Ibid., pp. 12-13.

No-one, however, thought he was mad, a view used to secure his removal, and upheld by the hospital authorities, who then maintained the attitude that a detainee who protested was dangerous and should be locked up, while one who did not should continue to receive treatment as a harmless lunatic; hence Magamou's decision to escape, and hence also the views about him of Dr. Bernardy(1). The reader is made aware of the contrast between these views, that Magamou is insane, and the reality, which he knows from the main narrative. The Doctor Baillet is the only person to realise the truth of Magamou's individual personality:

> Sombre et extraordinaire destin que celui de ce malade. Il nous force à regarder au-dedans de nous-mêmes, à ramener à la surface nos cloaques, à nous mépriser. Si vous compreniez le sénégalais! .....
> - Je ne suis plus sûr de rien, reconnut Bernardy.
> - Le courage est de remettre en cause nos certitudes. Mais qui aura ce courage? Baillet laissa tomber les bras. (2)

This perception of the individual nature of Magamou is reinforced by the esteem with which the reader is invited to hold Baillet, and in it may be heard the authorial voice commenting upon the significance of the hero and the work itself.

Milieu also has the important rôle of a quasi-protagonist vis-à-vis Magamou, presenting a personality with which he has to reckon, and acting upon his experience in a direct and formative way that is not found outside this small group of works. His relationship with the market is a central factor in this process, reflecting his own inner tension by the paradoxical combination of affection and rejection felt by the inhabitants of the market for him.

(1) Ibid., pp.III-II5.
(2) Ibid., p. 2II.

It is his removal thence that initiates the ensuing traumatic drama, which continues to be motivated in relation to the market by the decision he makes to regain his mutilation because of the market-place's failure to recognise the new healthy Magamou. So it is with the hospital, the other local pole of interest. Here his relationship with society becomes even more paradoxical and unpredictable, largely because of the personalities representing it with whom he has to do: individuals, autonomous and self-opinionated as they are, it is the combined effect of Dr. Bernardy and Cheikh Sar which drives Magamou to escape. The treatment he receives upon his return, being looked upon as a modern Lazarus, and antagonised by the increasingly paranoidal Dr. Bernardy, in particular, plays a central part in his thinking and intentions of suicide. The world of Magamou is as a mistress, capricious, cruel, desirable, who rejects the new Magamou, perversely preferring her former lover, l'homme-à-la-plaie. His thoughts at the climax suggest this sort of interpretation:

> La vie. Une vision grandiose. Les prisonniers? des travailleurs. Son oeil crevé? un globe lumineux. L'argent? un infâme attribut des nantis. Le marché? un Eden. La ville? une amante. Une mère. Sa propre situation? un paradis. Tout était eau, air, soleil, amour .....Magamou mordrait à pleines dents dans le couscous de la vie; il boirait à pleines lampées aux sources merveilleuses du plaisir; il se baignerait de vie, indéfiniment. (1)

By these various means, Fall has established a hero unlike the usual kind to be met in the field, unlike in the sense that, organised although his experience is in the formal structure of the work, he stands as a free, individual and thoroughly realised person. He is free in not serving ideological or social comment or argument, and he is individual in that the various levels and aspects of his personality are clearly and peculiarly his own, at the centre of which exists a determinedly courageous and independent will.

(1) Ibid., p. 250.

He is thoroughly realised in that the data are presented so that the reader experiences Magamou at significant levels of his being and in a dynamic situation which flows coherently from his own nature. In this respect one may justifiably describe the work as the only 'psychological' novel; the conflicts which dominate the narratives of Kané's L'Aventure Ambiguë or Bhêly-Quénum's Un Piège sans Fin, for example, are more sociological or philosophical, whereas in La Plaie the subject is the hero himself rather than the conflict or the social conditions.

There is a relation here between the reality of the hero-creation and the idea of the hero as an outsider. It is true that the French-educated African hero largely figures as a member of alien system of values, in any case; with Fall's Magamou, Evembé's Iyoni and Bhêly - Quénum's Ahouna, however, the novel starts to concern itself with the modern European subject of the man whose situation in life seems to him to be essentially, rather than by accident of geography, peripheral. Their literary coherence is maintained by a malaise of reflectiveness about the value of life itself. The success of such a kind of novel depends entirely upon the dramatic or realistic recreation of inner life, the seat of the malaise, which must be central in the whole work. That this sort of work should exist in so small a minority in this field is not surprising, in view of the facility of social comment and of ready-made drama of social conflict, and particularly in view of the prevailing literary philosophy of social commitment, which depends for its dramatic effect upon the exclusion from the community of a person fitted to play a normal part in it. The modern 'outsider' hero is one who sees himself as essentially unfitted for such a part. La Plaie is to be seen as one of the most significant works of African fiction of its time, in view of its imaginative suggestion of such a man.

CONCLUSION

The novels of the area may nearly all be described as 'social' novels, in deriving their inspiration from contemporary social issues and their material from observation of the authors' social experience. In this sense, the group as a whole is autobiographical. The concentration upon the passive and unwelcome areas of African experience in the colonial and neo-colonial situations may be related to the inferiority feelings consequent upon the colour question. It may also be a recognition of the great disadvantage suffered by the African in society in relation to the technologically and authoritatively superior European.

Exceptions to this are noteworthy. The group of autobiographical works, a group largely dominated by this emphasis, and its resulting compositional stereotyping, includes Faye's Le Débrouillard with its free flow of reminiscence. The 'Incomplete Biographical Fiction' group, however, provides no example of a fiction free from socio-political inspiration. The third sub-group, that of 'Death-Orientated' novels, uses its material to make socio-political points. This sub-group does also move into a broader area of thought with Kane's L'Aventure Ambiguë and Bhêly - Quénum's Un Piège sans Fin.

The social-mirror approach dominates the situational novel, whether it uses the individual conflict-situation or the community conflict, past or present. The emphasis varies from definite protest to mores-description, but the works remain a means of racial assertion.

Only three works seem to move in an area largely free from this concern: Couchoro's Drame d'Amour à Anecho, Moukoury's Rencontres Essentielles and Fall's La Plaie.

The first has little realistic, technical or stylistic pretention, while the second may be said to lack the substance to be compared with other works. So La Plaie occupies a unique place in the field as a work exploring the psyche of an individual person for its own interest's sake. That this person is also a social outsider gives the work an added dimension of singularity.

The further restriction operates of a generally limited regard for the possibilities of novel-technique. The complexity of organisation and reference which would enrich the reader's experience is usually lacking, by virtue of the general concentration of interest upon the common theme. The 'autobiographical' sub-group moves towards artistic organisation with Laye's L'Enfant Noir in its poetic restatement of the culture clash. The open-ended life type attempts a formal expression in Nokan's Le Soleil Noir Point, but this seems largely superficial; Ouologuem's Le Devoir de Violence particularly, although limited in its local concern, nevertheless restates these concerns in a more universal frame of reference, and seeks at the same time to do violence to the traditionally unified novel-form. The fictional move towards objectivating the cultural malaise in a physical death, firmly based on the actual situation, provides perhaps the most dramatic and potentially most coherent means of restating the Third World dilemma in récit form. L'Aventure Ambiguë must be seen as the leading manifestation of this combination of universality and localisation, as well as of ideological involvement and artistic detachment.

The life-form offers the most immediate means of racial assertion and is consequently numerically important. The situation-form has been used more in its potential for wide social reference and for dramatic conflict.

The African novelist being, as it were, externalist, the lack of psychological requirements of this group is explanation enough of the greater success he makes of the social situation, with its opportunities for observing large numbers of people in a superficial manner. This form has been preferred by Beti, whose Mission Terminée, Le Roi Miraculé and Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba stand as leading achievements of the traditional novel form in the field in terms of human reality, range of social reference and novel-organisation. Whereas Mongo Beti has confined himself to the representative personal conflict situation, Ousmane has preferred the broader perspective of the 'community' situation novel and demonstrated its potential at the documentary level as well as the human in Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu perhaps, with L'Aventure Ambiguë, one of the major and most typical African novels of the period.

The general lack of complexity of means and of corresponding human reference results from the conception of literature as a tool for protest or social observation. The theme of the work being essentially the clash of societies, a clash usually seen in simple terms, there is little call for attempts to create a satisfying aesthetic experience deriving from a fine interplay of complexities and ambiguities. As the participants and background material are drawn from contemporary life, there is also little or no need of invention or imagination. The literature being social in provenance and purpose, there is little awareness of the interest or value of the exploration of the individual psyche. Consequently, works such as La Plaie or Rencontres Essentielles are rarities, dealing with solitary experiences outside the scope of the bulk of the field.

The future may lie as much with Onitsha type work as with the 'psychological' novel.

The present reality of the works corresponds to the social background not only in its thematic range, and in its lack of complexity, but also in the relationships and priorities of the different elements of the novel composition. Like Loba's Kocoumbo, the highly educated African sees himself obliged to protest against oppression of Black by White or, latterly, by Black, or to present the African as a member of a society fully equal by its racial identity to any other race of people. The consequence for literature is a debasement of human individuality and imagination, and an exaltation of actual documentation and social 'realism'. The novels, therefore, concern themselves with the actual world as the writers have interpreted it, and not with an imagined authorial world such as an imaginative novelist might have created it, and such as the Western critic may expect of a sophisticated novel. So it happens that the novels are seldom entertaining, but rather instructive or challenging, exception made of the irony of an Oyono, the violent titillation of Ouologuem, the amused detachment of Beti, and the lively style of Kourouma, among the few.

As an element in the composition, characterisation, including that of the hero-narrator, is generally subordinated to narrative interest and organisation. Character contributes to the social picture. In general it plays a passive role throughout the work, enduring rather than initiating events, and contributing largely by observation and comment. Passivity is the hallmark of the African in his experience of the European-dominated world. The dynamic of the works springs from the impact of collective forces and well-established social realities. The interplay of personalities, the impact upon lives of other lives, the ability to mould events, do not figure significantly in the field.

An important exception to this, Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu, shows the African realising the dangers of passivity in the colonial situation and reacting vigorously to find resources to assert himself as a man.

A further result for character of this socio-centred approach is the importance of typical social figures. For example, the student-returner is evidently central. The African mother-figure has been frequently referred to. The African diviner appears frequently enough to be seen as a symbol of disappearing old Africa, and his association with supernatural power adds a dimension to the world of concrete phenomena and rational empiricism, and it may be useful to consider this point briefly.

Much of the field assumes the reality of supernatural agency in the affairs of men. Much also does not. Of the latter, major works such as those of Oyono and some Beti, by their silence on the subject while dealing at length with traditional African society, seem to contradict the evidence of the many which incorporate this kind of material into milieu and action. The field is also divided in its attitude to the subject, between a condemnation, as in Ananou's Le Fils du Fétiche, Ouologuem's Le Devoir de Violence and Cissé's Faralako, and approval, as with its beneficent operation in Gologo's Le Rescapé de L'Ethylos, or Fall's La Plaie. Les Soleils des Indépendances of Kourouma, in keeping with its dual interpretation of the events, presents the diviner with ambivalence, at first as a cruel monster, and later as a miraculously gifted agent capable of loving Salimata. The passage of Africa from primitive society to modern urban living may be seen to be accompanied by a shedding of belief in the diviner , just as Hazoumé's Doguicimi gives an important place to the figure, in its depiction of early society whereas Ousmane's Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu, in its urban setting, ignores the matter.

The role of the supernatural remains an important adjunct in the background evocation of much of the work, and its agents often remain shadowy figures, representative rather than realised. In addition to examples adduced above, reference must be made to the more detailed appearance of their activity, with a college of diviners, and a major part in the final stage of the action of Bhêly - Quénum's Un Piège sans Fin, to the thematic juxtaposition of Catholicism and fetishism in Philombé's Un Sorcier Blanc à Zangali to the passing of an old order which included the pagan priesthood in Bhêly - Quénum's Le Chant du Lac and to the role of this element in Laye's L'Enfant Noir and its sequel Dramouss. It should be noted also that the manifestation of miraculous power is described in these works and others without any deference to modern scepticism, and indeed as if no scepticism could possibly be entertained about its reality. The occult produces its miracles in the same matter-of-fact manner as commonplace events are produced. The novelist does not generally hesitate to build this layer of his reality into the world of the novel, and he leaves the reader to include it in his customary suspension of disbelief without any effort to authenticate its circumstances.

The creation of character being reduced to that of outline or representative figures has consequences for the intrigue. This militates against richness and novelty of action arising out of rounded complex character, and against character initiating main lines of action. For example, Oyono's Le Vieux Nègre et la Médaille is more the story of response than initiative. His Chemin d'Europe, however, moves away from this position in that the hero makes an individual effort to change his situation. In general, however, flaccidity of character is reflected in unadventurous, even passive, intrigue.

This simplicity of conception, which relates the works more to the class of récits than romans, and deprives character and action of freedom in the name of a didactic teleology, is reflected in the approach to plotting and narration: the majority of works are unilinear in narrative construction, moving in a simple chronological progression. Beti, Ousmane, Bhêly-Quénum, Fall and Kourouma make use of a branching narrative to enrich the plot. These writers, particularly, use the potential of third person narration for dramatic irony, as for example in Un Piège sans Fin, where the reader is taken from the subjective awareness of Ahouna to that of M. Houénhou, and thence to that of the author, with resulting stereoscopic effect. Beti's Le Roi Miraculé, for example, also achieves a deepening effect in his presentation not only of the Catholic priest's view but also that of the African people with whom he is dealing.

The chronological facility is occasionally used to imaginative effect. The majority of works place the temporal point of view firmly in an objective present time, from whence the events are recollected and narrated, so placing the work in the contemporary world. A few, however, use a flashback technique: Kourouma's depiction of Salimata's sufferings as a girl gain particular force in being juxtaposed against Fama's resentment at her apparent sterility. Ousmane's use of recollection in Le Docker Noir serves appropriately to underline the injustice of his trial with Fara's account of the work he has written about the iniquities of the Slave Trade and the notorious Middle Passage. The same work adopts the detective novel's technique of the delayed explanation of the mystery by a narration of the crime at the end of the book. The employment of variation of temporal pace is unadventurous, apart from works which combine the situation and the historical panorama, such as Le Devoir de Violence and Le Crépuscule des Temps Anciens.

In these, centuries of national life are evoked in a few pages, to be followed by concentration upon the experiences of a few days or hours; much reliance is placed upon the significant scene and the general summary, particularly in the presentation of the whole life. One work stands out in the matter of time, Le Regard du Roi. Here, the allegorical world of the novel has its own laws of time, moving towards the ultimate consummation of union with the mystical king, an event which has no sequel. Laye has blurred the demarcation between actual time, such as that in which Clarence was expelled from the Europeans' Club, and the novel's time, in which Clarence 'witnesses' medieval barbarity, takes part in dream-like sequences, hurries away from the North and languishes in narcotic sensuality in the South, siring a crowd of coffee-coloured children, waiting for the arrival of his salvation. It is possible to see this use of time as part of the African or at least non-European counterpart to Clarence's typically Western obsession with measured daily time. The work is unique in the group for its imaginative treatment of this compositional element.

One important effect upon the narrative of a teleological didacticism is the lack of surprise and suspense. So the development of a novel by means of fresh insights and attitudes within a developing mind is comparatively rare. The attitude of the hero does change, from hope to disillusion, but this does not surprise the reader. Exceptions exist, such as Magamou's discovery that he cannot live without his affliction. Fama realises suddenly that the coveted chieftainship is within his grasp and that it is he that is sterile, not Salimata, and Doguicimi learns that her husband had been dead all the time she had remained faithful to him. Ousmane's railway workers discover that they have resources within themselves to overcome colonial power.

The general position, however, remains, that the interest of the work does not lie essentially in the development of character and plot; rather, it is found in the relationship between society, milieu, and the young African man.

Milieu, in its outward manifestations and in its beliefs and attitudes, dominates the French West African novel, and it is not without some justification that one may attempt to see in it an expression of local sociology. So, it would be possible to compile references to traditional local customs, such as circumcision, male and female, initiation ceremonies, wooing, betrothal and wedding customs, religious festivities, funerals, and to typical figures of the pre-technological age, as for example the diviner. Such has been the inspiration of Hazoumé's Doguicimi and Boni's Le Crépuscule des Temps Anciens, while others have used references of this sort extensively for different purposes. Thus, Ouologuem's Le Devoir de Violence seeks openly to provide an astringent antidote to the idealism of L'Enfant Noir, presenting a world of horrifying cruelty and suffering in contrast with the latter's image of harmonious traditional life. The process is an integral part of the assertion of African identity seen as necessary in order to counter the overbearing White presence.

Milieu is the central factor in the African novel stereotype. The dominant pattern is one of thematic contrast, the first term being the traditional way of life as it has survived into the twentieth century, the second being either the French way of life at home or abroad, or the modern urbanised, pre- or post-independence, African life. The initial movement of this novel-field sought to describe this surviving African past before it disappeared or was lost from memory, as in Hazoumé's Doguicimi and Socé's Karim, a movement re-emerging in the work of Boni.

The post-war pre-1960 group contrasted the values of the indigenous culture with the destructive influences of the alien culture. A further group now occupies itself with the newer social problems of post-Independence. A very small number develop the experience of an individual without reference to his problematic relationship with a changing and sometimes hostile social environment. In most of the works, the social reality which confronts the hero is an ineluctable power whose influence must be undergone, dominating his life from infancy to adulthood, and sometimes to death. He is a product of his surroundings, and when these conflict he suffers or dies. Rarely does he react, as in Ousmane's O Pays, Mon Beau Peuple, or Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu, to change his environment. He may consciously strive to move from one to another, as in Oyono's Chemin d'Europe; usually it has to be accepted.

There are more original and more extensive presentations of milieu and its role in the field than there are of character or of intrigue. Laye's L'Enfant Noir, for example, presents it in 'poetic' terms, seeking to portray its mystery and mysticism. Kane's L'Aventure Ambigue structuralises the environment with symbolic personnages. Hazoumé's Doguicimi collates a wealth of data to recreate the massive ritual of a people's past. Ouologuem's Le Devoir de Violence singles out the bloodshed of a history as a means of doing violence to popular conceptions of Africa. Socé's Mirages de Paris personifies the French capital as a hypnotic seductress who destroys the souls of young Africans. Other, less striking, but still integrated and realised, milieu-presentations operate in the work of Beti, Ousmane and Oyono, particularly, to suggest the actual world in which the young African has to contend with powerful social realities. Character, action, atmosphere, the main constituents of the novel in the Western tradition, in this novel flow from the social situation, not through it, or past it.

It is in this respect that the field is of a piece, and that its development and achievement are to be seen.

Prose style may be considered here as a constituent of the composition. The simply functional and ideologically purposive nature of the works militates against the notion of creating a sophisticated prose style. The large majority have an unconscious style, reflecting simply the object of immediate concern. A very few, referred to in the text, seek special effects by a sustained literary style. These also operate within a more artistically conscious dimension in terms of organisation of the total work, as for example, with Oyono in Le Vieux Nègre et la Médaille. Prose style here, , working functionally to convey meaning in a mode of actual reference, contributes to the clarity of statement of the works' themes. I have not encountered a style which appears to support Janheinz Jahn's view of the existence of an African style of French prose, in the way for example, of the African English of Okara's experimental The Voice. Concrete imagery and rhythm, for example, are general property, and there are no works available to illustrate the idea of dialectal speech-patterns being reflected in the French prose and mistaken for surrealistic expressions. The one work which could be, mistakenly, adduced in support is Kourouma's Les Soleils des Indépendances, whose style possesses unusual qualities of forcefulness, richness, and range of allusion; but these qualities come over precisely because the language is French rather than through a supposedly non-French element.

In view of the dominant influence of the implications of the society-based stereotyped concept of the novel, Fall's La Plaie, Moukoury's Rencontres Essentielles and perhaps Couchoro's Drame d'Amour à Anecho are seen to be particularly important.

It could be argued that the racial-conflict syndrome has outlived its usefulness as a thematic stimulus and direction, and that future movement in the fictional field could be looked for either in a deepening of the society-conflict approach beyond the hitherto general superficiality into the near-universality of character-creation, atmosphere and style of Kourouma's Les Soleils des Indépendances, or in a discarding of the didactic socio-political generalities and a concentration upon the particular experience of the individual person, as in Fall's La Plaie and Moukoury's Les Rencontres Essentielles. Couchoro's Drame d'Amour à Anecho suggests the possibility of a popular literature closer to the interests of the mass readership, which could develop a literature to provide a firmer base than the present one which owes much to Parisian publishing and sales. Another possibility, as one can envisage this fiction developing concurrently at several levels, is the growth of a genuinely free novel, experimental, or poetic, or formless, regardless of nationalistic or regionalist interests, a fiction which could reflect multi-faceted experience in widely different modes from those hitherto attempted. The late date of the significant works La Plaie (1967), Les Soleils des Indépendances (1968), and Rencontres Essentielles (1969), could indicate that this fiction is gaining its freedom from the severe restrictions within which it has willingly operated since 1926, the date of publication of Diallo's Force-Bonté, and taking opportunities which have been exploited by its European counterparts, for nearly two centuries.

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The titles listed at (a) below comprise all the novels I have considered as belonging to the field. The general works at (c) include only those which seemed most relevant to my study. The list of articles at (e) is not a complete statement of articles on the field, but does include a large proportion of these. The titles under (f) represent only a small selection of available critical work on the subject of the novel which has been helpful in suggesting lines of thought.

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