

**THE NOVEL ART FORM AND THE YOUNG HERO PROBLEMATIC IN CONTEMPORARY
THIRD WORLD/AFRICAN FICTION**

Noël DOSSOU-YOVO
Université d'Abomey-Calavi
BENIN

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Third World/African Fiction (in English, that is) has come a long way by virtue of the long recognised relationship between literature (oral and written) and society. Indeed it has not always been fully appreciated how far a particular society both influences the themes and subject matter of its representative types and also profoundly affects their formal development. This being the case for obvious economic reasons more at the periphery than at the center of the contemporary world, there is a pressing need for African literature, among others, to carry on the process of filling the cultural gap between Europe and America on the one hand, and Africa, South America and Asia (in broad terms) on the other. That is what globalisation (a long standing phenomenon) is all about. But in the meantime and in spite of appearances, there are forms of resistance from the South to Northern (cultural) diktat. As a result, both practitioners and commentators of African fiction are inclined to point out the main peculiarities of that fiction, whereas they sometimes fail to see that these are clearly determined by the African (Third World) cultural tradition and environments.

Fiction (i.e. the novel), as we know it nowadays, is a basically European literary product transplanted to other parts of the world, with the passage of time. But in spite of its peregrinations, barring the peculiarity known as "nouveau roman" in France, among other types of metamorphosis, the Novel at the periphery of the contemporary world, has retained the pertinent traits of its European ancestor, i.e. the history, characterisation, setting, plot, language and style.

This paper is a study in characterisation of an unusual kind in Third World literature, as in France and Britain both the subject matter and its practice have naturally had a rather long standing tradition which includes names such as Cosette, Gavroche, Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, Ralph and Jack that sprang from the minds of Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens, William Golding among so many others.

Those names are borne by young characters or heroes

some of whom are representations of their authors as children or sheer adolescents. More particularly, names in literature generally and in British fiction at its mature age (18th - 19th centuries) were highly instrumental in novel writing: hence their significant resonance when the novel travelled far and wide and landed in India or (West) Africa for that matter, where the "wretched of the Earth" were in dire need of ways and means of uplifting their humanity. At the periphery of the world nowadays therefore, biography and autobiography became ready tools for writers and novelists whose briefs had to do with demonstration of self-esteem, cure for self-debasement, indictment of oppression and vindication of the rights of the down-trodden.

But the scope of this paper goes a little beyond characterisation (however unusual its kind) and reaches up or out to literature, life and society in 19th century imperial Britain on or down wad to the Protectorate of India and the Colonies of Africa, South the Sahara in the main.

The question here is how does the land lie in Anglophone Africa and India in the field of the novel, given that special reference will be made to variations of that art form and to young characters or heroes in Rudyard Kipling's Kim, Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not Child* and Peter Abrahams' *Tell Freedom*. With respect to the topic of the paper indeed, those are thought to be relevant material for study of very well and not so well known novelists that hail from the near center as well as the outer periphery of the contemporary world.

* * *

1 - For Britain, Imperial India is comparable to 18th century America with the formidable difference that one sub-continent is East while the other is West of that country whose nationals were so puffed up with her greatness that they used to say (as they still do) in their National Anthem she should rule the seas and the world....

a) But "East is East and West is West", said Kipling, a man of two worlds, known broadly as torch-bearer of British imperialism in India, whose political philosophy and

literature can still be rightly seen in terms of bridging the cultural gap between Old Europe and Mythical, Enigmatic East. In four or five centuries since the arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers in the New World, America evolved into a centre superior to that other centre which Britain used to be, having become the Centre of the Contemporary World subsequent to the fall of the Iron Curtain and the demise of Communism.

Further East of former USSR, India made giant steps in terms of ownership of the Atom Bomb but has not yet reached anywhere near any of the Centres or poles of development in today's world, due to its teeming, poverty stricken population, among other apparently untractable circumstances.

But politics and economy aside, culture and literature including fiction have long been part and parcel of the Indian environment where human endeavours aimed at the betterment of the body, the mind and the spirit have paid accrued dividends and caused equally high appreciation in the enlightened world, due to contact with the West, namely.

"East is East and West is West", said Kipling. "But there is neither East nor West, Border nor Breed nor Birth,

When two strong men stand face to face,

Though they come from the ends of the earth", he went on to say.

As a matter of fact, it was the Westerner who went to the East first, for obvious reasons indeed. Louis Cazamian (1) and Raymond Las Vergnas classified 20th century British novelists and short-story writers into "lords", "problem novelists" such as L.H. Myers, C.S. Lewis, George Orwell, Evelyn Waugh, Arthur Koestler - "eccentrics" such as Frederick William Rolfe, Malcolm Lowry, Lawrence Durrell - "women" named Dorothy Richardson, Sheila Kaye-Smith, Victoria Sackville, Rebecca West, Rosamond Lehmann - "young" like Kingsley Amis whose first novel was *Lucky Jim* (1954), John Wain who wrote *Hurry on Down* (1953), John Braine, author of *Room at the Top* (1957), an excellent novel which, in the spirit of rebellion against a probably outdated social hierarchy tackles the problem handled by John Osborne, among others, in his play *Look Back in Anger*, the problem of 'hypergamy', that is to say, a young man's marriage with a woman above his station. Other young novelists mentioned in the above literature book are Doris Lessing (born in 1919...), author of *The Grass is Singing* (1949) and *Martha Quest* set in South Africa, William Golding (1911) whose first novel is the now well-known *Lord of the Flies* (1954), "a sort of *Robinson Crusoe*", Alan Sillitoe (1928) a plebeian and popular writer who exploded with *Saturday Night and Saturday Morning* (1954), followed by *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1960), a volume of short stories and *Key to the Door* (1962), an autobiographical novel.

Last but not least, and because Rudyard Kipling, our targeted author to start with has quite something to do with the literature of entertainment, even in *Kim*, the success story the young hero of which we are about to scrutinize - we want to draw attention to the 20th century English "Entertainers". Indeed

the so-called literature of entertainment, although it can be considered as craftsmanship rather than true art, has none the less its masters whose names - especially abroad, that is in Africa and the Third World for that matter, declare the presence and impact of English letters, even among educated readers.

A. J. Cronin, a prolific story-teller, delighted countless readers with *The Citadel*, a novel about a doctor who has to choose between money and research. He touched his readers' hearts with a combination of Dickensian generosity and rosewater sweetness in *The Green Years* as well as he stirred their souls with his ingenious *The Keys of the Kingdom*. In the same vein and happily more conclusively, three women novelists, i.e. Elisabeth Goudge with *Green Dolphin Country*, Margaret Kennedy with *The Constant Nymph*, and Daphne du Maurier gave proof, each in her own way, of a very feminine subtlety, of remarkable aptitude for telling a story and, in a general manner, of a dexterity most difficult to acquire and therefore subject to envy.

Hence, the "detective novel" which cannot be completely ignored when part of the subject matter is Kipling, author of *Kim* (1901) a novel that deals largely with the "Great Game", a brazen name of British Imperial Secret Service in India in the Eighteen Nineties. Conan Doyle had a triumph (however small in the history of British literature) with *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and seemed powerless to stem the enthusiasm of his admirers. He tried killing off his hero in order to get rid of him once and for all, but he was quickly obliged by his readers' indignation to bring him back to life.

The link that leads from Rudyard Kipling, author of *Kim* to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, brain father of *Sherlock Holmes*, is straight forward enough, except that between the Empire and the Commonwealth of Nations there was a deliberate shift (based on previous Anglo-American experience of Independence war) from tutelage to mutually agreed enlightened partnership.

Indeed, although Kipling and Doyle wrote adventure stories, they both express the conditions peculiar to their respective periods of British history. With regard to the author of *Kim*, if the times about which he wrote were not too distant from his readers, the places and people certainly were.

And except for the father of Rudyard, in the 1860's, few Englishmen knew anything about India, or, for that matter, about the British army private, before. Kipling's early work began to appear in *Henley's Scots Observer*. As for the talking animals of the Jungle

Books and *The Lama* and *The Grand Trunk Road* in *Kim*, what could have seemed more exotic to the ordinary English reader? And in this exoticism, Kipling was only following a tradition of Orientalism that had an important literary revival of interest in the East, as it had in the Romantic Period, and the Aesthetic Movement itself, to which Kipling was supposed to stand in sharp contrast.

More specifically, Robert Louis Stevenson, who immediately preceded Kipling as a popular literary figure, was a master of the adventure tale set in exotic places. So, for that matter, was Joseph Conrad, even then in the process of writing his stories about distant continents and islands. This paper was to be entitled: "Outside-Insiders' practice of the novel art form and the young hero tradition in Third World /African modern fiction". Too long a title indeed; but the gist of the finally admitted title lies in laying bare the links that connect a few novelists and prose writers who plied their art and /or craft in the shadow of the British Empire and then, the Commonwealth of Nations, including Britain, India and Africa alone, with special reference to the young hero syndrome.

In that respect and at this juncture therefore, three authors stand in sharp relief against the broad black-cloth of British literature or fiction and its ramifications in two continents i.e. Asia (India) and Africa which we choose to be our concerns for obvious reasons indeed. The authors are Kipling, Conrad and Orwell, out of whom only one will qualify, given the specifications of our chosen topic.

Indeed the members of our triumvirate had a few things in common. The three of them were, though in different degrees, foreigners in England, and that foreignness, that double vision (triple at least in the case of one of them), as it were, gave them a perspective on England (their parent or adopted country) and a sense of its political and moral role in the world which other writers did not have or did not choose to make so much of.

Then, for the three authors the English language was - again in varying degrees - a second tongue, one which had had more or less consciously to be learned and to the consequent special awareness of which can be added, at least in part, another quality which two of them (Kipling and Conrad) surely shared, i.e. stylistic brilliance, as well as a concern for what sometimes seems pure verbal display. This particular trait would have disqualified Conrad rightaway, from among the three, for our specific purpose regarding form, as per biographical data on the Polish origins of the author of *Heart of Darkness*.

In subject matter, the three writers were similar in many ways; they dealt with peculiar materials which forced them, all during their careers, to live down reputations as adventure story writers (more so with Kipling and Conrad anyway) and seek to establish moral and ethical codes (even

in *Animal Farm* in addition to politics), dramatizing the "human" condition in novels and tales pitting men, women and animals against the indifferent jungle, desert, sea and symbolic home /farmstead. Indeed, such a novel as *Burmese Days* for example, is, in conception if not in execution, typically Orwellian, and a work like *Kim*, for that matter, makes use of elements which figure significantly in Kipling's story of Imperial India.

But when the two components of our topic (i.e. the novel art form and the young hero element) in the Indian context are at stake, only Kipling, author of *Kim* qualifies, as he alone among the three "Anglo-foreign" novelists, meets the two criteria relating to (1) the novel art form in *Kim* and (2) *Kim* as the young (main) character in the book.

We choose to deal with Kipling's *Kim* because the author and his book represent a first departure from the British/Caucasian Centre in the direction of the world periphery. As a matter of fact, our value judgement will be in terms of British/European references, due to the overall personality and nature of the author and his book. He shares with George Orwell his birth in Bombay in 1865 whereas Eric Blair saw the light of day thirty-eight years later (1903) and had a far shorter life than him, their deaths having occurred in 1950 and 1936 respectively in England. But Kipling, more than Orwell, put to paper the experience of the long years he spent in India, and *Burmese Days* (1934) was the first and only novel of India ever written by that "archetype of romanciers- par-nécessité" who, at the end of his brief life, had to his credit six novels, five essays, three critical essays and one seminal autobiography, all of them dealing with man and society in pre and post Second World War Europe. In spite of his birth place and his later enrolment in the Burma/India police, Orwell definitely is a European/English writer. Likewise, Kipling plied his way from India to Europe, back and forth, and until fame greeted him in London at the age of 25, he had an identity comparable to that of his young (main) character who in the very first line of the book that bears his name "sat... astride..." between India and England. Actually Kimball O'Hara, son of a colour-sergeant in an Irish regiment called the Mavericks, *Kim* is early orphaned and brought up by a half-caste woman to look and talk like any other native boy. In real life, during his first six years, young Rudyard (watched over by ayahs or native nurses) ran free among the places, sights and sounds of the great subcontinent of India; he spoke the vernacular much more skilfully than he spoke English, and he stored up memories on which he could draw for the rest of his life.

Before his sixth birthday, however, the boy was taken to board in England, the custom of Anglo-Indians at the time, and for the next six years, the young Kipling and his sister Trix lived far from their parents in what, forever afterwards, the author was to speak of as the "House of Deso-

lation". Following on these events, the young Rudyard, then twelve, was enrolled in a public school, designed specially for those sons of military men who intended to follow in their fathers' footsteps. Kipling was at first something of an outsider-but he never gave up those qualities which set him apart from his classmates. All through his career at Westward ho! the young Rudyard read voraciously and widely (in spite of his bad eyes); he also contributed pieces to the school magazine, and wrote enough poetry for a small volume of his early verse, School Boy Lyrics, to be privately printed by his parents at Lahore in 1881.

Further, just about this time, the sixteen year old boy happened to fill out a rather superficial questionnaire, a document which, in spite of its limited scope, tells something of Kipling's thoughts at this early stage of his life. Indeed, next to "favourite poets", for instance, the young author-to-be wrote: "Whittier, Emerson, Browning, Tennyson, Poe", a fairly conventional list at the time perhaps, although the fact that three of the five poets are Americans may come as a small surprise for the type of man into which he evolved through success, somehow.

But the most prophetic responses to the questionnaire were the ones related to music and next to the phrase "most delightful composers", Kipling wrote "Rossini, Meyerbeer, and Wagner"; the choice of operatic composers exclusively - that is, of "literary" musicians - is of undeniable interest, a reflection, perhaps, of the young man's own literary bent nurtured by an inner cultural environment which was definitely European in spite of Indian appearances.

In 1882 indeed, at the age of seventeen but looking considerably older, oddly enough, the young Kipling returned to India as subeditor of the Lahore Civil and Military Gazette, and for the next several years served a difficult journalistic apprenticeship which taught him to "observe sharply, judge quickly, and report tersely". In addition to editing, one of Kipling's jobs was to provide "filler" for the columns of the newspapers, verses and short stories to stop up odd corners of the pages and many of these brilliant early pieces were later collected as literary works some of which were shipped home to England and began to establish a reputation in London for the young writer before he himself arrived there.

As a matter of fact, the return trip to England, at the age of twenty-five, was a roundabout one which took Kipling through China and Japan and across the United States. America called up in him rather conflicting emotions and attitudes. On the one hand, he responded favourably to the vigour of the country, its freshness, and especially to its pretty girls (he was later to marry an American). On the other hand, he was frequently outspoken and even tactless about what he did not like, a trait which prompted one American newspaper to observe that "the blazed at [them] with a ferocity that throws Dickens and Mrs Throllope [two earlier harsh critics of America] into the shade". When he finally reached London, he had a little trouble getting his career underway, somehow because, as he rightly asserted

"East is East and West is West"; but the books that had preceded him had done their work well. One day in 1890, the young Kipling awoke and found himself famous. All of London was talking about him, The Times had devoted a leading article to him, critics were already speculating about his future, a future indeed that had in store for British or European as well as (Third) World literati, a book entitled Kim.

A book is the end result of the innate nature with which is blended the knowledge and know-how acquired up to a given point in the life-time of a man or a woman. We have, so far in this paper, tried to shape up the identity of Rudyard Kipling in terms of its nature that dangled between East and the West of the world from the mid-Nineties to the dawn of the twentieth century when in August 1900, the writing of Kim was pronounced complete. We also endeavoured to establish the identity of Rudyard Kipling as a European, British author, so that we can make a brief objective study of his most seminal book by referring to British literary critical standards, without qualms, in spite of the overwhelming presence of India and its ways in Kim indeed.

b) Our topic being "the novel art form and the young hero problematics in contemporary Third world (African) fiction, having dealt with an author whom we see as one of the most significant representatives of that fiction, we now wish to demonstrate how far Kim is as good as its author in the above stated regard. To do this, we shall respond to three questions related to the true literary identity of both the book and its young hero or main character.

When Kim was first published in London, feeling was running rather high against some of the political positions with which Kipling's name was associated, so the new book was received as well as some of the earlier works written by the same man.

One purely aesthetic criticism centred around the question of the form of the story in the book. Had Kipling at long last shown himself capable of writing a satisfactory full-length work of fiction, or had he not? - this was the issue which concerned a number of critics at the time of release of the book. In truth, ever since the author had exploded upon the London literary scene in 1890 with his brilliant poems and short stories, critics had been wondering in print whether the young man would be capable of a more sustained piece of fiction. Then, ten years later, the issue was still in doubt. Neither *The Light That Failed* (1890-91), nor *The Naulahka* (1891-92) represented Kipling at his best, and as for *Captains Courageous* (1897), memorable though the tale was, neither its story nor its scope permitted it to be classified as a serious adult

novel. *Kim* was a different matter altogether; it was a work of the author's full maturity, it had been written carefully over a period of many years, it was long and ambitious and into its pages its author had distilled all his knowledge of India and all his wisdom about the world. In spite of all that, many critics were of the opinion that Kipling was not a novelist and that, otherwise, the fact would have emerged from *Kim*. Indeed, the author himself was in essential agreement with that judgement.

Writing about *Kim* years later in *Something of Myself*, his posthumously published memoir, Kipling spoke of the book as being "nakedly picaresque and plotless", an estimate echoing many of the comments which greeted the book on its first appearance. To many of the early readers, in fact, the episodic nature of *Kim* was just another illustration of Kipling's inability to sustain a narrative beyond a relatively few pages. To be sure, there was a general thread of a story that ran through the book, but not noticeably more than it does through *The Jungle Books*, for example. Actually, Kipling seemed to be at his best when publishing book length works that dealt with the same characters and backgrounds throughout and had a general forward movement, but were in fact sets of short stories.

Contemporary readers may wonder why there should have been such a fuss about the nature of *Kim* as a novel or not. If a story is good, such a reader will say, why argue pedantically about what to call it? The answer to this question is so be found in the history of the period during which Kipling wrote.

When seeking to judge Kipling as a writer of fiction - to place him in the hierarchy of prose-writers - critics at the end of the nineteenth century had, as figures against whom to measure the new writer, story-tellers who had all made their marks as novelists. Some of these English/great men and women, though by no means all of them, had written shorter works too-Dickens's *Christmas Carol* is an obvious example - but the short story as such was not yet fully established as a genre, and in any case no European or English writer had ever proved him or herself a great artist solely through his or her work in that form. Thus, when Kipling first appeared on the scene with his remarkable short narratives - some of which, like "The Man Who Would Be King", were quite substantial - the natural impulse of critics was to suppose that the new writer would soon be moving on to bigger things and to withhold their judgement of him as an artist until he had taken the right direction in novel writing.

Obviously, Kipling also felt this obligation to novel writing, for within two years, he had published two long works, neither of which was up to the quality of his short fiction. That the short story might in itself be a

worthy medium for an artist was something that a long time did not occur either to English critics or to the writer himself; and so it was only matter of course that when *Kim* appeared, everyone should have been very concerned with the question of whether or not Kipling had finally written a novel.

Another explanation for the disappointment with *Kim* as a novel lies in the literary climate of periods that led on to the publication of the book.

The fact that the work was, to use Kipling's own terms, "picaresque and plotless" would certainly not have been held against it in the eighteenth century, when Smollett and Stern were writing, nor would it have been cause for criticism in the 1830's when Dickens's *Pickwick* was being serialised. But towards the end of that same nineteenth century, a feeling had begun to develop, largely through the influence of such men as Flaubert and Henry James (his best man at his wedding with his co-author Wolcott Balestier's sister Caroline in London in January 1892). According to that new literary trend, the novel ought to be taken more seriously as an art form by its practitioners; it should cease to be a mere public entertainment, and make as stringent demands upon the artist as does, for example, the epic or the tragedy. It follows therefore that the light, easy-going quality and the apparent carelessness of the structure of *Kim* were bound to displease many serious readers of the latter part of 19th century who had already been put off by the "vulgarity" and "journalistic brashness" of many of Kipling's stories and who thus supposed that *Kim* was the sort of book it was because its author could not be bothered making its art form any better.

But there is an otherwise convincing response to the early criticisms on the novel art form in *Kim* which can be found in today's reader of the book. For example, because he sees the short story as an artistic end in itself and not just as preparation for a longer work, the reader today is less concerned than earlier commentators with the once burning question of whether or not Kipling could write a novel. Then, while he may continue demanding that novelists approach the craft of fiction with high seriousness, he will no longer equate such seriousness with carefully ordered, dramatic plot structures; he will thus be relatively undisturbed by the picaresque plotlessness of *Kim*. After all, throughout the twentieth century alone, the "classical" criteria for novel writing underwent the influences of psycho-analysis and the cinema, among others, begetting relatively new things like the stream of consciousness and the "nouveau roman" (new novel) that would have scared away Richardson, Jane Austen and even Henry Fielding, the English father of the picaresque novel. From the critical viewpoint, the "take all" approach whereby the novel

can accommodate anything, some literati would read and judge Kim in terms of the richness, vitality and variety of life in India and appreciate the loose and seemingly thoughtless structure of the work as a clear function of its content.

Last but not least, in a novel which looks like a backcloth that stretches far and wide in order to cover the whole expanse of India, there is a need to clarify the issue of characters in particular.

To be sure, the core element in character formation in a novel, poem or play is psychology or consciousness, and the viewpoint through which the reader observes the events in Kim is essentially that of the young boy himself. Indeed, the hero-worship of such men as Creighton, which would perhaps be ugly in Kipling, is perfectly understandable in Kim. Boys (even in Europe) don't tend to make abstract or long range political judgements; so when Kim likes someone it is because of some particular attribute of skill or kindness with which the boy can enter into a personal relationship.

Some critics suggest and it is obvious enough that Kim is an elaborate apology for British presence in India; but politics apart, in terms of art form, the book is a brilliant picture of a particular reality, a reality which has the force, for Kim, that "The Law" has for Mowgli in *The Jungle Books*, and which the young Chela would have no more reason to question than he would the rising of the sun.

This becomes especially clear from Kim's relationship with the babu, a word which is a term of contempt, a snobbish reaction on the part of people who have spoken English from birth towards those who are painfully trying to learn and who are rather absurdly proud of their accomplishment. But never for a single moment do we, encountering Hurree Chunder, Mookerjee through Kim, take this patronizing attitude towards the babu. The world of the Secret Service, as reflected through Kim's mind, (has) developed an aristocracy of talent; therefore, it looks as though praise of the Secret Service is not praise for its ultimate political goals (which may simply be taken for granted), but rather for its creation of such an aristocracy.

But all this would be very well, if the readers of Kim were limited to twelve year-olds in the West, or slightly older youngsters in Third World countries. As a matter of fact, it is hardly a defence of Kipling against the charge that the object of his book is to glorify the British in India to say that, on the contrary, Kim has no aim at all except that it goes along stringing out disconnected episodes or impressions.

The structure of the novel does however impose upon the story one inescapable theme or idea: the book begins and ends with the lama, and everything that happens does so within the framework of the lama's quest for the River of the Arrow.

At first, it seems that the lama's quest does not differ materially from the quests of other people he and his chela encounter on the Grand Trunk Road. All men are involved in a variety of quests, and it is in the nature of life to be a long, big quest. The beggar looking for his evening meal - the Secret Service agent

out to trap a spy, the lama searching for his river, are all one, or at least they seem to be. But towards the end of the book, the reader comes to realise that all the quests of this world are absurdly futile, since the triumphant conclusion of each quest is only the beginning of the next.

The lama's quest alone is real, for it is a quest for the end of all questing, and it is successful. In a trance, the soul of the holy man leaves the body and joins with the oneness of all creation. And looking back, the soul sees "the stupid body of Teshoo Lama lying down", sees the whole world of trivial acts it has left and knows them for what they are - games. The men who are still engaged in playing them may call them great games if they like, but games they are. The only reality is the oneness which the lama has achieved with the rest of all creation and of which his love for the boy is the symbol. And it is on this gratifying note that the novel ends.

2 - This paper aims at giving a dynamic clock-wise centre-periphery panoramic view of the novel art form and the young hero tradition in the twentieth century (contemporary) world.

We started with the centre, that is England, because the novel is a basically European cultural product: then, imperial India was our next port of call to the East. Now, in order to move slowly but surely through the periphery, we elect to go clock-wise from India to Africa.

The centre here, definitely is England where, according to Arnold Kettle (2), the novel originated where it did because of the changes which transformed the country from a feudal and traditionally oriented to an industrially slanted society. This is a view which our own investigation and hindsight support and which can be applied to Africa to some extent.

Social and cultural change indeed has both given rise to the cultivation of the novel form in Africa and largely determined that art form as well as its social and psychological content. As a matter of fact, social and cultural change in Africa, South of the Sahara mainly, has not involved merely a transition from an old agrarian situation, in which oral tradition is the predominant mode of cultural expression, to a modern industrial one in which writing in the Roman alphabet is a predominant mode, as was the case in Europe. The new African literary phenomenon is of the nature of a superimposition rather than a transition, giving a composite rather than a unified picture: elements of the old traditional culture exit side by side with those of the modern industrial culture, the oral tradition with the Western literary, and the traditional village with

modern town.

Furthermore, placement of the transition and superimposition components within the centre-periphery perspective leads us to South Africa and Peter Abrahams' *Tell Freedom*, an African country and an (auto) biographical novel that bear a sort of family resemblance to *Imperial India* along with *Kim* by Rudyard Kipling with reference to Apartheid and the young hero tradition (3).

a) Peter Abrahams' *Tell Freedom*, an auto-biographical novel, cannot be tackled effectively without prior clarification of the crucial and linguistic group (of authors) to which the novelist belongs or with which he associated himself as (South) African at least up to 1956 when he released his best African political novel.

As an African novelist, Abrahams, like many others at the periphery of the contemporary world, has written what can be broadly termed 'colour literature' with reference to 'literature at the centre of the world, the literature of Whites, if one assumes white as zero colour. More specifically, Abrahams' literary production is part and parcel of South African Coloured literature.

Peter Abrahams wrote a few poems in local languages but chose English as his priority means of literary expression in order to gain world appreciation and be read outside the borders of his native South Africa. A number of authors did the same too; they were not many and among themselves they made up a rather coherent group of people whose lives and works, on the whole; were different in nature from those of other South African writers (black or white) who used local languages or their own brand of English (4) for literary purposes.

Furthermore, because these writers were born in the cities, they do not have the feeling of belonging to the ways and customs of tribal (South) Africa. Indeed, apart from *Wild Conquest*, in which he presents a few sketches of the Matabele traditional life, Abrahams has hardly shown any inclination to dealing, in his novels, with the indigenous people of his native South Africa.

More generally, South African coloured writers' consciousness of their own peculiar identity connotes the feeling of uprootedness so characteristic of most people who live in great modern cities. No wonder, Ezekiel Mphahlele was the first and foremost detractor of the concept of Negritude which, to believe Senghor, is deep-rooted in old tribal Africa.

Another feature of coloured South African writers is that, because they are (at least this was their case exclusively starting from 1940's) city dwellers and often have a quick mind as well as a keen sense of awareness, they seem to be inclined to have a peculiar feeling of the grim rule of apartheid (5). Indeed, the coloured South African writers were invariably confronted with a dilemma: in their

innermost selves and because they were articulate enough for it, they felt an irrepressible urge to write. But anything they wrote often pointed out to social subversion. In the end, escape into exile became not only imperative but also unavoidable (6), as was the case with Peter Abrahams who could not have stayed in South Africa any longer than he did. In 1939, his capacity for resistance was reduced to nought and quietly as a clandestine passenger he boarded a ship that left Durban and reached Bristol after weeks at sea.

In its early days, (1950's and 1960's), South African coloured literature was dominated by the short novel.

Mphahlele's first publication was a thin collection of stories entitled *The Living and Deal* (Ibadan, 1961), just as La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* (Ibadan, 1962) and *And Three-fold Cord* (former Easter Berlin, 1964) contain many scenes suggestive of the grim life and juvenile delinquency in the African quarters of Cape Town.

In 1952, Peter Abrahams was sent by the London Observer to South Africa to report on the race problem, and the outcome of the journey back home materialised as *Return to Goli*, a book which is nothing more than a series of stories dealing in turn with "the Whites", "the Blacks" and "the Coloureds" of South Africa. And while *Return to Goli* has something of a "novel with a purpose", in that behind the book there stands the set purpose of giving direct information on the racial situation in South Africa, *Tell Freedom*, which comes next, is woven in more elaborate form that has nothing to do with journalism (7).

The difficulty in abiding by the rule of objectivity in novel writing is sensed in another way too: there was in fact hardly any South African author, living in exile, prior to majority rule in "the beloved country" - that did not feel an almost unbearable urge to speak and write of his own life. In 1954, Abrahams published *Tell Freedom*, an autobiographical novel which appeared in a French version as *Je ne suis pas un homme libre* (Tournai, Casterman, 1956). In 1959 *Down Second Avenue*, was released by Mphahlele; in 1960, Hutchinson wrote *Road to Ghana*; in 1963 and 1964 were released in turn *Blame Me on History and Emergency* by Bloke Modisane and Richard Rive. As a matter of fact, that wave of subjective writing corresponded to a broad movement of exorcism which allowed the writers to get rid of obsessions and idiosyncrasies due to apartheid, before they turned to an art where the topical did not obliterate the universal.

Finally, there is a strange paradox in the literary career of Peter Abrahams, which is that, having left his home country before Dr. Malan's harsh policy of apartheid entered into full operation, the author of *Tell Freedom* had not been able to share in the sufferings and struggles of the years that followed the Second World War in South Africa. That seems to be the main reason why most of other writers and

critics ignored him altogether with almost unanimous ostentation. Ezekiel Mphahlele, an old school fellow of Abrahams, in *The African Image*, (New-York 1962) made no mention of his books, except for *Wild Conquest*, first published in 1950. Lewis Nkosi, who was a promising playwright and critic at the time, did not say a word on Peter Abrahams in his *Home and Exile*, a collection of essays released in 1965, a year when Abrahams was an already accomplished writer, having published eight out of the ten books that have been put to his credit up this day. But in spite of those limitations of circumstance on his work, as well as new developments in this home country, Peter Abrahams stands as one of the best English speaking Coloured Writers that South Africa has ever had. Indeed, a few reputed African critics strongly satirized some of Abrahams' contemporaries, not him. The Nigerian playwright and critic, John Pepper Clark, spoke of those contemporaries in terms of cruel irony and Lewis Nkosi denounced such authors as Rive and Modisane saying that they wrote as though Dostoevski, Kafka and Joyce had never lived, and that they produced works where journalism is caught shamelessly dressed up in plumes of imaginative literature.

As a matter of fact, a study of Abrahams is worth the while even to day because of his originality and talent; and these lie in the author's contained style, his refusal of the sensational, his love for psychological insight, his search for balance in judgement, and his technique that aims at the highest objectivity in literature. In view of these, having lived his first twenty years in his home country, Peter Abrahams has succeeded in achieving what Nkosi required of a good writer from (apartheid) South Africa: to make a convincing and valid work of art out of social facts which were (and still are) the daily by-products of racial violence, social discrimination and "unfreedom of love". b) Now that the "literary" stage is set, it is convenient that we look critically at Peter Abrahams' *Tell Freedom*, an autobiographical book by a South African author, in which the main character is a young hero indeed.

Child character or young hero tradition is as old as the world; but from the vantage point of our own prescribed North/Britain - South/Empire/ Commonwealth literary corpus, we can see distinct influences from post Second World War British Fiction impacting South African literature in general and Abrahams' *Tell Freedom* in particular. Indeed, as a young hero book, *Tell Freedom* shares quite a few features with *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist* or *Coming Up for Air*, *Lord of the Flies*, by Charles Dickens (8) the paramount English novelist, George Orwell and William Golding, all British, among so many others. In fact, in the five novels mentioned above, the story is one of young boys that are made to think, behave and speak with reference or in contrast to adults in their search for sense and sensibility from boyhood to manhood. And in each book, each young hero or group of young main characters evolves in a given psycho-social environment chosen by each writer.

Tell Freedom also has a sort of family resemblance with a

novel like *Kim*, in that the two books belong to the periphery of the contemporary world, although or perhaps because their authors are a Coloured South African and an Anglo-Indian, son of two bred and born English man and woman.

The character-author similarity is worked out in approximately the same way, and as many critics say, *Kim* bears the stamp of "Kipling as usual" - that is, just another dose of imperialism and white supremacy, the mixture as before. *Kim* may look black or dark, the book is saying (according to those critics), but really he's white and that's all that matters. Whiteness will out. And the highest duty of a black boy in Imperial India who is suddenly discovered to be white is to educate himself properly so as to become a member of the white man's oppressive Secret Service (brazenly referred to as the "Great Game") and put down any attempts by his former intimates, who do not have the magic gift of whiteness to become their own masters.

In *Tell Freedom*, that magic gift of whiteness is out of question, that is, beyond the reach of both the author and his spokesman. Here, the double personality process in not from one race (black) to another (white), but in terms of a shift from a young boy or rather a child of "three, perhaps; or four; or perhaps a little older", called "Lee" - to "Peter", or rather "Peter Abrahams", his "real name", one hundred and fifty odd pages through the book.

The topic of this paper is at its lowest so far, from a top-bottom, centre-periphery perspective, and the dividing line will go further down as we move on from South Africa, to Zimbabwe and Kenya and stop our peregrination in Ghana.

Not that writers, or novelists for that matter at the periphery have less merit than those at the centre; quite the contrary, all told, they are more deserving, because they have come a long way and their endeavours are in terms of almost simultaneous apprenticeship and practice of a foreign language and culture as gateways for their own native ones to the new contemporary world.

Surely, Rudyard Kipling was born in Bombay, India; but his father, John Lockwood Kipling, was both an artist and a scholar and had worked as a sculptor during the building of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and as a pottery designer at Burslem. Kipling's mother, Alice Macdonald, was one of four brilliant sisters. His aunt "Georgie", in whose house he was to spend his only carefree days between the ages of six and twelve, was the wife of Sir Edward Burne-Jones, the celebrated Pre-Raphaelite painter.

His aunt "Aggie" was also married to a painter, Sir Edward Poynter, while his aunt "Louise" was the wife of Alfred Baldwin and the mother of Stanley Baldwin, who was later to be Prime Minister of Great Britain.

That was a sample family background to a literary celebrity who was born in the mid-nineteenth century (1865) and lived well into the first half of the twentieth (1936). That celebrity became Anglo-Indian by the force of circumstance, but remained English indeed and won the Nobel prize for literature in 1901.

As far as Peter Abrahams is concerned, his father came to South Africa from Ethiopia, a son of landowners and slave-owners who had seen much of Europe in the first instance. Later on, when Abrahams' mother talked about the father (who died when Peter was only toddler, as someone lifted him up and he looked into the coffin where the father lay) - she told wonderful stories of his adventures in strange parts of the world.

Abrahams' mother was a member of the Cape Coloured community. "Coloured is the South African word for the half caste community that was a by-product of the early contact between black and white. The first children of Europe who reached the Cape of Storms were men without women. They set up a half-way house to the East there. There was intercourse between white men and black women. The results were neither white nor black. So, the Cape Coloured began (Tell Freedom) p.10.

Abrahams' mother was the widow of a Cape Malay (a product of the East Indies' strain of the coloured community) who had died the previous year and left her with two children. She was alone except for an elder sister, Margaret. The mother, Margaret and her two children were living together when she met the man from Ethiopia. Margaret was the fairer of the two sisters, fair enough to 'pass'. Her husband was Scot who worked in the mines, and they had a little girl with blonde hair and blue eyes.

To that street and that house came the Ethiopian, the father who wooed and won the author's mother; then they married there and found a house of their own further down the house of which they made a home of love and laughter. From there, they sent their boy and girl to the coloured School above Vrededorp

From there also, the Ethiopian went to the mines each morning, like many other immigrants (from Scotland in particular), although not quite so (see Paddy, *The Red One in Mine Boy*, 1946). To that house he returned at the end of each day. In that house, the author's sister, the third child in the family, was born.

There at last, early in the morning of 19th March 1919, Peter Abrahams was born; and that is how, and when in the slums near Johannesburg started the story and life of the coloured South African writer, as reflected from his

birth up to the age of 20 (in 1939) in *Tell Freedom* (1954), an autobiography indeed.

When two people (s) belonging to different backgrounds meet, there is bound to be a clash or series of clashes in a variety of fields; hence Rudyard Kipling's celebrated "East is East and West is West", which is a global, all-embracing assertion. When Greeks colonised Romans and that Rome invaded other parts of the world, including Europe as far down as the Mediterranean fringe of North Africa, there were shocks that reverberated far and wide in space and time so that in parts of black Africa Latin and Greek were compulsory languages for study in secondary schools and at the university up to the late 1960's. Due to the ensuing clash of cultures where ways of Europe tended strongly to supersede those of Africa, writers belonging to the so-called "Dark Continent" felt they had to see to the preservation of their cultures including their own life stories and experiences, lest these should fade away and vanish altogether into thin air. Hence, the emergence and practice of the autobiography from the eve of the Second World War (when young Peter Abrahams had to leave his "beloved country") up to well into the independence years of African countries.

Peter Abrahams wrote on childhood and youth mainly in *Tell Freedom* and *Wild Conquest* in which there are young characters that are reflections of people in flesh and blood, bred and born in apartheid South Africa.

We choose to deal with *Tell Freedom* because of the linking nature of its main character, a young hero that can be seen half-way between Kim from India and Njoroge from Kenya.

In that autobiographical novel, a coloured African writer looks back upon his early childhood and youth years, at a time when the man's strong will got the better of poverty and colour-barrier. The novel contains three parts labelled "books" by the author; but we shall concentrate on the first two, in which the author appears as a child and young hero, the third part dealing with Peter Abrahams as an already adult person.

Unlike what obtains in Camara Laye's *Black Boy* or *Dark Child* (*L'Enfant Noir*), the first part of Abrahams' *Tell Freedom* tells indeed of sad experiences which poor little Lee had early in life. Without doubt, *Tell Freedom* is Peter Abrahams' autobiography; but in the first part of the novel, the main character is called Lee, a name true-to-life enough and indeed reflective of the coloured, Malay, Far East side of his mother in seeming opposition to his father who, because he was Abyssinian, "didn't have any white blood in him" and therefore "must have been black" [*Tell Freedom*, Faber and Faber, p.61].

As is related in number one part of the autobiography, like Peter Abrahams, his author, Little Lee was born in Vrededorp, a dark heap of dirty slums-near Johannesburg, in 1919. For the sake of realism therefore, the novelist makes his young hero carry that name through one hundred and fifty pages, that is close to half of the whole book, apparently due to the strong impact of that early period on the adult person whom the youngster grew into. The first (opening) picture we have of Little Lee is one where he is keenly associated with a raindrop world through which he sees his family: his mother and his father, his big brother Harry, his big sister Margaret and his not-so-big sister Natalie. And as he puts it: «that was the beginning of awareness» (p.12); he didn't know exactly how old he was: three, perhaps or four; or perhaps a little older.

Then one day in the street, he found a stray kitten he called "Moe", a name that flashed into his mind after his mother had asked for it. The little cat and him became close, inseparable friends that ate out of each other's plates, when the others were not looking! But soon, his "poor sickly little Moe" died, and Little Lee "grieved and grieved him so". Then brother Harry made a coffin out of an old fruit box and one Sunday morning they took him to the Ottoman's Valley above Vrededorp, and buried him. Thereafter, Peter Abrahams had flashes of memory, as he remembered the family picnics on Sundays, the stirring music of the Salvation Army Band and the peaceful laughter of their house because everyone in it seemed to be happy. The author also remembered his first experience of "crime and punishment", that is his stealing of sweetened condensed milk and the beating by his mother who wept while she beat him, which "made the beating all the more painful".

At last, Peter Abrahams remembered his mother and father merging into each other in his mind, as together, they were his symbol of peace and laughter and security.

But the order and stability that had been in the author's early life, dissolved when, like a thunder-clap in a blue sky, his father died, bringing to an abrupt end the initial, happy period in the man's life.

Then started a series of sad experiences which the young boy had with aunt Liza who to him became a person with a name, together with her husband, uncle Sam who lived at Elsberg where hunger gave mealie pap, moeroga leaves soup and crackling, a feast-like quality after cowdung had been collected to make the fire that cooked the food.

Young Lee's awareness of the world and people of flesh and blood was also in terms of meeting and getting along with friends, namely, Hotnot Annie who claimed to be pure Hottentot, and Oupa-Grampa-Ruiter who was a drover (9). Later in the novel, Lee found himself selling firewood to townfolk. He also once was an apprentice in a smithy; hence his friendship with a young black boy called Nondi with whom he earned a fat cake free of charge from an old black man with a pushcart outside Braamfontein Station.

As "book 1" draws to an end, young Lee's further experiences

(some sad, others happy and downright hilarious) are reviewed, percolating one another: he has nice little gatherings with family members, through long summer days, playing games, and ends up paying a visit to his mother at the Petersen house, Granny Petersen being his mother's aunt by marriage - after walking the full expanse of the landscape at "the upper end of Kruger station location". Then there was supper that comes to an abrupt end due to the unexpected call which the location priest and his wife paid on "Sister Petersen" protracted by too long a thanksgiving prayer to Lord Jesus.

But young Lee has grown, as on a visit to Harry his big brother, now a prisoner at Diepkloof Reformatory, he had his bitter experience of "pride and prejudice" and suffered the pang of watching his own brother break rock under the hot sun as a result of his arrest in a dice game. Thereafter, he had his own fight with a group of white lads, simply because he was black. Further, since stark poverty plays funny cricks on the poor, he was wrongly accused of stealing half a crown, "the only money in the house"; and he held his hands above his head while aunt Mattie went through his pockets. Next, outside the house, adding insult to injury, Dinny, the India hemp smoking crook, who "moved with the easy, springy grace of a wild animal" (p.143), forced young Lee to beg at crowded corners in the city; and this went on until the youngster told his big brother Harry who fought Dinny badly and put an end to more forced begging expeditions for the young lad....

Lastly, prior to "running" into a world completely different from that of his family, friends (both close and casual) and society at large, young Lee was an eyewitness to a row between Harry whom he realized he didn't know really and Enna, his young wife who had just given birth to a baby-boy. In the heat of the row, the youngster decided he must go, and as he did so, he thought of dark Emily, the other girl who had loved Harry who was a gay, spruce, clear-eyed and self-confident gentleman when he first met him in Elsberg, but then lapsed into a dirty, unshaven, baffled, bitter father, seething with futile rage, yelling at the top of his voice in a filthy room, now that he was saddled with a mad disillusioned young wife and an innocent baby-boy bawling on a bed in a stale smelling place. It was then that young Lee admitted something was happening to him and the way he saw the world in which he lived.

From those beginnings of a new awareness to the world of Education, there was only a short step which young Lee took gladly as at long last he revealed his "real name, Peter Abrahams" to the young white

woman who looked at him, then began to read from Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare.

As a matter of fact, it appears that the unveiling of the adolescent's true identity was a prerequisite for the reader of Peter Abrahams' literary production to understand how the discovery of the wonders of the Roman alphabet at the age of eleven or thereabout changed the youngster into an avid consumer of the invigorating food which for him Western education turned out to be.

Book 2 is only a little more (ten pages) than half of Book 1 and just as much (eleven pages) more than Book 3 in physical volume. This is explained by the sheer fact that the first (longest) part of the autobiographical novel takes care of the individual Peter Abrahams' life story from infancy till the time (when he was eleven odd years old) of his raiding of the world of book learning. That initial period is long because of the care and energy required to plant the seeds of a man's character in a multi-racial society.

After that painstaking exercise is done by dint of accumulating various early life episodes, the second part of the novel is only in terms of streamlining and consolidating mature, higher level experiences, such as attending school regularly (although this was "for three years"), learning "to read and write".

The author, recollecting what the second stage in his early life was like, remembered that Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare was his favourite reading matter and that he stole, "by finding", Palgrave's Golden Treasury, two books which, together with the Everyman edition of John Keats, were his proudest and dearest possessions, his greatest wealth. They fed the familiar, craving hunger that awaits the sensitive young and poor when the moment of awareness came.

Indeed, for young Peter Abrahams (who could no more be called "Lee" except by his mother, aunt Mattie and sister Maggie), with Shakespeare and poetry, a new world was born, as well as new dreams, new desires, a new self-consciousness.

More particularly, he desired to know himself in terms of the new standards set by those books; he lived in two worlds, the world of Vrededorp and the world of those books. And somehow, both were equally real; each was a potent force in his life, compelling. His heart and mind were in turmoil, and only the victory of one or the other could bring him peace.

This he achieved only when he succeeded in leaving his beloved country altogether, as reported at the end of book 3: young Abrahams got to Durban via Cape town through a most rugged, tough and crazy path. And even once he reached the harbour in Durban, he was not sure he would be free and board the "ship needing a whole crew"

(p.306), bound for the outer world and Bristol finally.

But Natal was only the tail end of the story in Tell Freedom. Indeed prior to getting to that far end (South East of the country), Abrahams (who was no more all that young, although barely twenty years old) tried Cape Town where he had a warm reception and a good stay with the Communists in the persons of Dr. Goolam Gool, his family and fellow-trade unionists.

In spite of all that, Abrahams left and went to Durban with his strong desire for an exit, because the Communists did not "allow for the human heart" and as physically he was no match to the Cape Coloured giants, the Indians in Natal, he thought, being more of his small size.

Abrahams found his way out of Apartheid South Africa in 1939, when he was 20 years old, which is a young age.

Book 3 in Tell Freedom should therefore be fully included in this treatment of our topic which deals with not only the novel art form but also the young hero element; but a little like the first part, the third and last "book" in the novel appears as a quick succession of episodes in which characters, the main one in particular, are in a hurry telescoping one another, on their way in and out of the various snapshots which the author carefully string out in a bid to form the large chain of the novel as a whole. Abrahams the novelist indeed, seems to have taken great care about the articulations of the many pieces that make up his autobiography which he organised in three broad strands containing items resembling undercurrents that keep coming and going from one part to another, in spite or in view of the author's efforts at delineation.

In that perspective, the novel seems to have been given a global bottom-top structure by the author, with characters, even names and types of activity belonging basically to specific levels of the edifice. For example, the spokesman of the author having been given two names throughout the novel, it appears that "Lee" which sounds rather like a pet name is reserved for the bottom level of the structure, that is book 1 in the novel the setting of which happens to be Vrededorp and its vicinity. Peter Abrahams, the author's "real name" appears for the first time on page 150 (in our edition), that is in any event a few pages prior to the middle, and runs through the second half of the novel where levels two and three upwards are to be found. But, each time the author's mother or sister Maggie and other close family members appear and communicate with Peter in books 2 or 3, they invariably call him Lee, this connoting the intimacy that binds mother and son, or sister and brother irrespective of time and space or place.

Likewise, when in Cape Town where he is supposed to be "a leader" and have as friends "rich people like the Gools", he meets and talks with Mag (his sister) who has come up to Cape Town as well, along with her new jobless husband Chris, because "things were bad on the Rand", he natu-

rally persuades his sister to "go back" where ma can help and advise" her. In other words, Maggie and Chris belong to the bottom level of the social structure in Apartheid South Africa, whereas he is managing to reach the top where things are better but tough in some ways (10). The sister and her husband should therefore not interfere and not put themselves in the wrong place.

Furthermore, there are types of gainful activity which in the novel (and in the country for that matter) - are carried out in specific socio-cultural and /or geographical set-ups.

For example, "Cape Town was full of skilled coloured cabinet makers" in the 1930's. But, oddly enough, whereas the opening chapter in book 2 in the novel is devoted to book knowledge and Western type of education, the following sections of that second part show young Abrahams hovering again at the edge of delinquency including helping aunt Matie sell skokiaian (the foul-smelling forbidden hot drink), and even carrying bags for white ladies at markets.

As a matter of fact, it is the second part of *Tell Freedom* which reflects most the problematics of the young hero in the whole novel. Surely, the roots of Abrahams' character and personality lie in the intricacies of such early life experiences as were assumed by young Lee in Vrededorp, Elsberg, Braamfontein and a few other locations on the Rand; but this was a passive process from the viewpoint of the young boy.

Book 2 in contrast shows a rather positive and downright active phase in the development of the autobiographical novelist's personality. It contains further negative events which a boy that has grown bigger, but this time, we have a new person who is keen on taking initiatives in terms of doing menial jobs in order to earn money and "learn some more" (p.187). As for what he wanted to learn, his answer to the "slim, neatly dressed, collar-and-tie young man" whom he met "on the other side of the parking space where on old Zulu with a push-cart sometimes sold coffee and fatcakes" (p.166) - was "to write stories" (p.188). The slim young man could not help offering there; but he insisted on pointing to a possible job opportunity for young Abrahams at the Bantu Men's Social Center. After performing what appeared as a rite of passage (that amounted to cleansing his dirty body) - young Abrahams got his first white collar job as an office boy, his very first step indeed up the social ladder, far away from the periphery but close enough to the centre of Apartheid South Africa a couple of years before the outbreak of the Second World War.

There he was blessed with the revelation of the American Negro World in terms of Folk Song and Literature; that was one of the three main influences which were going to frame up the future life of the young man who was then yearning to acquire as much knowledge of the "Civilised" World as could come his way.

The second paramount influence he assumed later in the novel and in life at the Diocesan Training College of Grace Dieu, through Father Adams, a man who loved good literature. In

that College indeed, young Abrahams was subjected to a routine schedule which comprised strict hours of study and office work. In fact, his sweeping, dusting and occasional typing at the office was meant to compensate financially the free education that was made available to a few young men like himself at the College.

In his study time, young Abrahams one day, wrote an essay which pleased Father Adams most, and at the end of class, the priest invited the young man to his rooms to look at his books and borrow any he might wish to read.

That night was the beginning of a series of tutorial lessons in spoken and written English, during which young Abrahams was allowed to talk freely of books, writing and writers with Father Adams, a "literary expert". And whenever Peter used big words or made clumsy sentences, Father Adams would send him to the Bible adding:

«The Bible says 'And Jesus wept'. ' Suppose that would be too simple for you. Read the Bible if you want to see how good English should be written!» (p.223).

Abrahams "read the bible and saw": that was where, when and how Abrahams' style and language were born.

The third, last and decisive influence on Peter Abrahams was the winning pull of Europe over and above the dazzle of Black America which gripped the young man's heart and mind when he paid his first visit to the Bantu Men's Social Centre.

True, the impact of the American Negro Folk Song and Literature on young Abrahams was and probably still is momentous in as such as William

Du Bois - among many others - undeniably provided our author with a key to the understanding of the latter's own world. Abrahams became "a nationalist, a colour nationalist through the writings of men and women who lived a world away from him" (p.197); he also owed them "a great debt for crystallizing his vague yearnings to write and for showing him the long dream was attainable" (p.197).

"Yet England, holding out no offer, not even the comfort of being among his own kind, countered that prime call, because men then dead had once crossed its heaths and walked its lanes, quietly, unhurriedly, and had sung, with such beauty that their songs had pierced the heart of a black boy, a world away, and in another time" (p.200).

Eventually, the "intelligent", far-sighted young man forms a satisfactory compromise: he decided he would go to England first and to America afterwards. He would go to the land of Shakespeare and others because the dead men who called were, for him, more alive than the most vitally living. In his heart, he knew his going there would be in the nature of a pilgrimage (p.200).

After July 1939 therefore, the young man (hero) left Durban to Britain where he lived many fruitful years, writing most of his books on (South) Africa. In 1953 he returned briefly to his once home country, on mission for the London Observer, to investigate race conditions there; the outcome of that stay was in terms of a book entitled: *Return to Goli* which he released the same year back in London. He left Britain in the latter part of the 1950's and settled in Jamaica where he has been active in the media (11).

3 - Cecil Rhodes (12) once had a wild dream which he believed was bound to come true in terms of "linking the Cape with Cairo" (p.301). Rhodes's dream was strongly nationalistic in that it was a reflection of the man's feelings in favour of British domination and against Boers' keenness on their autonomy in late 19th and early 20th century South Africa. As a matter of fact, prior to the long Boer political leadership in the country that lasted almost nine decades (1907-1997), the supremacy which accrued to the British in 1902 at Vereeniging (although rather short-lived: 1902-1907) had a great impact on the Cape-Cairo axis, at least up to Nairobi.

Indeed, throughout the 20th century, there was an incessant back and forth shuttling movement between White-dominated South Africa, and pre-independence Rhodesia (which evolved into Zambia and Zimbabwe in 1964 and 1980 respectively) as well as pre-independence or colonial Kenya.

Marjorie Olhude Macgoye, author of *The Story of Kenya: A Nation in the Making*, Nairobi, Oxford University Press, 1986, p.33 says that Kenya had three faces in the 1920's and that every Kenyan leaving his home for school or work had to be aware of them, given that a little England had been created, not only in Nairobi but in all the areas of European settlement. Macgoye on the same page 33 reports:

"in 1922, Winston Churchill, then Colonial Secretary, declared in London, with Lord Delamare among the listeners, that Kenya was a British Colony and could look forward to complete responsible self-government. That meant white self-government, but this did not happen. Kenya never became another South Africa or Rhodesia...."

Kenya went its own "African" way in the wake of the Mau-Mau rising (1952) which led to legislative representation, self-government (Madaraka) and total independence (Uhuru) in 1961, June and December 1963 respectively. Northern Rhodesia got its independence without much ado in 1964 although or whereas Kenneth Kaunda had to write *Zambia Shall be Free*, his autobiography in 1962. Southern Rhodesia (once white dominated) had more than a "white self-government"; it went against the immediate will of the British government at the time as Ian Smith (turned a hero) made what appeared as a daredevil "Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965". But the "African solution" came at long last after a fourteen year bush war waged by Robert Mugabe and his fellow-rebels who gave the country its independence and the proper name of Zimbabwe in 1980.

Although they are on the same Cape to Cairo axis, Kenya and South Africa as well as Ngugi and Abrahams are different matters altogether. Colonial Kenya, as described in Ngugi's *Weep Not Child* is less multi-racial than South Africa: there are no Coloureds or Boers and whereas the Kenyan Indians are strong enough in trade and business, they are far from forming in their country of adoption a socio-political class as powerful as is reflected in *Return to Goli*. Further, Abrahams is at least one generation older than Ngugi whose approach to writing is that of somebody who studied literature at the university.

Weep Not Child was the first novel to be published by an East African writing in English, giving Ngugi a certain distinction and making him something of a leader. To assess his position in relation to other East African writers, it is necessary to look at works by those writers at the time they achieved recognition, i.e. throughout the 1960's and 1970's, at least up to Ngugi's arrest (December 1977), detention (1978) (13) and release from prison (December 1978). Certain factors in Ngugi's own life help to explain the preoccupations of his writing. His radical and socialist ideas are deeply rooted in his own childhood experiences during some of Kenya's most turbulent days in the 1950's. His education at the elite Alliance High School (1954-1958), accounts for his sympathetic portrayal of Njoroye and Waiyaki, and his keen sense of Kenya's inequalities.

"Kenya never became another South Africa or Rhodesia" said Marjorie Olhude Macgoye in 1986, with regard to conditions which prevailed in the three countries in the 1960's. But as (political) conditions are likely to change more rapidly than otherwise, nowadays, because Southern Rhodesia turned into Zimbabwe in 1980, there-

after it stopped resembling even Black majority ruled South Africa of post-colonial Kenya for that matter.

During the period he spent at the University of Leeds (1964-67), Ngugi met left wing thinkers and Marxists and this influence emerges most forcefully in his subsequent writings, especially *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) and *Petals of Blood* (1977).

As a leader in an emerging literature therefore, Ngugi played a vital part in establishing and defining the status and identity of the East African, who had previously been seen and chronicled mainly through the eyes of European writers, explorers and missionaries. Elspeth Huxley's *Red Strangers* (1944) is a fine example of that sort of writing, but despite her feel for the land and her awareness of detail which are slightly reminiscent of Alan Paton, unlike the author of *Cry the Beloved Country* (1948), she registers situations from the standpoint of an interested visitor. The role of the African novelist, Ngugi says, is to dive "deep into the collective unconscious of his people", to "seek the root, the trend, in the revolutionary struggle" (14). It is not sufficient to restore the African character to his past; also the past must be "meaningful in illuminating today and tomorrow". (15)

In his writing, Ngugi begins with *Gikuyuland* before colonial invasion, registering, as Gerald Moore puts it; its essential harmony and unity when seen from above, its apparent division and hostility when viewed from below (16).

The first novel which Ngugi ever wrote is *The River Between*; *Weep Not Child* came only next. But while both manuscripts were ready for release, because of the appropriateness of its main theme, *Weep not Child* was published in 1964, a little after the year of Kenya's Independence; then a year later, *The River Between* appeared in print (1965) (17).

We choose to deal with *Weep Not Child*, because we find it not only typically more black African than Peter Abrahams' *Tell Freedom* (a Cape Coloured novelist's life story), but also more vibrant than *The River Between* (a rather linear maiden story that "start and finishes with the ridges" of *Gikuyuland*).

One good definition given of African Literature is that proposed by T.R.M. Creighton at the Congress of Africanists in Accra in 1962. The Congress defined African Literature as "any work in which an African setting is authentically handled, or to which experiences which originate in Africa are integral". *Weep Not Child*, by the way, fits squarely into that definition; moreover, while Abrahams' *Tell Freedom* is undeniably South African, this second/first novel by Ngugi belongs to East Africa: the setting is purely East African, and the experiences of the characters (whether a white man like Mr. Howlands or a Blackman like Ngotho) are deep-rooted in the East of the Black continent. The materials for writing the book are drawn from East African soil and the subject matter is a familiar one to every East African from the 1950's at least up till now. Except for the allusion to the Second World War in which, historically, both Africans and Europeans were involved, every other inci-

dent in the novel is an integral part of what Jean-Paul Sartre, the French existentialist, would call the "African soil".

The *Gikuyuland* with its ridges, endless red or dark roads, little or "great" lakes, as well as rift valleys are all deep down in East African soil.

The Mau Mau insurgents, the arrest, trial and detention of Jomo, and the famous time of Emergency belong to an important phase in the history of the struggle for Kenya Independence.

The experience of young Njoroge the hero, over that period, could be the experience of any young school boy in Kenya during the Emergency.

Weep Not Child significantly falls into two sections - "The Waning Light", set in pre-Emergency Kenya, and "Darkness Falls" - depicting as suggested in the title, the dark days of Emergency. The action of the novel revolves around the lives of different families, all with different status both socially and economically. Ngotho represents the traditional way of life - the common man as we would say today; Jacobo the modernized, privileged (East) African, and Howlands, the white (British) settler.

Njoroge, the hero, travels and lives through all three worlds, going to school and later falling in love with Jacobo's daughter Mwihaki, and also coming into friendly contact with Stephen Howland when they both meet at the Siriana sports field. This contact and apparent understanding on the part of the children is a deliberate suggestion by Ngugi to indicate that the children are the hope of Kenya. Whereas the fathers fail or/refuse to understand one another, the children are innocent of hatred, suspicion and prejudice.

Then there is an adoration of Education in *The River Between* which is re-emphasized in the first published but actually second written novel by Ngugi. But here one other factor emerges, that of Land, which is presented as the crucial issue leading to the crisis in *Weep Not Child* where Education is said to be good, and only good because it will lead to the recovery of the lost lands by the Blacks in the 1950's Kenya.

In *Weep Not Child*, the turning point is the workers's strike which results in Ngotho's attack on Jacobo and hence his having to quit Jacobo's land. Because of extra expenses therefore, Njoroge's education is threatened and we see him on the verge of despair.

But the most significant factor resulting from the strike, however, is that Ngotho ceases to work for Mr. Howlands. At the material level, this means that he and his family are now down and out, off from their ancestral lands. The recovery prophecy will not mate-

rialize in Ngotho's life-time; the pace of life is too fast for the old man.

Then simultaneously with the declaration of the Emergency and the arrest of Jomo, Njoroge passes to go to Siriana Secondary School. The way is now open, there is nothing to stop him and he goes there confidently with soaring hopes of acquiring education and then uplifting not just his family but all the land also.

It is the thwarting and destructing of these hopes that gives *Weep Not Child* its tragic status. It is also the fall of Ngotho from the strong pivot, respected father that he was once to the castration not only of his physical but spiritual manhood. Additionally, it is the stifling of the young love between Mwihaki and Njoroge that grows from grassroots and even in juvenile form able to withstand adult prejudice and suspicion.

Those are the issues which Ngugi highlights and not the physical Mau Mau war that ends with Jacobo, Ngotho and Howland dead, Boro near hanging and Kori and Kamau in detention, for the noble nationalistic cause.

4 - "East is East and West is West", said the Imperial poet-laureate. Indeed, although Kipling went on to say that "there is neither East, nor West, Border nor / Breed nor Birth, When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth" - the truth is that East Africa and West Africa, for example, are far from being alike in many respects: physical environment, people, climate, culture, ways to modernity, etc.

Kenya for a long time has been a loner in terms of access to the Western type of modernity, East of the Black continent, whereas on the West coast of Africa, "of woeful retrospection, as 'the White Man's Grave' renowned" - half a dozen countries, once colonies, French or English speaking, made the most of their encounter with Europe in the field of modern literature at least.

We can comfortably go back to the ebullient 1930's that led to World War II and caused a dramatic change in the thus far bleak image of the Black Continent, where many African intellectuals chose to express their ideas in literary form; and using English, French, Portuguese or local vernacular languages, they wrote novels, short stories, plays and poems, interpreting African life. But the favourite genre has been prose fiction

By 1969, Africans had written nearly four hundred (400) novels and more than five hundred (500) volumes of short stories, half of them in vernacular languages. The majority was published after 1945 when mass literacy campaigns and the expansion of African education led to an increased demand for credible reading matter.

South Africa produced much of the vernacular writings and West Africa had the lion share in terms of novels in English and French. But it was not until the early 1960's

that East and Central Africa became known for fiction particularly in English and Swahili. These two regions of the Black Continent were therefore late comers just as they have produced relatively less items of modern fiction in English for that matter.

Then a group of writers, most of them young (Nigerian) Ibos (during the 1950's) who had grown up reading Ekwensi, Achebe and others - chose to write a completely different type of fiction and set their stories in rural communities which had little or no contact with the city or the outside world. These were studies of culture conflict as well as celebrations of traditional tribal life; they dealt with problems arising from (West) Africa's encounter with Europe and pleasures of ordinary villagers. That was local colour fiction which, in terms of time, coincided with the Reformist phase (1964/65 onwards) and, with regard to space, started in Nigeria, then spilled over to Ghana.

In Nigeria, Nkem Nwankwo's *Danda* (1964) for instance, describes the escapades of a young ne'er-do-well who refuses to take life seriously until he marries and settles down to raise a family. Onuora Nzekwu's *Highlife for Lizards* (1965), Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and Asare Konadu's *A Woman in Her Prime* (1967) - record the miseries of ageing wives who fail to produce children and fear they are barren.

In a few novels, even the local gods and witches have important roles to play. The heroine in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966), an extraordinarily beautiful 'femme fatale' turned out to be an incarnated sea goddess married to a jealous Sea King. In E.C.C. Uzodinma's *Our Dead Speak* (1967), a dead warrior solves a murder mystery by speaking to his people at an oracle shrine, telling them the secret circumstances of his death. The authors of those novels sought not only to give a vivid picture of African life, but also to capture, as Achebe had done, the rhythm and flavour of native thought by transliterating West African vernacular imagery, figures of speech and proverbs into English [see Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* (1964)].

In Ghana, where the Nationalist trend of fiction did not rise until the downfall of Kwame Nkrumah (1966) - the local colour literature (fiction) manifested itself in a form slightly different from the Nigerian experience when two authors tried to re-capture their childhood experiences by writing fictionalised biographies of their fathers and themselves.

In *The Catechist* (1965), Joseph Abruquah (from whom the author of this article received a hand-written curriculum vitae in lieu of a biography in 1974 when the novelist was headmaster at Adisadel Secondary School, Cape Coast, Ghana) describes the unrewarding career of an underpaid church minister's helper transferred from one small village parish to another until his health finally breaks down and he dies.

Last but not least Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*

(1966) tells a similar story but from the viewpoint of a sensitive young boy whose father laboured as a teacher and headmaster at various Catholic mission schools in coastal and up-country Ghana.

The author of this article decided to dwell at some length on Selormey's only biographical novel for two main reasons (1) first, in view of the young hero problematics which is part and parcel of our topic (2) second, because peripheral authors need to be known in a bid to catch up with those already at the centre. Selormey's is minor in one major way: Unlike the majority of front liners in African literature who are academics or holders of university degrees, he studied physical education in Ghana and Germany and for seven years was in charge of physical education at St Francis Teacher Training College, Hohoe, Ghana.

He later became Senior Regional Sports Organizer for the Ghana Central Organization of Sport. Then he began giving more and more time to writing, including features and script writing for the Ghana Film Corporation, and was responsible for the scripts for two films: *Towards a United Africa* and *The Great Lake*.

A Ghanaian Sportsman, however good in the 1960's could not have written a novel with a purpose (roman à thèse), or a library success, under normal circumstances; and Francis Selormey was no exception: at 39, he wrote an autobiographical novel (his only one book ever published), which displays a remarkably consistent style made up of neatness and simplicity. Kofi (the young hero) was born, like the novelist himself, on the coast of Ghana, during the nineteen-twenties, his grandfather a wealthy fisherman, his father a teacher. The story that he tells, nearly forty years later, is of early life at home and in school. He describes vividly the talk and customs of the fisher people of the Gold Coast; he remembers with love his kind and gentle mother. But he recollects, too, the stern, hard righteousness of his father, as well as the beatings he suffered in the name of a Christian education.

A clash was inevitable but when it came and destroyed whatever was left of his childhood, Kofi discovered that beneath the fear and hatred he often felt for his father, there had always been a kind of suppressed, untold love.

That simple, straightforward story has almost nothing to do with the grandiloquence (however subdued at times) of *The African*, first published in 1960 and up to mid-1980's the best known novel from Sierra Leone, that tells the various episodes of a young man's

education and his subsequent rise to political power as national leader in his own country.

Nothing to do with the unavoidably high-flown language in *Ake: The Years of Childhood*, an autobiography which Wole Soyinka released in a bid to shed some light on his complex personality.

With regard to Amu Djoletto's *The Strange Man* (1967) and Joseph W. Abruquah's two novels released in 1965 and 1968 in London, however, there is a family resemblance in that the four novels (including *The Narrow Path*) are either strictly autobiographical or growing-up novels.

Djoletto, in his novel, traces the career of a young man who is sent to a boarding school as a punishment for having castrated a goat. He hates the many floggings he has to suffer at the hands of cruel teachers and headmasters, but he perseveres at school in the belief that if he goes through it, he'll "be a great man in future".

The rest of the story proves the young man right: on completion of his education, he gets a good job in the civil service and gradually rises to a position of prominence in his community.

Likewise, the adolescent hero of another "Bildungsroman", Joseph W. Abruquah's *The Torrent* (London, Longmans, 1968) - does not need coercion or persuasion to go to school. He is so convinced of the value of Western education that he is willing to walk twenty-four miles to take the Grammar School Entrance Examination. Although he later realises that his advanced schooling has Europeanized him so much that he no longer feels completely comfortable in traditional African society, he never regrets having been weaned from "bush ways". His education has made him a confirmed "albinophile", a worshipper of white culture, and he accepts alienation from his people as the price of assimilation into the "civilized world".

Francis Selormey's *The Narrow Path*, however, appears to be a border line case in terms of both contents and art form.

Indeed in addition to its contents (some of which will be touched upon briefly shortly), the book justifies its title by its strict linearity, sober descriptions, fine details, didacticism and a few other manifestations of a desire to fulfil a task of exacting craftsmanship.

Generally, the watch-word seems to be ambivalence, which the author adapts to occasions as they arise.

For example, one remarkable achievement is the balance held between the old and the new, most in evidence in religious belief and practice. In that respect, the rites of birth, marriage and death are celebrated according to a double (African and European) creed. Children are given two names: "...Kofi because he had been

born on a Friday. But at baptism, A Christian name of his father's choice"(p.11). Likewise, "the marriage was celebrated with all the traditional customs and blessed in the Catholic Church" (p.5). Also illness is treated through the help of both African herbalists and European doctors.

Contrast is used by the narrator recurrently to express his disbelief in the occult practices while describing them at length. The whole of chapter 10 is devoted to "The Witch". Yet, even Kofi's father, the narrator says, "no longer believed that all sickness was caused by witchcraft and he wished to bring up his family in the new ways" (p.5).

Again, by means of memory (or is it "flashback"), Kofi is able to watch the fetish priest who helped his mother through her difficult confinement, with the enjoyment and humour of detached curiosity. The priest, the wood carving of the god and the divination rite are described with great care and know-how, including recitation of "incantations in a secret language which he had learned during his years of apprenticeship" (p.10). But the whole scene ends with the priest demanding his fee and the final amused comment, "the priest did well that day, earning enough money to keep him for a fortnight" (p.10).

Chapter 4 deals with the birth of a sister and is an occasion for the novelist to review the old customs through the eyes of the narrator both as child and as adult, which enables the shuttle from belief to disbelief back and forth. A powerful ancestral spirit, Torgbui Zu (grandfather Anvil) is invoked to ensure a safe birth. On that brightly shining moon night, the narrator says, "I felt the spirits around me" (p.31).

The small hut covering the ancestor's grave in the middle of the compound is described in ambiguous terms of reverence and disrespect, as in the invocation scene prior to Baako's departure to the USA, in Armah's *Fragments*. Coins are thrown into the hut as propitiary offerings, but some children like his "cousin, Bensah - the third son") sometimes creep in and collect them to buy sweets. Then the narrator dismisses the belief that those children are cursed and bound to grow up to be thieves as childish, opting for the common saying that he who steals an egg will rob a cow. Thus is created an atmosphere of romance in a world of reality.

The child's "naïveté" is also used to parallel the two (African and Christian) religions and express the pride of African identity: the prayers addressed by the child to the god of foreigners has no answer and his "faith in the missionary priests and their god is shaken" (p.32); but the ceremony to Torgbui Zu ends with a rite of divination whereby the spirit responds favourably to the invocation and will ensure a safe and easy birth.

Generally, the description of Ghanaian (Ewe) traditional lore is worked out in a non-committal style; yet it provides a wealth of details which suggests the natural leanings of the author. But again, in the long depiction of the rites of birth, an ambiguous, slow and sure shift is observed from the old "superstitions" to the new, modern "faith" through the rationally acceptable symbolic ceremony and the offer of sensible advice.

Soon after his birth, Kofi falls ill; then his mother and grandmother fearing for his life and indeed thinking he at one moment he was dead, the mother goes to the fetish shrine. The priest, said to be very knowledgeable in matters of life and death, immediately detects the child is alive. Tricky as he is, the priest solemnly declares the child dead but warns he will charge a heavy fee if he succeeds in bringing him back to life....

Selormey goes on smoothly building up his multifaceted structure: supplying ethnological information to curious non-Ghanaian readers, laying claim to scientific knowledge freed from superstition - partly, one suspects, to assert his equality with Westerners inclined to despise Africans as gullible people, denouncing the cleverly exploitative clergy and creating a climate of romance that tends to make Kofi an aspiring, probable hero.

This atmosphere is mentally eye-witnessed by the modern reader of (African) fiction whose intelligence precludes blind acceptance of the miraculous while his or her unconscious can be stirred through a slanty presentation of the heroic archetype. The death-resurrection motif fits the mythical desire as well as the wisdom of the initiatic rite of passage, just as trials provide focus for nearly all chapters in the book, chapter 8, "My Bad Year" being paradigmatic of this repeated pattern.

At the age of nine, Kofi falls ill again, as "some witch or wizard was trying to steal my life from me" (p.71); then, the heroic-death-resurrection model used at his birth reappears in another plausible story which ends with his beginning "to recover", when "all hope" for his survival has been "lost" (p.72).

Kofi's painful experiences, a number them resulting from his father's severe beatings, are given to be sensed as rites of growth: "That day saw the end of my childhood" (p.81, "I knew myself clearly for the first time" (p.141), "I felt grown up, almost a different person" (p.162).

A parallel motif emphasizes the exceptional qualities and privileges of the young hero. He is repeatedly said to be the youngest among his school mates (pp.41,62,83). He has a box of his own, a most uncommon thing for a boy of his age in that (West) African environment, all the more so since "not even" his "Aunt Anny owned a box of her own" (p.48). Kofi is also only boy in town to wear shoes (p.17). When he is fourteen and closes his formative years, Kofi is confident enough to give himself the image of "an

all-round person", good academically to pass the examinations, interested in games and sports, playing in the school-teams, practising music and deriving "a lot of pleasure in trying to paint" (p. 162).

Finally, as he entitles his story "The Narrow Path", a recurring image (pp. 5, 70, 85, 125, 145, 171), Francis Selormey makes Kofi conform to the heroic pattern while managing to keep him within the limits of a non-mythical mentality. The belief in magic, as means of winning the love of a girlfriend, is presented as inevitable, "for it was woven closely into the lives of all my people" (p. 152).

But Kofi is shown to restore his westernised self-respectability by attributing the belief to the child he no longer is.

Yet the unacknowledged power of this belief diffuses a supernatural atmosphere quite suitable to the creation of an unassuming heroic figure.

CONCLUSION

The writing of this article was prompted to us with our sudden, unexpected realisation of the basically evolving nature of literature, human and social sciences in the world, with special reference to Western Europe (Britain for that matter) and the Third World with emphasis on India and Africa, South of the Sahara. This article is only a beginning.

It may in future find its way into a fullfledged book focussing on the changing reality of African literature as part and parcel of an African Studies Programme for Francophone Africa. Indeed throughout the contemporary world, that is, in Europe (Britain, France, Germany, mainly), America (the USA, Canada and South America), Asia (where the process is gathering speed in Japan especially), and Anglophone Africa (Ghana, Nigeria and even South Africa) - African literature (both oral, labelled "orature", and written in African and European languages) has moved from its initial "centres" that are Britain and France to various "peripheries" worldwide. (18) For reasons of academic convenience, the author of this article decided to shift "right" towards the Centre and show the basic language links that bind novelists such as Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling, Peter Abrahams, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Francis Selormey who hail from England, England and India, South Africa, Kenya and Ghana, respectively.

The other complementary binding link was the young hero problematics, given the primacy of the self in all human endeavours and the overriding fact that main characters in the novels studied here young as they are, represent people of flesh and blood, born to and bred in England, India, South, East and West Africa.

When Kim appeared in 1901, almost every knowledgeable reader at the time was concerned with the question of whether or not that Kipling had finally written a novel. The main criticism had to do with the fact the work was, to use Kipling's own terms, "picaresque and plotless". A little like the reading public in the eighteenth century when Smollett and Sterne

were writing, but going beyond the influence of such men as Flaubert and Henry James whose opinion was that the novel ought to be taken very seriously as an art form by its practitioners, the contemporary reader of Kim could accommodate the picaresque plotlessness of the book in terms of the richness, vitality and variety of life in India.

But Kipling in his time had a writing brief quite different from those of Peter Abrahams, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Francis Selormey, decades later in Africa.

Though Abrahams insisted on his identity as a Coloured South African (he may have opened up through further worldwide experience and passage of time) - these writers could clearly be set apart as non-White, downright African authors. Their literary works (novels mainly) have given rise to a less substantial critical material for reasons pertaining to culture which has tended to be "global" for a longer period of time than the contemporary reader is generally aware of. But language is the root of culture which also includes history, geography, anthropology, sociology, economics, politics and a few other ingredients, each of which has its old and new phases or its "past" and "present" according to Wole Soyinka, Literature Nobel Prize Winner who insists that the "past" of Africa "must address its present".

This definitely is a positive pointer ideologically; but as far as literary appreciation is concerned, it does not make things easy for the literature or fiction produced of late (1950's, 1960's onwards) by Africans in European languages. Such literature or fiction for a long time has been evaluated largely in terms of Western (British, French or even American) criteria, which does not stand to reason. Naturally, the ideal situation is that African literature or fiction should be written in African languages including the cultures they carry along with them.

But, given the yawning gap that needs to be filled in that regard (which African Studies Programmes are meant to cater for) - the interim practical solution calls for the emergence of (modern) African standards that would serve as guidelines for appreciation of the value and relevance of African literature and Arts which have so far been unduly submitted to foreign critical rules sometimes too blindly applied by so called African literature critics. (19)

Bibliography

A - General (chronological)

1- R.H. Snape, *Britain and The Empire (1847-1947)*, Cambridge University Press, 1945.

2- Louis Cazamian and Raymond Las Vergnas, A

History of English Literature (Modern Times: 1960-1963)
- Book VIII, J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd, London, 1964.

3- H.L.B. Moody, *Literary Appreciation*, Longman, 1968.

4- Emmanuel Obiechina, *Culture, Tradition and Society in The West African Novel*, African Writers Series, 1975.

5- Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and The African World*, Cambridge University Press, 1976.

6- E. Gachukia and S.K. Akivaga (ed), *Teaching of African Literature in Schools*, Kenya Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1978.

7- Eustace Palmer, *The Growth of the African Novel*, Heinemann, 1979.

8- Chinweizu, O. Jemie, L. Madubuike, *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature*, Fourth Dimension, Enugu, 1980.

9- Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1987.

10- *Annales de la FLASH*, Université Nationale du Bénin, Editions du Flamboyant, n°5, oct. 1994.

11- Noël Dossou-Yovo, *Individu et Société dans le Roman Nègro-Africain d'Expression Anglaise de 1939 à 1986*, Tomes 1,2,3, Ed.L'Harmattan, Paris 1997.

B- Individual Novelists Studied (Creative and Critical)

1- Rudyard Kipling

a) Creative: *Kim*, 1901

b) Critical: *A Treasury of Short Stories*, Bantam: New York, 1957

Randall Jarell, ed., *The English in India*, New York, 1963

Randall Jarell, ed., *The English in England*, New York, 1963

(r)Kipling As A Short story Writer

* J.M.S. Tompkins, *The Art of Rudyard Kipling*, London, 1959

* C.A. Bodelsen, *Aspects of Kipling's Art*, Edinburgh, 1964.

(r)Kipling and Politics

* Noël Annan; "Kipling's Place in the History of Ideas", *Victorian Studies*, III, IV (1960, 323-348.

* Richard Faber, *The Vision and The Need*, London, 1966.

* George Orwell, "Rudyard Kipling", *Essays*, New York, 1954.

* Edward Shanks, *Rudyard Kipling: A Study in Literature and Political Ideas*, New York, 1940.

* Lionel Trilling, "Kipling", *The Liberal Imagination*, New York, 1950, pp.120-129.

(r)Miscellaneous

* C.E. Carrington, *The Life of Rudyard Kipling*, New York, 1955.

* Morton Cohen, *Rudyard Kipling to Rider Haggard: The Record of a Friendship*, New York, 1965.

* Bonamy Dobree, "Rudyard Kipling", *The Lamp and The Lute*, revised edition, London, 1964, pp.38-64.

* Elliot L. Gilbert, *Kipling and the Critics: An Anthology*, New York, 1965.

* Roger Lancelyn Green, *Kipling and The Children*, London, 1965.

* Mark Kinhead-Wweekes, "Vision in Kipling's Novels", *Kipling's Mind and Art*, ed. Andrew Rutherford, Edinburgh, 1964.

* C.S. Lewis, "Kipling's World", *They Asked for a Paper*, London, 1963.

2- Peter Abrahams

a) Creative: *Tell Freedom*, Faber and Faber, London, 1954.

b) Critical:

(r)Novels and Books

* George Orwell, *Coming Up For Air*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1939.

* George Orwell, *Nineteen-Eighty Four*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1949.

* Ezekiel Mphahlele, *The African Image*, Faber and Faber, London, 1962.

* Hernton Calvin, *Sex and Racism*, Paladin, London, 1970.

* Michael Wade, *Peter Abrahams*, MacMillan, London, 1972.

(r)Articles

* Achebe, Chinua, "The black writer's burden", *Présence Africaine* (English ed.), n° 59, 1966, pp.135-140.

* Achebe, Chinua, "The English Language and the African Writer", *Morning Yet On Creation Day: Essays*, Heinemann, London, 1975.

* Creighton, TRM, "An Attempt to define African literature", Gerald Moore (ed.) *African Literature and the Universities*, Ibadan University Press, 1965, pp.84-88.

* Dipoko, Mbella Sonne, "Cultural Diplomacy in African writing", *Africa Today*, 15 (1968), n°4, pp.8-11.

- * Jones, Eldred D., "Nationalism and the Writer", J. Press (ed.) Commonwealth Literature, Heinemann, London, 1965.
- * Mphahlele Ezekiel, "The language of African literature", Harvard Educational Review, 34 (1964), pp.298-306.
- * Okpaku Joseph .O., "Culture and criticism: African critical standards for African literature and the arts", Journal of the New African Literature and the Arts, n°3 (1967), pp.1-7.
- * Povey, John F., " The quality of African writing today", Literature Review, 11 (1968), pp403-421.

3 et 4- Ngugi wa Thiong`o and Francis Selormey

- a) Creative: Weep Not Child (1964)
The Narrow Path (1966)
- b) Critical
- (r) Studies in African Literature

- * O.R. Dathorne, African Literature in the Twentieth Century, 1976 (A complete coverage of novels, plays and poetry in English, French, Portuguese, Afrikaans, Swahili and other African languages).
- * Shatto Arthur Gakwandi, The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa, 1977.
(Twelve key novels by Oyono, La Guma, Beti, Abrahams, Achebe, Aluko, Soyinka, Armah, Duodu, Ngugi and Ousmane are examined for their literary and social importance.)
- * Ngugi wa Thiong`o, Homecoming, 1972.
(Essays on African and Caribbean literature, culture and politics.)
- * Ngugi wa Thiong`o, Writers in politics, 1981.
(Ngugi's detention without trial can now be seen to mark a new phase in his development as a writer. The title of this collection gives notice of a commitment which has already become apparent in *Petals of Blood*, his fourth novel published in 1977.)
- * Eustace Palmer, An Introduction to the African Novel, 1972.
(Twelve key novels by Achebe, Laye, Amadi, Beti, Armah, Ngugi and Okara are carefully introduced and evaluated.)
- * Edgar Wright, The Critical Evaluation of African Literature, 1973.
(Seven essays on the contribution of criticism to the development of African Literature. Special Studies of Soyinka, Ekwensi, Ngugi, Okigbo and Rabearivelo.)
- * Christopher Heywood, Perspectives on African Literature, 1971.
(contribution include Ngugi, Irele, Ikiddeh and Rubadiri - Essays on topics which make an important move towards the widening of critical assessment)
- * Emmanuel Ngara, Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel, 1982.
(This book gives valuable help in the difficult topic of evaluating style)
- * Emmanuel Ngara, Art and Ideology in the African novel,

- 1984.
(This is one of the first books which seeks to make a significant statement on the state of written literature from a Marxist ideological perspective. It takes further the ideas which have been widely welcomed by teachers and students in *Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel*.)
- * G.D. Killam, An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi, 1980.
- * David Cook and Michael Okienimkpe, Ngugi wa Thiong`o: An Exploration of his Writings, 1982.
(This book has the benefit of showing the trends that were emerging in the writer's earlier work. The authors also show that Ngugi's activities over the years indicate steady development in his thinking about social issues.

(r) African Literature today Series

N°5 - The Novel in Africa, 1972
(Reviews - Articles and comment on Achebe, Aluko, Armah, Aquiano, Laye, Ngugi, Nzekwu and Soyinka)

N°7 - Focus on Criticism, 1975
(Articles on Critics on African literature, the Nigerian Novel, L.S.Senghor, Ayi Kwei Armah, Ngugi, Oyono)

N°10 - Retrospect and Prospect, 1979
(Reviews - Ten years of African Literature Today
Articles on Reassessment of the African Novel, Trends in African theatre, Recent poetry from Africa, Yambo Ouologuem, Kofi Awoonor, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Ayi Kwei Armah, Richard Rive, Arthur Nortje, Cyprian Ekwensi, Ngugi.

(r) "The Child and The new Literature in English". Commonwealth: Essays and Studies, Volume 15 N°1. Autumn 1992

FRENCH ABSTRACT

L'objectif majeur de cet article est de « rassembler ce qui est éparé » ou qui tout au moins donne cette impression dans le domaine du Roman contemporain du Tiers Monde d'expression anglaise où le personnage principal est non pas un adulte mais un garçon voire un adolescent.

Quatre romans ont été choisis pour étude du double point de vue de l'Art romanesque et de la problématique du héros adolescent, à savoir *Kim* de Kipling, *Tell Freedom* de Peter Abrahams, *Weep Not Child* de