

Newman's essay, especially in the context of this collection, raises the question of how the structuring of the narrative vis-à-vis the reader functions in other Gordimer texts. Thus, what is gathered together in Rowland Smith's collection of essays is a variety of commentaries that seem at times to miss completely the mark and at others to challenge and illuminate.

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NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> One short essay by Anthony Delius touches on Gordimer's first collection of stories ("Danger from the Digit: *The Soft Voice of the Serpent*"). Another essay, "Cutting the Jewel: Facets of Art in Nadine Gordimer's Short Stories," by Kevin Magarey, deals with several of her collections of stories; however, after reading sophomoric commentary on summaries of various stories and learning that there is a "poetic structure" (47) to some of the stories, the reader gains little insight.
- <sup>2</sup> The three essays are: Abdul R. JanMohamed's "The Degeneration of the Great South African Lie: *Occasion for Loving*" (90-96) from *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa* (1983); John Cooke's "Landscapes Inhabited in Imagination: *A Guest of Honour*" (104-16) from *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: Private Lives/Public Landscapes* (1985); and Stephen Clingman's "Deep History" (205-22), a somewhat tortured structuralist reading of Gordimer that is the introductory chapter to *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside* (1986); Clingman's essay should really be read in context with the rest of his text. These selections are no doubt added to help meet the objective of providing "coverage."

C. L. Innes. *Chinua Achebe*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990. pp. 199. \$34.50.

C. L. Innes begins her study of Achebe with a rather uncharitable reference to the earlier books on him which she characterizes as merely "introductions . . . concerned chiefly with describing the novels in terms of their central themes, conflicts and characters" (1). Her own book, she claims, will demonstrate that Achebe has created "a new English *literature*" through his use of the novel form and the alterations he has made to it "to suit its new African surroundings." In doing so, she would not merely pay due attention to Achebe's concern with language and historical change but would also place particular emphasis on Achebe's "Africanization of the novel, trying to discern what elements he has used and what innovations he has made in his development as a novelist" (2).

Her principal strategy in trying to substantiate her claim is to stress the central importance of Joyce Cary's work as the chief stimulus to Achebe's fiction — right from his decision to try his hand at writing

in 1951-52 when he was still a student at the University of Ibadan. Achebe's entire fiction is, according to Innes, a rewriting of Joyce Cary. It was his response to Cary that suggested to Achebe his "fundamental theme" as a writer — "that African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans" (1-2).

The significance of Joyce Cary as a stimulus has been mentioned by Achebe himself, and has been discussed by other critics before Innes, such as Robert Wren. But no other critic before her has gone into such detail to show the relationship between the work of Cary and Achebe. She shows, for instance, how Achebe planned his first novel as another version of *Mister Johnson* and how the rewriting — Achebe's attempt to give a less "superficial" picture, "not only of the country, but even less of the Nigerian character" — turned into two novels — *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*. Innes demonstrates how well Achebe achieves his objective. Whereas Cary shows African women being bartered and battered as animals by their menfolk, Achebe shows that relationships between Igbo husbands and wives can be as complex and varied as those between English husbands and wives. Cary portrays African rulers as despotic and greedy, but Achebe shows the democratic functioning of African societies in which the elders of the community display deliberation and judgment. As a novelist Achebe's outlook and technique are more realistic inasmuch as he demonstrates that human beings are not rootless individuals without origins and antecedents, as they are in Cary's work, but products of their societies, thus illustrating the intricate relationship between individual psychology and the social context in which they have grown up. This is where Achebe's novel, according to Innes, makes its firmest response to Cary.

Innes, however, overplays the relationship between Cary and Achebe when she discerns Achebe's concern with Cary as his main preoccupation in all his four earlier novels as well as in his short fiction. But this obsession does not take anything away from her subtle and sensitive analysis of these novels. Through a highly discriminating study of Achebe's imagery and symbolism, she provides us an insight into his thematic concerns — such as the relationship between the masculine and feminine principles, the individual and the community, the elite and the ordinary people. The individual's search for self-fulfilment is, for her, the main theme of Achebe's fiction. While in the earlier fiction Achebe is interested in individuals such as Unoka, Nwoye, and Akueke for whom the cultural and psychological conventions of their society do not allow adequate fulfilment, there is an increasing recognition — as seen for instance in *A Man of the People* — of the importance of class interest as a factor in the denial of individual fulfilment. And it is in this concern —

seen in its most acute form in *Anthills of the Savannah* — that Innes discovers the principle of development in Achebe's fiction.

Innes's book is the result of long and sustained meditation on Achebe's work. While endeavouring to view his fiction in its social and political context, Innes emphasizes Achebe's position as a great writer-statesman, a towering public figure in Nigeria's intellectual and cultural life, his services to the Igbo community as well as to the Nigerian nation. As a spokesman not merely for Nigeria or Africa but for the entire Third World, he has challenged the complacent sense of superiority of Western intellectuals and their fellow travellers, such as V. S. Naipaul, who believe that Western institutions, ideas, and norms should serve as models for the rest of the world.

Innes's distinction consists in her ability to find the secret of Achebe's greatness as a writer, of the surpassing excellence of his fiction. This secret lies in the wisdom, courage, and integrity of his character, the sanity of his moral imagination, and the breadth and comprehensiveness of his vision. These qualities of Achebe are the outcome not of a foreign education and culture but of his firm grounding in the African tradition. Moving him through his entire career has been his high sense of the writer's mission, of his responsibility to his community, so memorably articulated in the Abazon Elder's emphasis on the importance of the story in *Anthills*: "It is the story . . . that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. . . . It is the thing that makes us different from cattle" (124). It is also from the African tradition that Achebe has derived his aversion to dogmatism, manifested in his belief that there is always more than one side to a question. Innes has compared Achebe's techniques and effects in the new and radical "epic" novel he has created to Brecht's epic theatre. Use of diverse modes of discourse, not merely as a means of distinguishing differing speakers and differing cultures but also as a means of celebration, satire, and interrogation, has, Innes points out, been a characteristic feature of Achebe's fiction. Songs, folk-tales, proverbs, parables, and myths are used as an ironic and alternative commentary on the main action as in Brecht's "epic" theatre. The author's technique and form are an expression of his dualistic and ironic vision which finds its characteristic expression in the Igbo proverb: "Where something stands, there also something else will stand."

While it may be difficult to accept her claim that Achebe has created a new literature, there can be no question about Innes's success in demonstrating Achebe's contribution to the development of the African novel and his greatness and distinction as a writer. There is a detailed and thorough analysis of the novels both in terms of their themes and techniques thus striking a perfect balance in the discussing of his art and thought. Innes brings out the unity of

Achebe's *oeuvre* in which each of the novels takes on fuller meaning when read in conjunction with the traditional novel which precedes it in point of composition. The short stories and the poetry are given sufficient weight, and the sixth chapter which discusses Achebe's writings on social and political affairs during a period of twenty-eight years is one of the most valuable in the book. But for some printing errors — Makarere is spelt as "Makere" three times (103, 109, 113) and Gandhi as "Ghandi" (118) — Innes's *Chinua Achebe* (which contains an excellent bibliography) is a highly perceptive and original study of the distinguished African novelist. It is an auspicious start to the new series on African and Caribbean Literature sponsored by Cambridge University Press.

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#### WORKS CITED

Achebe, Chinua. *Anthills of the Savannah*. London: Heinemann, 1987.