

Darkness and Light: the Interplay of Pessimism and Hope in the Poetry of Richard Ntiru

A. RASHEED YESUFU

THE POETIC VISIONS OF the Ugandan writer, Richard Ntiru, crystallize around his pervasive notion of a world riddled by tensions and conflicts. In his poems, this sublunary state is simultaneously reflected within individuals and groups and in interpersonal relationships. Thus, in most cases his articulation of a general state of malaise only serves as a means of objectifying what is happening on a more concrete level of life. Some of his visions often intimate both the existentialist and absurd, whereby his apparently "meaningless" and contradictory expressions are the façade of a subsurface web of meanings which speak of the futility, corruption, injustice, poverty, moral decay, and cultural confusion of man. In fact, these constitute the strings of the tensions and conflicts which he sees as tearing man apart. All these elements obviously feature in Rosette Francis's characterization of the poet's work collected in *Tensions* (1971):

Ntiru is one of the young writers who live in an age of an accelerated degree of change that produces profound alterations and tensions. [In his poems] we are surrounded by a cosmos and an environment which are made up of tensions.¹

Except for the mention of Ntiru's name, this could very well describe the young T. S. Eliot with his large imagistic reflection of an age of futility and tensions in poems beginning with "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." This similarity of motive seems to explain Ntiru's fascination with T. S. Eliot and other Western poets concerned with the conflicts and tensions of human life. It is not surprising therefore that, like Eliot, Ntiru also believes in and adjures man to seek an eternal fountain to

quench and rejuvenate his parched soul. This dual concern with the lugubrious and unenchanted side of humanity as well as the glimpse into a hopeful future that man could reach through a purposeful effort make up the darkness and the light of Ntiru's poetry.

Ntiru's dominant vision of human nature is that of futility, loneliness, insecurity, and ultimately meaninglessness. This view of human life in society is definitely influenced by his knowledge of modern European literary attitudes. This fact creates an initial problem for one who comes to his work with the single-minded expectation of finding the more popular perception of man held by his contemporaries in East Africa. The question an uninformed reader of modern African literature is bound to ask is, "Is it actually compatible to the African psyche and social nature to feel a sense of futility, loneliness and insecurity in the midst of the much-avowed communalistic spirit of Africa?" The answer to this question is yes because the society about which Ntiru writes is not the pristine type which thrived on a communalistic ethos. Rather, it is a world similar to those portrayed by Ayi Kwei Armah in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) by Kofi Awoonor in *This Earth My Brother* (1971) and by other writers who mirror the modern soul in its perennial confrontation with the disillusionment of its time. It is also a society which, according to Francis, has undergone "an accelerated degree of change that produces profound alterations and tensions." These changes in society, the way man reacts to them, and how he now behaves toward his fellow men account for his sense of futility, loneliness and insecurity. Since, as Pope remarked in *An Essay on Man*, the proper study of mankind is man, Ntiru studies man in his society to investigate the actual nature of the human kind.

In order to give man a local dimension compatible with his reflection of his society, Ntiru often operates along a line similar to that of his contemporary Jared Angira. However, in place of Angira's bellicose Marxist dichotomy, Ntiru sees men in his society as divided into two economic classes. These classes are not exclusive, since one could easily move from the lower to the higher one, as in "Flashback."² But it is always clear that he sympathizes with the "paupers" of his society. Hence, in spite of

the absence of the revolutionary zeal of Angira's language, the tone of Ntiru's work is never mistaken in its purely moral concern. He is concerned not with revolution but with the exposition of human failure and the need to reverse its trend, possibly through a spiritual retreat.

"Whispers of the wind," the very first poem in *Tensions*, opens on the subject of fear as a controlling emotion in man. It intimates those crawling sensations which one feels while in a situation which engenders suspicion and fear without any discernible reasons. Hence man here is "strung on pulleys of unknown fears / to scale the city of vanishing walls." Man is portrayed as a being who is plagued by irrational fears: he fears the midnight at dawn and is not in love with light. This means that he exists in an ambience of fear from which he is mostly powerless to extricate himself. But the purely existentialist fear of which Ntiru speaks in the first few lines of the poem apparently symbolizes the actual fears he sees controlling the lives of the members of his society. In this context, it becomes the mutual fears arising from the unhealthy nature of social relationships. For the less-privileged section of the society, it is a fear of the unknown and a deep sense of uncertainty about how they will take care of their daily needs in a society ruled by an overbearing and indifferent upper class. For this latter class, on the other hand, it is a fear which emanates from a gnawing sense of guilt and insecurity in a social setting in which they have, by their own actions, constituted themselves into enemies of the populace.

The basic contradiction of man is the burden of "The Masqueraders" (15), which portrays man as often acting in direct contradiction to what he feels. The poet presents man as a being in whom action is not invariably an index of inner conviction or feeling to express man's innate irrationality. This is the major idea conveyed by the opening lines of the poem:

When the crocodile crunches its prey,
 Is it pity or pain moves it to tears?
 When a dog crushes bone to nothingness,
 Is it remorse that makes it weep?
 (Brides weep on their wedding days. . .)

The poet's use of the crocodile and the dog as classic examples of the contradiction he discerns in human nature is doubly significant. First, the animals objectify an inherent insincerity. Thus, although both animals are engaged in actions which they cherish most, they camouflage their actual emotions with tears, as man does while in his contradictory humour. Second, these symbols are highly emblematic figures drawn from the oral culture of the poet. They invalidate any suggestion that the poet is incapable of operating outside the narrow parameters of an academic/classroom poetry. This is what Roscoe implied in his statement that the poet's work lacks the freedom which bespeaks an independent artistic life.³ If the apt use of these animals as symbols in this poem is not an example of an iconographic independence on Nturu's part, then what is? A similar use of animal imagery/symbolism is found in the works of other African poets, notably Okot p'Bitek who employs them to depict the ferocious nature of the politicians in his society. In West Africa, one is readily reminded of a similar strategy employed by J. P. Clark, especially in *Casualties*.⁴ In this technique, all of these poets rely directly on the oral literatures of their immediate cultural backgrounds. In these oral literatures animals are endowed with the power of speech, and they also have well-known behavioural traits. So when Nturu chooses the crocodile and the dog, he is packing into these symbols a heavy load of suggestions of insincerity. The human beings of his society contradict what they claim to be or stand for, and this the poet regards as an act of insincerity which includes them in a group with the dog and the crocodile. When in the last line of the stanza he says: "Brides weep on their wedding days . . .," he clinches his point because he regards the weeping of brides during their nuptials as contradictory and insincere: it fits neither the mood of the occasion nor the actual feelings and sincere expectations of the brides.

In the second stanza, both the time and the human elements coalesce in the poet's depiction of the untruthfulness of man. He sees the time as "this unsung and songless age" in which men wear their masks by day and pretend to be what they are not ("We wear ourselves inside out"). They do this in order to be able to continue in their roles as masqueraders: "To avoid the

prying rays of the sun / That focus our actions into question marks." It is even curious but original that Ntiru's version of masking has nothing to do with W. B. Yeats's in his poetic theory of masks/anti-self. While in this latter type the masqueraders affect what they are not but aspire to in life, in Ntiru the masqueraders seem to engage in a compulsive but "selfless" round of masking which leads only to an existential artificiality: "We are not satisfied with reality; / Our natural port is artificiality."

But in his characteristic sympathy with the destitute and the paupers of his society, Ntiru seems to imply that those who are really involved in masking are the rich; hence he writes, "Even the destitute embrace our plight: / They compete with glee to subsidize the rich." These lines make it clear that the first person plural "We" consistently employed in the poem is still exclusive. It is the multiple voice of the chorus of masqueraders in the society. In what seems to be a more passionate confession by this voice, the poem closes in lines which further impress their crass contradiction:

We love shadows
 they are unreal;
 We wear rubber teeth
 they can't bite:
 We walk at night
 to mingle with the dead.
 We rape the moon because it won't scream,
 We regard our life as an endless dream.

The sentiments expressed here with such an apparent air of accomplishment only fix in our minds the ineffectuality and contradiction of these men. They mingle with the dead and live a life equivalent to an endless dream. This means that they are irretrievably caught in their masquerading, which is an unreal state of existence; nonetheless, they will continue in this unreality "as an endless dream."

In "The Roses are Withering" (17-18), the poet proceeds through a sequence of aphorisms to express some aspects of human nature. In this opening line, two opposing phenomena are locked in an inexorable conflict: the "rose" that symbolizes youth, freshness, and beauty is presented in a fatal collocation

with “withering” which means death. Without questioning the aesthetic (symbolic) merit of this line one might, nonetheless, agree in part with Roscoe’s comment on the “academic” nature of Ntiru’s poems. The rose (unlike the crocodile, or the dog in “The Masqueraders”) is not an indigenous African symbol. The symbolic equation of rose-fading-fleeting time-death, of youth/beauty-death is, strictly speaking, a Western poetic convention whose employment in African poetry betrays sheer academism on the part of the poet. Ntiru is very conventional in this sense when he relies on the “rose” to convey the theme of human fatality. But this is what he goes on to do in the next three lines:

Our birth is only our death begun
Life tapers waste away the moment
They are lighted. (17)

This is an old idea which has come down to us from the Greek dramatists; but in the context of modern African poetry it is an idea which the Nigerian poets J. P. Clark and Wole Soyinka have given their personal marks. With Clark, it is the cry of the new-born child that presages death and the world beyond. In the birth of a baby we also have a prefiguring of death. Clark also sees birth as the beginning of death and he captures both events in the baby: a birthday to him becomes (or is essentially) a deathday.⁵ Similarly, Soyinka, in his “Seasons,” sees the maturity of the corn as a symbol of death at nativity.⁶ According to him, the appearance of the tassels on a corn which symbolizes its birth (or maturity) also means death to the plant, since it calls for harvest. Ntiru follows this popular tradition in his handling of this motif. For him, the moment a taper is lit to begin “active life” (like a new-born baby) it begins its “death.”

In the second verse paragraph of the poem, Ntiru shifts his focus (without any apparent transition) to a more mundane aspect of human nature. His focus rests on woman. In a sentence which echoes the ambiguous bluntness of some lines of Yeats’s “Crazy Jane” sequence, Ntiru writes:

“At the centre of every woman
Is a core of a prostitute.”
So claimed Shannon of the Eunuch’s Order[.] (17)

The first sentence here acts as a topic sentence to what follows in the next section of the poem. But before we proceed to that section, we should say something about the last line of the quotation. By deliberately disowning the sentiment of the sentence, Ntiru is utilizing the device effectively employed by Christopher Okigbo of Nigeria in the expression of his most sarcastic disapproval of church, churchmen and politicians in his poems. He often pointed out the illogicality of church teachings through the voices of Opanдру and a demented man whom he called "Jadum from Rockland." It is in fact what Jadum and Opanдру have to say that the reader hears.⁷ Here we are similarly asked to assume that Ntiru's sentiment is that of Shannon of the Eunuch's Order, apparently the Catholic Order which practices celibacy. Like Okigbo, Ntiru is pointing out a basic contradiction of the church, and he wants us to see the celibate churchmen as anti-life. However, the poet doesn't stop here but he uses the idea of Shannon as a point of departure in his expression of the nature of debased womanhood in society:

Hasn't womankind resolved unanimously
That virginity is base selfishness
In the conduct of human relations
Their strong point is selfish generosity. (17)

The poet is playing on a multivalent contradiction in these lines. He implies that woman's seeming kindness is essentially self-serving. This is why when she decries the selfishness of virginity, and propagates an unselfishness in this regard, she is shown to be actively engaged in serving her need. This is the selfish generosity of which the poet talks in the lines above. The oxymoronic yoking of "selfish" and "generosity" expresses the tension of discernible action and inner motive.

The selfish generosity of woman is further applicable to other human beings who always serve their interests as they pretend to be generous. Thus both the "darling daughter" who is perched "at the bar counter / . . . with a fixed smile / like a monkey on heat" and the "Inspector who is keeping it up with a barmaid" are not acting out of selfless zeal. They do whatever they do neither out of kindness nor of love, but out of selfishness.

Ntiru therefore sees man's ultimate state as loneliness, since

man's basic motivation in his interactions is neither love of others nor selflessness. The ultimate expression of this innate quality of man is made in "To a Late Rich Miser" (34). In this poem we see that even the man of wealth will experience loneliness in his final hours on earth and eventually leave the world alone. The loneliness of the "late rich miser" here is symbolic of that of all men. He is someone who has enjoyed the gregarious pomp that high society can offer; but the time comes when all that becomes immaterial. At this time everyone — from the family to "the poor folk that had wealth [him]" — has to withdraw physically. The miser, however, has a way of alleviating the pangs of loneliness. He thinks about his wealth, but eventually everything (including this) will slip away and leave him alone. The poet says:

As your head fell back,
 You suddenly remembered
 That you could only take what was yours.
 But alas! What was it?

These, the poem's closing lines, articulate the fact of the aloneness of man no matter how much worldly wealth he accumulates. That thing which the man could take which belonged to him is himself.

It is this loneliness of man that Nturu further captures in his image, in "The Pauper" (35-36), of the pauper who, even though he is in the city centre where beautiful cars reflect him and which is filled up with "beautiful people" and tourists, is still lonely. He sits "alone on hairless goatskins" as the busy world hurries by oblivious of his plight. Nturu seems to say that he is also the quintessential man.

Nturu expresses the futility of human life by focusing on the inexorability of fate. He sees man as continuously progressing toward his predetermined fate; there is virtually nothing he can do to change the course of events already in motion as well as those which are bound to come to pass. These are the points which the poet makes in "The Prophecy" (102-104). By the title he seems to suggest that human life is something of a vindication of a divine prophecy for man; that what constitutes one's fate is already part of a plan known to the gods. Hence he sees it as

futile for man to attempt to control, in any way, his own or his fellow human beings' fate. It is on this note that the poem opens:

Who shall console the veiled woman
 who buries her head in her wet hands,
 who weeps at the folly of weeping
 tears that won't dissolve the sour truth
 that in a deal between God and man,
 God always takes the better bargain? (102)

In these lines and throughout the poem, the veiled, lonely and sobbing woman is a symbol of man who is at an epiphanic moment in life. Her helplessness in her woe represents the futility of man's efforts vis-a-vis his fate. Thus her weeping is not just that of a Niobe or a Rachel lamenting a personal woe but that of a symbolic representative of man bewailing the lot of his kind. Her efforts, like all human efforts to divert the course of Fate, miscarry through what are apparently agents of Fate itself, the equivocating Three Sisters of the Oracle who are drawn very closely after the three witches who hasten Macbeth's doom. Like Shakespeare's witches, Ntiru's Three Sisters are dealers in half-made statements which, while they instil a false sense of security, actually leave man open to the whims of Fate. These are the words of the Three Sisters:

"Daughter of Misfortune
 A woman is never barren
 In your last egg, I see a daughter
 But beware of the bull's horn." (103)

For a woman who has had to wait all her life before she could have a daughter from her "last egg," the actual arrival of the child proves not to be her own fulfilment but that of Fate. As if to prove its inexorability more mercilessly, it takes away the long-awaited child in what appears to be an accident in the woman's neighbourhood thus:

Who shall hear the hunters' cry
 that drew the daughter to the gate,

 the hunters' spears shimmering with
 victory that dazzled the daughter's eyes
 and overturned her balance, thrusting
 her on the fatal point of the bull's horn
 negligently sticking out in the kraal? (104)

This is, presumably, in spite of the protective care of the woman who had been warned by the equivocating Three Sisters. She and the mediums she had consulted prove futile in the attempt to check Fate, and in a final re-emphasis of this the poet ends the poem by asking, "Who can prevent the liver of ill luck / from breaking the knife?" The soft glandular liver will, if so willed by Fate, break a knife.

Ntiru seems to be pursuing this same line of the inevitability of Fate in human affairs and destiny in "Rendezvous" (72). It is at first somewhat contradictory in a poet who is acutely aware of the social differences of men in his society to suggest the "equality" of all men in this poem. This is what he suggests by the word "rendezvous"; he affirms that a common destiny unites both the happy and the unhappy in society. What symbolizes this common Fate in this poem is the night that comes to console everyone (status notwithstanding) at the end of the day: "Happiness and unhappiness / lie in silent truce / under nonchalant night." This idea directly reverses Shakespeare's notion that sleep favours only the poor and "troubleless" souls, while the wealthy who have everything to entice sleep fail to benefit from it (*2 Henry IV* 3.1). Shakespeare's final moral is that "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," but for Ntiru, no head is free from the predetermined destiny of man.

Although the poetic cosmos upon which Ntiru focuses his attention is riddled by both external and inner conflicts and tensions, the ultimate consolation one gets from his work is the absence of despondency. Apparently, in this respect the poet, to propagate his vision directly, takes over personally from the mere reflection upon life in an existentialist and tragic mode. By proceeding from the fatalistic and aberrant visions of human life in society to those which imply that there is still a ray of hope for man if only he will be human, the poet becomes an optimist. However, Ntiru's optimism, like that of T. S. Eliot whom he regards as a worthy master, is not just a cheap escape from the ugliness of his humanity. Rather than implying that man can overcome his problems because he is innately perfectible, he seems to say that he is worthy of salvation through a spiritual rejuvenation in which he actively participates. This to the poet

is obviously the surest way to a long-lasting solution to the conflicts and tensions that tear man apart. This panacea is clearly conducive to Ntiru's high moral concern, which contrasts sharply with the political radicalism of his contemporaries, especially Angira. Thus, where Angira would recommend a purgative violence to rectify the pernicious human situation, Ntiru regards true salvation as a natural emanation from a sort of a chaste "inner music." It is a quest for the "stillpoint" of this inner music in which the music becomes the music-maker that the poet favours in the poems that will be dealt with below.

In "There is Hope" (78), the poet strikes a note of hopefulness. His strategy is the juxtaposition of the hopeful toils of nature with a similar predicament of man which is always implied. The major consolation he derives from such spectacles of life is that they are invariably followed by periods of boon and success. This sense of optimism is engendered and realized by the concrete presentation of both insect and plant life which, in spite of their apparent unviability in a gargantuan world, still succeed in their onerous life-tasks. This focus on such elements of nature as the sun, the beetle, the floating waterlily, and the beanshoot as the symbols of hope in life has a sort of pseudo-deistic implication. By his emphasis, it is clear that Ntiru sees the immanent hand of a divine force behind the success-in-helplessness of puny life. This belief gives him a sense of hope:

There is hope
in the rays of the sun
as they pierce the gloomy clouds

I feel courage
when I watch the black beetle
as it rolls a ball of muck

I feel buoyant
with the floating waterlily
as it tosses ashore on the crest of a wave.

What the poet seems to say here is that the unseen hand of the prime mover which takes care of the sun, the beetle, and the waterlily will also care for man in a greater proportion. This divine hope will also be analogous to the sprouting of "the beanshoot . . . / through an afterbirth of hard clay." To the reader who stops at this poem, Ntiru's philosophy of hope (so

far) is unfortunately likely to seem an indulgence similar to that of the Romantic notion of the perfectibility of man. The plausible question would be: What effort has man made to be worthy of succour from God or any superhuman force? It is apparently with this in mind that the poet goes on to intimate that man needs to suffer either physically, spiritually, or through selflessness.

“If it is True” (73-74) concentrates on the theme of self-control and self-abnegation as prerequisites for the spiritual salvation needed by man. What the poet recommends in this poem is as stringent, in both language and content, as those remedies suggested by Hopkins and Eliot in similar situations. The self-denial specifically approved by Nturu calls for the rejection of a relish of the sensuous apprehension of phenomena as well as the engagement in some activities which are not of any benefit to our fellow human beings. In all, the poet desires the denial of the bodily senses as man’s essential step toward perfecting himself for the service of his fellow man. It is also doubly significant that the poet wants man to mortify his faculties of speech, sight, hearing, and movement. This is equivalent to what T. S. Eliot so powerfully expresses in “Burnt Norton” as the necessary “desiccation of the world of sense, / Evacuation of the world of fancy.”⁸ But much closer to Nturu’s sentiments are those of Hopkins in “The Habit of Perfection,”⁹ in which the five bodily senses and the lips, feet, and hands are to be subdued in supreme service to God. Like Hopkins, Nturu points out or implies the negative application of the senses by man, and he places beside this their ideal deployment in the pursuit of the larger good of man. Hence he says:

If it is true
that the world talks too much
then let’s all keep quiet
and hear the eloquence
of silence

If it is true
that the world sees too much
then let’s all close our eyes
and see the inner vision
beneath the closed eyes

If it is true
 that the world hears too much
 then let's wax our ears
 and listen to the chastity of inner music
 that defies betrayal
 by the wayward wind.

The "inner vision" of which the poet speaks is the "uncreated light" of Hopkins. However, in order better to place his recommendation in the perspective of the conflicts of his society that need resolving, Ntiru becomes very practical at the end of the poem: he sees the ascetic who has mortified his faculties as less likely to generate tension with others. This is why he closes the poem with the following lines:

... the dumb don't tell lies
 for the blind can't be peeping-toms
 for the deaf cannot eavesdrop
 for the crippled can't trespass.

What these "negative" human conditions and their boon for humanity symbolize is thus a situation in which each man readily sacrifices what he cherishes most in order to cancel out frictions with his fellow men. As soon as this is done, then "a damp gust" similar to that of Eliot's *Waste Land* V will bring the first rains to revive the parched souls of men.

The boon of this re-spiriting rain is graphically presented in "First Rains" (87), where the heavens gaze down on earth and seem to share in its predicament. The earth is said to be "brown and wizened," and clearly this description of the physical landscape objectifies the spiritual drought that plagues its denizens. Thus, men are barren creatures inhabiting a wasteland that needs a spiritually rejuvenating rain. The poet's suspenseful description of the physical as well as the spiritual drought of the sublunary world in the first verse paragraph effectively captures that lingering and uncertain moment between a period of abject hopelessness and one of divine succour. One feels that the situation cannot continue as it is: it must either change for the better or deteriorate. This is how he paints his picture:

From bewildered heights, heaven gazed on earth:
 She was brown and wizened with care.
 Sallow vegetation lingered motionless in emptiness,
 Cocking her crisp leaves, devoid of harmony.
 And the famished animals limply trudged,
 And slowly stopped with lifeless uncertainty,
 Calmly resigned to their cruel fate.

This sight provokes the heavens to sympathize with earth; it embraces the earth at the hilltops. On a purely artistic level, the description of the heavens as embracing the earth is an example of Ntiru's perceptiveness and freshness of vision when it comes to the apt observation and expression of objects in words. Here, the icon of the personified heaven hugging the earth arises from what less poetic and pedestrian minds would express as the horizon or the apparent juncture of Earth and Sky. This embrace between the heavens and earth re-invigorates the earth. It is also the most concrete evidence of the coming of the life-saving rain. Hence, when Ntiru refers to the rain directly as "the Messiah," he is charging the word with a wider meaning appropriate to the theme of the poem. Ultimately, one has the impression that Ntiru, like Eliot, is implying through the Messiah/Rain metaphor that both the acceptance of the will of God and the offering of prayers are prerequisites for man's salvation. This is the sense conveyed by the last lines of the poem:

While moribund life, galvanized, rushed indoors
 To impart word the Messiah was coming.
 Then gushed the volley of drops of sorrow:
 Heaven wept at poor earth's wretchedness.

This is the Messiah-rain coming to refresh the parched earth; it is also the Messiah-Christ weeping for debased man as an essential aspect of His vicarious passion for man. Further, these last lines also constitute a brilliant display of Ntiru's syncretic mythography: he superimposes one myth upon another. When he sees the heavy raindrops as the tears of heaven falling upon earth, he is imaginatively comprehending the Christian myth as well as the Yoruba (Soyinkan to be precise) conception of the rain as the tears of the sky bull which obliges man after the

essential sacrifice.¹⁰ This sacrifice is thus a requirement emphasized by Christianity, by Eliot, and by Yoruba/Soyinkan mythopoeses. It is appropriate since one who can give selflessly will live in peace with his fellow-men. This will be the end of conflicts and tensions.

Finally, this rain is one of both physical and spiritual revival for things of the world. Child, bird, animal, the cracked earth, and the brown grass all relish the long-expected rejuvenation. So when the "sun again smiled at the purged earth" after the rain, the complete picture of hope for embattled man is almost fully executed. This happens as a logical conclusion:

While heaven and earth disengaged their arms
To stop their passionate mutual embrace.
The scene was set, Paradise recreated:
First rains had come to salvage the earth.

This beatific and paradisiac state is attainable by the world, the poet seems to say; it is worth the sacrifice man has to make.

Nturu's poetry is that of the human condition; and in his moral sympathy with the seemingly hopeless situation of man in his world, the poet's vision is ultimately a bright one. However, one needs to trudge through a verbal terrain of disillusioning details in order to arrive at the thrill of a hopeful future which will be achieved through the sacrifice made by man. It is with regard to this dominant view that his work, in spite of the uncomfortable current of scepticism which runs through it, should be seen as that of a man who is in love with men and his society. In this perspective, his vignettes of degeneracy on the personal and societal levels become his own way of recommending an opposite way of life for man; and his Heraclitan vision, predicated upon a fire of strife and tension, leads man to a vista of a New Jerusalem.

NOTES

¹ "Review of *Tensions*, by R. C. Nturu (Uganda)," *Lotus: Afro-Asian Writings* 27/28.1-2 (1976): 146.

² Richard Nturu, *Tensions* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1971) 38-40. Further references to this collection will appear parenthetically.

- ³ Adrian Roscoe, *Uhuru's Fire: African Literature East to South* (London: Cambridge UP, 1977) 107.
- ⁴ *Casualties: Poems 1966-68* (London: Longman, 1970).
- ⁵ This is the implicit theme of "A Cry of Birth," in John Pepper Clark, *Poems* (Ibadan: Mbari Publications, 1962) 15; but the theme is best expressed by Wole Soyinka in "A First Deathday," *Idanre and Other Poems* (London: Methuen, 1967) 26.
- ⁶ *Idanre and Other Poems* 45.
- ⁷ See "Heavensgate," in his *Labyrinths with Path of Thunder* (London: Heinemann, 1971) 8-9.
- ⁸ *Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, 1971) 49.
- ⁹ *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. W. H. Gardner (New York: Oxford UP, 1948) 46-47.
- ¹⁰ See Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters* (New York: Collier, 1970) 167.