

won him a literary prize. Although they write about their country, and they have, from time to time, borrowed from their country's myths, these young writers' works are merely an extension of the European literary tradition. But they are informed by a freshness and strength that is often lacking in much of the writing of decadent Europe. John Pepper Clark, for instance, describes the god of creation in "The Imprisonment of Obatala" in sharp, vigorous images:

*And He, roped in the tightening pit of alarms  
Dangles in his front, full length.  
Invincible limbs cramp'd by love of their strength . . .*

WOLE SOYINKA HAS A REAL satiric streak in him; his strength comes mainly from his ability to stand outside himself; the self-contemplating irony also means self-discovery. In his poem about the African immigrant in London there is a beautiful mocking tone:

*My dignity is sewn  
Into the lining of a three-piece suit.  
Stiff, and with the whiteness which out-Europes  
Europe.*

Okigbo, whose second volume of poems is to be published shortly, is small, sardonic, and detests much of the posturing to be found in the literature which consciously extols the virtues of being black. His favourite pastime is tracking down "negritude" poetry, which he finds intolerable, and reading it aloud, which makes it sound even more wooden, accompanying such a performance with cackles of laughter and much stamping of feet. Perhaps the poem he dislikes most is by the Senegalese poet Léopold Sédar Senghor, dedicated "To the American Negro Troops" of the Second World War whom Senghor describes as "warriors whose mouths are singing flowers".

Of the Nigerian novelists, Chinua Achebe is by far the best. He is a soft-spoken young man in his early thirties. In his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe wrote in simple but masterly prose, recording faithfully and affectionately the life of an Ibo village he saw falling apart under the impact of a grinding technological civilisation, charged with a high-powered Christian religion. He has enormous integrity, and commands the respect of the younger, more experimentally daring writers. Achebe acknowledges the debt he owes to Conrad.

BEST KNOWN ABROAD and very controversially discussed at home is Amos Tutuola, who has delighted English readers with his re-creation of Yoruba myths in *The Palm Wine Drinkard*, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, and others. He works as a clerk in the Nigerian Broadcasting Company and has had little education. Often the younger writers appear to be amazed at his phenomenal success abroad, and while admitting his inventive powers as a story-teller they tend to attribute his success largely to exotic interest by English readers in the way "a primitive story-teller" has bent the English language to his resources. Tutuola churns out his stories in two weeks; there is a rumour that he refuses payment in cash and will accept only clothing material. When I made an appointment by telephone to see him for an interview he sounded quite doubtful; on my insistence

he finally agreed to see me the following evening, but in predictably African style, failed to appear. When we finally met a day later he dismissed the incident with a disarming candour: "Well, sir, you see the train disappointed me."

A pioneer novelist in English is Cyprian Ekwensi, whose descriptive passages vividly capture the teeming atmosphere of Lagos life. His second novel, *Jagua Nana*, relates the story of the dwindling fortunes of a pretty but ageing prostitute, and will be filmed shortly by an Italian company. Often Ekwensi shows signs of bowing to sensationalism, crowding his novels with loud violence and sex. He is uneasy with the young writers and tends to be imperious; on the other hand they regard some of his work with indulgent humour, often dismissing him as "a good journalist".

What is perhaps most striking about the literary atmosphere in Nigeria is the sense of freedom, of crowded intellectual disorder, the sweltering heat of talk, of discovery, of experiment, and of the candour of criticism—all of which must produce good literature. John Pepper Clark sits at "Kakadu Nightclub" in Lagos casually watching prostitutes plying their trade. He is soon joined by Yemi Lijadu. Wole Soyinka drops in later in the evening. Christopher Okigbo arrives after driving 80 miles from Ibadan; and there is soon a hubbub of talk against the din of blaring highlife music. These writers are young, ubiquitous, impatient, excitable; and they are all helping to tell the story of a nation. ●

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## In a World that Harries

*Then and Now*

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### CARL MAFOKO

BETTY BRACED UP on the bus seat as she pushed her hands deep in the armpits for warmth. Her mind was trifling with the idea of a friend that Lady Selborne had lost to Phelindaba.

Behind, the dreary stretch of the arm of the Magalie mountains loomed above the smoky village of Lady Selborne . . . a dying village with memories lingering about the yawning remains of houses.

Betty spoke. Her friend Jane was in a happy mood. "So at last they are gone, Jane!"

"Yes, Betty," Jane joined, taking up the end of the interesting news she had broken to her friend. "What else could result from her fancy? There you can see again the real Mary at work. What a clever girl she is! Her husband would not hear of it. The boring type I tell you. Are they not settled now, far from the quarrels."

"I pity her temper. Mary is too rash; what do you think, my dear?"

"And Dan was too good for them. Looks like he was in the aprons and his wife in the pants. Too good for that quarrelsome neighbour. Now it's all over."

"Only hope she won't do much of the talking over the fence. She was always for sharing a bowl of salt from next door."

"But there everything is yours. No next door neighbours; no dirty children to spoil your furniture."

"Which they haven't," Betty said triumphantly. "My dear, how will they cope up with Pheli life anyway? I mean the shining stoves, kitchen schemes and all that."

"Got to work hard, my dear, like others. *En jy moet cleverig wees* (you must be sly)."

"And the rent, and food. Dan doesn't earn much."

"But one month's sparing would not be much, Betty. Just to furnish the house, see. How you are despised if you live in an empty hall like most of the old families. An old bed and a bench is all you find. . . . Ha, ha! my sister, you know I nearly laughed my lungs out at that story of Dambuza. Just imagine a man gambling for furniture. . . ."

"Food and furniture, then rent. That is what makes me doubt. No Jane, my dear, my child must have food. Enough every day."

"And clothes of course, my sister. I can see you are right," Jane agreed.

"Ha! you can never know how these people get money. . . ."

Here Betty paused, Jane being lost for words. Betty just gazed in front.

YES, ENOUGH EVERY DAY. . . . In her expression you see a vague longing, for something she cannot get. It has been carried down the ages this unrest, they say; and in what various forms among the lower people!

"I'm afraid, Jane. . . ." Betty paused again. You see the glint in her eye; you feel the throbbing in her heart. No, it is in you. A wind is sweeping your breast, reminding you of fearful words you once learned from poetry, which now shape themselves in you thus:

*The gale, it blew so hard among the massy trees;  
The gloom of it, it frightened the lonely African child;  
She sought protection in the quelling assurance  
Of her mother's hearth, so full of glowing warmth.  
The burning fire was in the red, red embers.*

*The gale, it blows so hard now in the bosom of the  
young girl;  
It fans the fire of the soul to amber in her shallow  
eyes  
At every turn she prays for safety in a world that  
harries;  
Crying: good luck, come my way, good luck.*

*Then Nomsakazi and Tselane lustily braced their  
bodies as they danced,  
Chanting folk-lore, as they gathered wood and reed,  
For father's thatch that must protect them against the  
rain.*

*Now it's Jane and Betty, restlessly swinging their taut  
hinds*

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CARL MAFOKO is the pseudonym of a learner-journalist in Pretoria.

*On the hard seats of a rocking bus,  
Vigorously clutching at fleeting ideas,  
Seeking for one that must offer them security.  
The world offers no comfort . . . not even the world  
of husbands.*

"TALK OF MY house in Pheli?"

"Yes, my stoep and yard, every piece of it, they say."

"No, municipality. That's the municipality's property."

"And the escape from nuisance landlords, Betty."

"No, my dear, that's to change from talking-landlord to landlord that lashes."

"Well . . . eh . . . the municipality is a harsh landlord; there you're right, my sister. How I respect your sense!"

Betty just stared again, her parted, thickish lips essaying a word; her white pearly teeth arrayed in a pleasing outline.

"Look, last year James was ill for four months. . . ."

"And you exhausted all your savings on rent; shame!"

"Oh, Jane! whose savings? Just explained our position to our landlord. And what a rattle of a landlord we have! But oh! he understood. He always does when it comes to such pathetic cases. So what matters the silly chiding?"

"And we always laugh at their singing. Is it not nice, my sister!"

"Yes, and they are ridiculed. So we come out victorious."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jane when she realised the bus was stopping where she alights. She has to hurry. Ten minutes left.

What is perhaps most striking about the literary atmosphere in Nigeria is the sense of freedom, of "So," shouted Betty behind her, "we meet tonight by the fire on our stoep. I have news for you, dear Jane."

Jane does not reply now; and Betty understands. The girl's mind is fixed now on her work. She must hurry.

So Betty just stares, and shows her shining teeth, her parted lips thickish and brown. She is speaking, yes, but to whom. . . .?

Young woman was not wont to muse in this forlorn manner. ●

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