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**Chinua Achebe, Robert Penn Warren, Joseph Conrad and Henrik Ibsen:  
Literary Affinities and Influences**

**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of Magister in language and Literature**

**Submitted by:**

Mrs. Maida Naima

**Supervised by:**

Prof. RICHE Bouteldja.

**Panel of Examiners**

- |                             |                          |            |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------------|
| - Prof BENSEMMANE M' hamed  | University of Algiers    | Chairman   |
| - Prof RICHE Bouteldja      | UMM Tizi Ouzou           | Rapporteur |
| - Prof ARAB Si Abderrahmane | University of            | Examiner   |
| - Prof BAHOUS Abbas         | University of Mostaganem | Examiner   |

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## **Declaration**

I hereby attest that all the ideas contained and developed in this dissertation are mine. All the sources and references are faithfully acknowledged and are provided at the end of each chapter of the present work.

Mrs N. Maidi

## Abstract

The following dissertation is a comparison of one of the most outstanding authors in modern African literature, Chinua Achebe and three other writers of world-wide acclaim; the American Robert Penn Warren, the British Joseph Conrad and the Norwegian Henrik Ibsen. At the basis of the research is a belief that a commonality of experience and interests can lead writers belonging to different cultural backgrounds and disparate geographic areas to write in a similar way and develop similar themes.

A number of literary critics, inspired mainly by the ideologies of Negritude, the Black Arts movement and the notions allied to them, and convinced of the uniqueness of the African experience and the specific context of African writings, have very often compared Chinua Achebe's novels with other works by African and Afro-American writers. Dwelling on these concepts (Negritude, the Black Arts movement) has blurred for them the cultural affinities that may exist between African and western writings.

We have attempted to avoid the pitfalls of previous comparative criticism by establishing linkages between West African writing and Western literary traditions. This dissertation contains three chapters; the first chapter deals with the affinities between Achebe's A Man of the People and Robert Penn Warren's All the King's Men in terms of their characterisation, narrative structure, themes and mode of writing. The second treats the intertextual relationships between Achebe's A Man of the People and Conrad's Nostromo. In the third chapter, we have further carried our analysis by drawing parallels between Achebe's A Man of the People and Ibsen's play An Enemy of the People. This chapter has considered the similarities in terms of characterisation, imagery and themes.

The final conclusion that can be drawn from this comparison is that Achebe's work can be read in the light of three distinct literary traditions: The

American Southern literature, the Edwardian Literature of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the Norwegian (Victorian) literature of the second half of the Nineteenth Century. This assumption has been more or less demonstrated in the present dissertation. The intertexts of Achebe's A Man of the People are of three orders: literary affinity, influence difference and impact.

## Résumé.

Ce mémoire est une comparaison entre un éminent auteur de la littérature africaine moderne, le Nigérien Chinua Achebe et trois autres auteurs de renommée internationale ; notamment l'Américain Robert Penn Warren, le Britannique d'origine Polonaise Joseph Conrad et le Norvégien Henrik Ibsen. Notre recherche est fondée sur notre croyance qu'une expérience et des intérêts communs peuvent mener des auteurs issus de cultures et d'aires géographiques différentes à écrire de manière similaire sur des thèmes identiques. En effet, avec la naissance d'un nouveau genre littéraire appelé communément le roman de la désillusion dans les années 60, les études comparatives convaincues de la spécificité du roman Africain, se sont limitées à la recherche des affinités entre les différentes œuvres africaines et afro-américaines.

Dans notre travail de recherche, nous avons essayé de briser ces limites en établissant des liens entre un auteur d'Afrique de l'ouest et d'autres auteurs d'Europe et d'Amérique.

Ce mémoire contient trois chapitres. Chaque chapitre est précédé d'une section traitant les contextes historiques et éléments biographiques qui ont contribué à l'émergence des affinités littéraires entre Achebe et les autres auteurs traités dans cette étude. Le premier chapitre est une comparaison entre A Man of the People de Chinua Achebe et All the King's Men de Robert Penn Warren. Cette analyse tire des parallèles entre les deux romans au niveau de leurs structures, personnages, leurs thèmes et leur écriture. Ces deux romans sont de type *Roman à clé* dans le sens où ils se fondent sur des faits réels et les reproduisent dans leur fiction. Le deuxième chapitre est consacré à la recherche de l'influence de Nostromo de Conrad sur le roman d'Achebe. Cette influence est apparente dans l'adoption par Achebe des mêmes thèmes et mode de représentation que son prédécesseur. Le troisième chapitre traite de l'impact du Norvégien Henrik Ibsen sur Chinua

Achebe. Les œuvres comparées dans ce chapitre sont la pièce de Théâtre An Enemy of the People de Henrik Ibsen et A Man of the People de Chinua Achebe.

La conclusion finale qui peut être tirée de cette comparaison est que les intertextes de A Man of the People sont de trois ordres distincts, l'affinité littéraire, l'influence et l'impact. L'œuvre de Chinua Achebe s'inscrit dans trois traditions littéraires différentes. La littérature Américaine (du Sud des Etats-Unis), la littérature edwardienne du début du 20<sup>ème</sup> siècle et la littérature norvégienne (victorienne) de la deuxième moitié du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle. Nous espérons que notre travail aura contribué modestement à briser ces barrières littéraires.

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# Introduction

Western literary critics have been increasingly interested in West African writers as a result of the phenomenal growth of African literature in the last decades. Among these, the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe has attracted considerable critical attention since the publication of his first novel Things Fall Apart (1958) which established him as one of the most important founding figures of the African novel in English.

It is worth noting that Achebe is read and discussed more than any other Nigerian writer; there is almost certainly more published criticism on him than on any other African writer. A bibliography of works relevant to Achebe and his works published in Nigeria in 1990 listed 1,453 entries, 287 of which written by Achebe himself. (K.Booker.1998.p.82) Book-length studies have been written on Achebe's novels including those by G.D. Killam (1969), David Carroll (1970), and Arthur Ravenscroft (1969). Another book-length study by Robert Wren (1980) Achebe's World: the Historical and Cultural Context explored both the historical and the cultural context of Achebe's novels. Simon Gikandi, in his book-length study Reading Chinua Achebe (1991) analysed language and ideology in Achebe's fiction.

A number of Western and African Critics, whose interests extend to comparative literature and the study of influence and affinities in the writer's novels, compared Achebe to other writers. Yet, these literary critics, inspired mainly in their analyses of the African writer by the ideologies of Negritude, pan-Africanism, what came to be called the African heritage and convinced of the uniqueness of the African experience, compared Achebe to other African and Afro-American writers. A review of comparative analyses involving Achebe has shown that the latter has been more often compared with other African and Afro-American authors than with writers belonging to other literary traditions. Yedieti Coulibaly (1976) compared Achebe's Things Fall Apart to the black American

Baldwin's Go Tell it on the Mountain. The comparison considers the cultural disintegration in both novels. Another African comparative study by Nkwele Ekaney (1977) grouped Achebe with two of his compatriots: Soyinka and Tutuola; the problems of cross-cultural reception have been the subject of this comparative study. In 1978 another critic Tony Obilade grouped Achebe with Soyinka in another comparative study: The Stylistic Function of Pidgin in African Literature: Achebe and Soyinka. The critic René Richard in 1970 compared Achebe's A Man of the People with Cyprian Ekwinsi's Iska. Achebe and the Afro-American Ralph Ellison was the subject of a comparative approach to Afro-American and Neo African writers [Williams, P: 1976]: Simon Gikandi in his Reading the African novel (1991) studied myth, language and culture in Achebe's Arrow of God and Elechi Amadi's the Concubine. And in 2000, Annie Gagiano wrote Achebe, Head, and Marechera: on Power and Change in Africa

One of the misleading notions inherited from the ideologies of Negritude and the Black Arts movement is the tendency to consider them- these ideologies- and the notions allied to them as the guiding spirit that yield to the production of more affinities than divergences in the writings of black Africans and Afro-Americans. The dwelling on such beliefs has robbed the critics of the opportunity to see the connections, and blurred for them the cultural affinities that may exist between African and Western writings both English and American.

Another debatable fact is that, after 1966 with the publication of Achebe's A Man of the People, Soyinka's The interpreters (1965) and Armah's The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born (1969), the birth on the literary scene of the novel of disillusionment written out of frustrated hopes, and the publication of many other works by equally prominent writers like Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Gabriel Okara, literary critics, especially those interested in the comparison of themes, techniques and formal innovations, ceased to go beyond the

boundaries of African literature, believing that African writers, by now, could be compared with each other rather than with other European or American literary counterparts. Convinced as he was as to the absence of textual relationships between Achebe's fourth novel and Western ones –a fact due mainly to the African specific context and experience, the critic Frank Schulze–Engler assumed:

However we may peer into the western canon, nothing there will be able to provide us with the necessary information. the answers will have to be sought in the inter -textual relationship between this novel and previous as well as later works by Achebe himself and other West African authors in the complex of Nigeria post independence politics . (Kloos Ed. 1998. 16)

In this dissertation, we shall attempt to avoid the pitfalls of previous comparative criticism on Achebe's novel by emphasising the connectedness of Achebe's work with Western literature. Our study rests on the assumption that African literature is becoming a prominent component of world literature and that the African novel is part of a larger fictional universe even if, it cannot be denied, it still retains distinctive features. National literatures and individual artistic productions are, in fact, far from being closed compartments; because literature is a system of relationships that erases and transcends mere geographical boundaries. Chinua Achebe has shown a literary sensibility with Western writers. His first novel Things Fall Apart borrowed its title from the first lines of W.B. Yeats' poem, "The Second Coming" (1919) making of the Irish writer a sort of literary father. His second novel, No Longer at Ease owes its title to "The Journey of the Magi" (1927), T.S.Eliot's poem. This induces us to posit the possibility of literary connectedness with other writers from the Western canon. Our aim therefore is to assess Achebe's position in the Western literary tradition

It is our intention in this paper to compare Achebe, in a three-way analysis with an American writer, a British and a Norwegian author of the same world-wide fame. In our view, no other writers present better precursors to Achebe than the British Joseph Conrad

whose works have exerted considerable influence on Africans and Westerners alike, and the Southern-American poet, essayist, novelist and critic Robert Penn Warren, one of America's best-known man of letters. Our study will be extended to include a third chapter where Achebe will be grouped with another canonical writer on behalf of whom Edmund Gosse wrote "I have little hesitation in saying that no other foreign author of the second half of the nineteenth century has been so ably and exhaustively edited in English as Ibsen has been in this instance." (Gosse: Ibsen). The impact of Ibsen was so greatly felt. After having been accused of 'trafficking in filth', he became one of the dominating figures in the history of Modern theatre and even earned the tag of the father of modern drama with rather provocative plays.

Similarities in the historical background of these writers and their concern with questions of history, morality and imperialism and over all, the demoralizing nature of politics make us assume that more affinities than divergences may come out in the background to their novels.

As it would be too ambitious an enterprise to compare all the writers' novels, we shall limit our work to the comparison of Achebe's A Man of the People with Conrad's Nostromo and Warren's All the King's Men. Achebe's novel will also be seen in the light of Ibsen's An Enemy of the People. In our view no past fictional works represent better precursor novels to A Man of the People than the above mentioned works. All of the three novels tell the story of "a man of the people" whose idealism is corrupt by power or silver or a lack of understanding of human motives. The novels are melodramatic tales of idealism corrupted by power or "material interest" or slaughtered on the altar of self-interest. The novels display striking similarities in their backgrounds. There is, in fact, in the political events that converged to make its writing possible for Achebe much in

common with the background of Nostromo and has much more with that of All the King's Men and An Enemy of the People.

It is our intention in this dissertation to borrow from two of the methods of comparative literature, namely analogy and influence. Analogy is an aspect of literary scholarship which is set to identify the affinities between authors by exploring political, social and cultural backgrounds that make for the literary convergences between two or more writers. It rests mainly on an evolutionist assumption that explains these similarities on the ground that human beings everywhere have the same psychological make-up. As regards influence studies, their aim is to investigate the indebtedness of a work in terms of structure, themes or world view to particular sources. The documented similarities are the result, as the diffusionists maintain, of a historical line of contact between the societies (Okpewho 1992.p.167).

In our analysis we shall operate from two theoretical premises developed by the Russian and the American poetics Georg Lukacs and Harold Bloom. Insights from Northrop Frye's theory developed in Anatomy of Criticism will also be borrowed. Our selection of these theories is due to the fact that their cultural categories fit in well with the perspective of our comparative study. In The Anxiety of Influence, the critic gives a reinterpretation of the traditional term influence which insists on a direct borrowing from past writers (poets). In The Anxiety of Influence, Bloom, in fact, rewrites literary history in terms of the Oedipus complex. Influence, according to the critic, provokes an anxiety that engages a younger writer in an Oedipal struggle to overcome the suffocating dominance of a literary patriarch." (1975.95)

Though Achebe does not openly acknowledge any Conradian influence, certainly not that of his book Nostromo because it is against Heart of Darkness that the writer set to write, in the light of the assumption that "a writer writes only one book during his literary

career, and keeps rewriting it” and acknowledging Conrad’s overwhelming prominence, there is reason to look at Achebe in the light of Bloom’s remark that the feeling of a belated poet towards his precursor is made of admiration, hatred and antagonism, engaging him in an Oedipal struggle to overcome his suffocating dominance. The belated poet, locked in oedipal rivalry with his precursor, will seek to disarm this strength by entering it from within to make a revision of the precursor’s poet through a distorting “revisionary ratio”. There is reason to think that Achebe’s A Man of the People can be analysed within one of Harold Bloom’s six revisionary ratios.

The fact that A Man of the People like Conrad’s Nostromo and Warren’s All the King’s Men -though modern in the sense that their perspective on history is rather ironic – are realistic in mode requires a widening of our vision.

In their approach to literature, Marxist critics relate the literary text to social reality. One of the influential theoretical models in Marxist criticism is the reflection model which sees literature as a reflection of a reality outside it. There is no doubt that Lukacs’ insight explored in his Theory of the Novel can also be brought to bear on Achebe, Conrad and Warren to see the extent to which the realities presented in the novels are mediated totalities.

To implement our research, we shall rely on the following outline. One, our dissertation will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter will deal with the comparison of A Man of the People and All the King’s Men and the second, with A Man of the people and Nostromo. The subject of the third chapter will be the comparison of Achebe’s novel and Ibsen’s An Enemy of the People.

Since our dissertation rests on the assumption that similarities in circumstances and politico-historical situations may give birth to literary affinities, we shall start each of the two first chapters with a section exploring the contexts and backgrounds of the novels. It

will be followed by other sections that will investigate the analogies in terms of characterisation, themes, plot, and modes of writing. Each of these chapters will be rounded with a full section exploring the differences resulting from the divergences in the writers' intentions or cultural contexts.

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# Chapter One

The African and American Realities in *A Man of the People* and

*All the King's Men*

## Introduction

There is a critical agreement in literary studies that All the King's Men (1946) and A Man of the People (1966) are archetypal narratives of the rise and fall of a demagogue. The literary commentators classify each fiction in the realist mode. However, these literary critics have not missed the modernist thematic strain of 'alienation' in each novel. Convinced of the political relevance of each narrative, literary critics have managed to establish the linkage between the fictional elements and their referents in the actual political history of each nation. This critical convergence about the broad outlines of A Man of the People and All the King's Men extends also to other aspects of the narratives such as: characterisation, themes, structure and setting and testify of the similarities in the two fictions. Yet, in spite of the striking convergences between Achebe's and Warren's novels no comparative study of the two has been undertaken yet.

The similar critical assessment between Achebe's and Warren's fiction induces us to undertake the following comparative study in order to reach the type of comparative relationship that may exist between the two works. The thematic outline which permits us to carry out this comparison relates to the realities of African post- independence and the dark implications of the American dream. The two themes emerge as powerful motifs which determine the formal aspects of each fiction and convey their historical perspective. They also account for the ironic mode of the narrative and highlight the two authors' attitudes towards their respective nations' realities.

Our task, in this chapter, is to focus on the examination of both the similarities and the differences in the two novels. The first section will be devoted to the similarities in the background of the two novels. The analogies in terms of characterization, setting, themes and the use of irony will be examined throughout the second section. We will borrow from the theoretical paradigms of Georg Lukacs' Theory of the Novel (1971) to assess the reflectionist and the referential dimension of the two narratives. In the second section, we will use Lukacs' 'the inner form of the novel' to evaluate the problematic nature of the characters. We will also refer to Northrop Frye's 'Theory of Modes' developed in his Anatomy of Criticism (1990) which will allow us to investigate the differences in the mode of writing between the two fictions. In addition, allusion will be made to Aristotle's definition of the tragic character provided in *Poetics*. Aristotle's view of the tragic hero will lead us to establish the tragic dimension of All the King's Men and to assess the realistic aspect in A Man of the People.

## **Section One**

### **The Similarities Between All the King's Men and A Man of the People**

#### **The Background of the Two Novels**

Contemporary criticism insists on the autonomy of the text. Modern critics; Formalists and New Critics, in particular, assume that the text's meaning resides in the words actually appearing on the page; that the text is a unity which carries within its structures all the information necessary to understand it and thus, is the only trustable authority. These critical approaches to literary texts have severed the text from its author and context and by this have come to miss the fact that literature trans-acts a peculiar relationship with society and ideology, and that while a literary text maintains a certain relative autonomy, it is still tied up with its history and milieu. A work of art does not issue out of nothing and is not created out of a historical and a social vacuum. It is written in a

given period in history by an author who has lived in that period and has been involved in all the changes and influences inherent to it.

It is important to note that an author is a real being as apposed to the fictitious nature of the text. He is a socio-political being evolving in a given community and liable to bear its influences. Thus art for art's sake -a phrase advocated by New- Critics becomes "just another piece of deodorised dog shit" (Achebe: 1975, 19). For the African, Achebe argues, art has always had utilitarian, functional or practical values as well as aesthetic pleasure.

Realism, in fact, has held and still holds its firm ground in African novels which are conceived for particular needs; the immediacy of the cultural problems addressed by post-colonial writings often gives that literature a relationship to reality that seems more direct and urgent than that found in Western literature. Achebe's awareness of the fact induced him to declare in "The African Writer and the Biafran Cause"( 1968):

It is clear to me that an African writer who tries to avoid the big social and the political issues of contemporary Africa, will end up being completely irrelevant like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames

Given such views, the African novelist would necessarily be concerned with the central problem of the 'burning houses' of the post- colonial period.

The engagement with reality holds true for the American writer as well. Though Robert Penn Warren is an advocate of art for art's sake, his novels are concerned with the moral problems of the South. And All the King's Men, in particular, is a novel which is deeply grounded in the realities of the American South of the 1930s. Therefore, like Achebe, the American writer indulges in the process of documenting in a fictional narrative the factual events of a specific period in his nation's history.

It follows that the Formalist school of literary criticism is not suitable for our purpose and cannot be brought to bear on our comparative study. The main argument lies in the failure of these theories to do justice to the political and social content of the novels.

Concerning Warren, some critics recognise that his All the King's Men transposes into fiction the tone of Louisiana politics of the 1930s. These critics manage to show the political relevancy of the novel with an interest in the biography of Senator Huey Long. The most useful study of the relationship between the real-life strong man and the fictional character is critic Ladell Payne's (1968) Willie Stark and Huey Long: Atmosphere, Myth, or Suggestion?. Payne's essay shows convincingly that many external elements in the fictional portrait of Willie Stark rely heavily on the career and personality of Huey Long. (Chambers ed.1977:pp98-115) Likewise, in his essay "*All the King's Men: The Matrix of Experience*" (1964), Robert Penn Warren certifies: "If I had never gone to live in Louisiana and if Huey Long had not existed, the novel would never have been written." (Light ed.1964:p.2)

The above critical assessment about Warren's novel holds true for Achebe's A Man of the People. The majority of critics seem to agree on the fact that the relationship of A Man of the People to its times is actually profound and that the novel relates to events in the Nigeria of the 1960s. An early reviewer of Achebe's A Man of the People remarked that the novel was "worth a ton of documentary journalism" [quoted in Isidore Okpewho: 2003.224]. Robert M.Wren, convinced of the socio-political accuracy of the novel, devoted a full-length study to the demonstration of its referential veracity. Moreover, the publication of A Man of the People two days after the January 1966 coup prompted suspicions within both official quarters and the general public that Achebe had some inside knowledge of plans for the military coup (Ezinwa- Ohaeto.1997.15)

The similarities in the critical assessment of All the King's Men and A Man of the People as novels anchored in the realities of their respective nations let us assume the convergence in their respective writers' concern with their countries' moral problems. This concern instructed the grounding of their creations in their particular spheres of experience so as to confirm Lukacs' apprehension of the novel as a reflection of objective historical conditions. Their portrayal of their contemporary worlds suggests an additional way in which Lukacs' Theory of the Novel is relevant to All the King's Men and A Man of the People. The novel for the critic is the product of its period of history; it is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer given as meaningful (p.56). The existence of the novel as a form bears witness to this decay which is characteristic of contemporary reality (ibid.p60).

All the King's Men was written in 1946, yet, its narrative relates both literally and symbolically to the events that shook America and the world at large in the 1930s, a period of human misery and political turmoil known as the Great Depression. In fact, the late 1920s saw a dramatic fall in income for most Southern farmers; during the war, farming had boomed as European countries bought American wheat. However, as the Europeans began to recover from the effect of the war, American wheat was no longer in such demand.

In addition, many farmers in the South did not own their land; they were called sharecroppers and were unable to make enough money to pay back their rent. Large numbers of them were facing bankruptcy. The ecological terror that blew across fifty million acres of the Midwest and the Southwest in the form of a dust bowl in 1933 made things even worse for the American Southern farmers. During this time, charismatic leaders such as Huey P. Long of Louisiana answered the cries and anguish of the distressed people and created strong political machines that helped them to become absolute rulers of their subjects.

By the 1920s the tensions between the wealthy planter-business people of the Delta and New- Orleans in the southern section of the State and the poor dirt farmers from the Pine Barrens in the northern section had reached a breaking point. The planter aristocracy had so controlled politics that the small farmers and poor labourers remained effectively disempowered from antebellum days into the twentieth century.

The potential for conflict between the rich and the poor increased as the government of the 'gentle men' continued to ignore the plight of the poor classes in the state. Seeds of discontent continued to grow throughout the twentieth century as the government became unresponsive to the public majority. Near the end of the 1920s, the times were ripe for a leader with ambition and ability to take advantage of the bitterness that ensued from decades of antagonism. Willie Stark , the protagonist of All the King's Men is the product of the social construct known as the 'red hills' people who are holders of small plots of poor red earth and known as the Rednecks. He comes to power as an advocate of lower class' interests .In his essay *The Messiah of the Rednecks* (1960) Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. writes that in 1928, when H Long was elected Governor of Louisiana, probably one-fifth of the white men on the farms could not read or write (Light ed.1971: 8) . In the novel, Willie Stark tells the crowd who has poured to the Capitol after his political opponents' failed effort to impeach him:

It is your right that their every child shall have a complete education. That no person aged or infirm shall want to beg for bread .That no Poor man's house or land shall be taxed. That the rich man and the great companies that draw wealth from this state shall pay this state a fair share .That you shall not be deprived of hope! (p. 261)

The American South, in fact, resembles in many respects the African post-colonial states; both are underdeveloped areas that suffered the horror of war, defeat and misrule in the hands of self-interested demagogues.

The atmosphere that generated A Man of the People was no less chaotic. The actual events that provided the novel's framework are, as one would expect, all connected with the period that followed Nigerian independence. A decade of troubles that generated a widespread disillusionment following the initial euphoria of independence

Nigeria became independent in October 1960 after patient negotiations between Nigerian leaders and their colonial masters. Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe took the post of Governor General to become "Father of the nation". The new nation was divided into Northern, Western and Eastern administrative regions along the lines of the natural geographic division. Each of these regions was the centre of one of the major ethnic groups: the Hausa and Fulani in the North, the Igbo in the Southeast and the Yoruba in the West. Each region had a different governing political party; the Nigerian People's Congress (N.P.C.) in the North, the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (N. C.N.C) in the East, and the Action Group (A. G) in the West. The new government was a parliamentary system with each region represented in the Federal Government. The Northern region, however, with its large population, soon dominated the entire country politically.

Despite declarations of socialist intent, the governing parties were committed to the capitalist economic system. The leaders' choice of ideological allegiance brought them into close collaboration with one or the other of the superpowers and led them to subscribe to models of political and economic development that proved disastrous for their people. Soon political domination switched into a doctrine of neo-colonialism that aimed at controlling the former colony's economy and creating both an economic and intellectual dependency upon the former colonial power. One of the consequences of this policy was the rise of political dictatorship.

In 1963 when Nigeria became a Republic within the Commonwealth and Nnamdi Azikiwe its President, the situation was already deteriorating both politically and

economically. “The politicians were exhibiting signs of excessive greed, parochialism, and devotion to selfish interests” [Ohaeto: 1997.88].

The gap between the burgeoning middle classes and the growing labour classes grew rapidly greater during the five years of independence. Protest against failure to raise wages widened to a generalised attack on displayed ministerial wealth and all forms of corruption.

The politicians, civil servants and employers both Nigerian and expatriate showed little concern for the plight of the poor working classes. Widespread corruption plagued the new nation. And Fanon’s examples of ‘the pitfalls of national consciousness’ were felt everywhere “scandals [we]re numerous, ministers g[re]w rich, their wives doll [ed] themselves up, the members of parliament feather[ed] their nests and there [was] not a soul down to the simple policeman or the Customs officer who d[id] not join in the procession of corruption.”[1965: p 172]. Earlier in 1962, a state of emergency was declared in the Western region. “Achebe was one of those who expressed anxiety as the initial confidence in the progress of the country diminished” [Ohaeto: 1997.88]

In addition to the economic condition, the pro-Western strand of the Balewa independence- government alienated the educated elite who criticised its foreign policy as too pro-Western and not sufficiently anti colonial. In The Story of Nigeria , Michael Crowder states that by the end of 1965 Nigerian politicians had earned almost universal contempt for their corruption, profligacy, and lack of real concern for those they ruled [1978:260] . It was, however, “the failure of the politicians to respect the letter and spirit of the constitution” adds Crowder “that led to the chaos that precipitated the 1966 coup” (Ibid. p. 260).

In 1962, a census was conducted in foresight of the forthcoming election. Its results gave indication that the North had a larger population than the three other Southern

regions. The Southern politicians fearing the political subjection to that of the Hausa-Fulani of the North contested the results. As a consequence to the widespread doubts about the accuracy of the census, the Prime Minister decided on a new census whose results-announced in February 1964 - confirmed that the majority of population was still in the North. The results were accepted by the N.P.C. whereas the Eastern region government won by the N.C.N.C and the Action Group of the West rejected them.

In spite of the controversies and discontent on the census results and the delimitation of the Federal constituencies, 1964 was an election year; the Federal election was fixed for the 30th of December. New political alliances reduced the contending political parties into two: The United Progressive Grand Alliance (U.P.G.A.) made up of the (N.C.N.C.) And Action Group (A G) and the Nigerian National Alliance (N.N.A) made up of the (N.P.C.) and some breakaways of former N.C.N.C and Action Group.

The election was held in the North and some parts of the Western regions but was boycotted in the East, the Midwest and in Lagos. The N.P .C and its allies won an overwhelming victory. President Azikiwe refused, at first, to call on Balewa whom the results declared Prime Minister to form a new government. He was ,however , persuaded after a while to do so on the understanding that the government would be a broad-based one after new elections were held in the West where no effective election had taken place.

The 1965 Western election was scheduled for the 11th October. Yet, as the election approached, the political controversies in the Western region were assuming alarming proportions. In that election in October, various instances of election malpractices were registered, contestants were beaten and detained and ballot papers destroyed. In A Man of the People, Achebe works his creative imagination to reproduce these electoral malpractices; in the novel Odili ,Nanga's contestant , is beaten and retained in hospital , while his friend Max is killed .The West became lawless despite the presence of troops in

Ibadan; political executions, beating and arson became prevalent. The anarchy continued into the New Year 1966 with barricades erected by opposing factions and many people were killed by these political thugs. It is in these moments of great confusion that on 14 January a group of Igbo military officers took control of the government, placing Major General Ironsi of the new military regime in much the same fashion as Achebe had prophesied in the novel A Man of the People. Ngugi testifies to the point that “it was Achebe’s A Man of the People who correctly reflected the conditions that breed coups and rumours of coups” [Ngugi: 1993. 67]

## **SECTION TWO: Comparison and Contrast**

### **1- Characterization**

The similarities between Achebe’s A Man of the People and Warren’s All the King’s Men can be seen at the level of the conception of the novels’ main characters.

#### **Willie Stark and Chief Nanga**

Willie Stark and Chief Nanga are archetypal figures of corruption and deceit; they stand as examples of the prevailing moralities in the American South of the Depression of the 1930s and Nigeria of the 1960s .Their corruption is shown at different levels and is associated with a change of ethos and values and the moral drift in contemporary politics.

Willie Stark the once ‘Cousin Willie from the country’ personifies the American ideal of the self- made man who rises from nothingness to opulence. He is the product of his age and represents the aspirations of his countrymen for wealth and power. But he incarnates both the success and the corruption of his age.

Willie Stark rises from poverty to become the governor of his state and its powerful figure, he starts his life as the country treasurer of Masson city. At the beginning of the first chapter, he is shown as a frustrated young man unable to convince Pillsbury against building the school house through J.H. Moore whose rates are high and quality low. He

feels dejected when his voiced protest and suggestions go unheard. He fights the good fight against corruption until by luck and the collapse of the shady constructed school-building, he becomes a political hero. Willie takes control of the political state through a combination of reforms. His idealism and honesty are slowly replaced by a more realistic or cynical view of life. Willie is a political demagogue who can hold the attention of people and induce them to act according to his wishes.

Like Warren's protagonist, Nanga is a man of his time; the cynicism and slackness of his villagers enable him to succeed in his endeavours. He rises from insignificance to opulence. Like Warren's hero, Nanga has humble beginnings; a popular young and handsome teacher who goes into politics about 1948 and wins a seat in Parliament and just like Willie Stark, wins the ministry through illegal means and uses his political power to satisfy his own needs. Presently he is the Minister of Culture and lives in a luxurious house in the capital Bori. However, wealth and success are not all that characterize him. He is also deeply involved in the corruption of his post-independent country.

Nanga is a popular chief "The most approachable politician in the country" (p.1) and a very charming politician. "[...] well versed in the issues at stake, accomplished in the art of mob rhetoric, utterly lacking in personal integrity, and endowed with a belligerent capacity for sheer vindictiveness" (Cook:1983.43)

Stark's corruption is apparent in his ability to blackmail and bully his enemies into submission. He leaves no stone unturned to punish them. As a politician with a philosophy, Stark believes in the principle 'the end justifies the means' and adheres to the Calvinistic principle of the Original Sin and Total Depravity. He believes that "Man is conceived in sin and borne in corruption and he passeth from the stink of the didie to the stench of the shroud" (p.49) Like Stark, Nanga also uses illegal means to secure his position and promote his power. He bribes and threatens his political opponents. He even resorts to

violence to have his aims fulfilled. Both men use their office to reward their followers and bully into submission their opponents.

Through their mischievous deeds and dishonest practices, Willie Stark and M.A.Nanga stand as the expression of the respective moralities of the America of the Depression era and post -independence Nigeria. They also offer an image of the decline of values and a change in ethics and describe a reality made of blackmail,

corruption and crime. Even if the two characters seem to embody the ideal of the self-made man and success, their power does not invite the reader to admire because it is rather achieved through illegal and dubious ways.

### **B-Odili Samalu / Jack Burden**

In All the King's Men, Jack Burden stands as the informant-participant agent. His involvement in the world of Willie Stark assumes a journey of self- discovery from which he emerges embittered but matured and willingly accepts to “go into the convulsion of the world out of history into history and the awful responsibility of time” (p.438).The protagonist of A Man of the People seems to perform the same role and ends the narrative bitterly disillusioned. His involvement in the realm of Nanga's politics functions as a way towards self-discovery “; sitting at Chief Nanga's feet [he] received enlightenment” (p.39)

Characters' self-recognition is the ambition of literary authors which, according to Georg Lukacs, is achieved through the internal development of the novel's characters. Lukacs 'premise, i.e., “the problematic individual journeying towards himself” establishes the definition of the inner form of the novel (Lukacs. 1971.77-81) The theory ,in fact, is applicable to the actions of the protagonists of All the King's Men and A Man of the People.

Jack develops as a character with multiple externalities. He undergoes a series of psychological conflicts; each is laden with the absence of a father, erroneous philosophies,

despair and rejection of personal responsibility. His discourse adheres to Lukacs' description of the problematic individual and his pitfalls allude to his immanent character meaning. Jack is not capable of emotional expression. According to Louis D. Rubin, "Jack's existence at Burden's Landing did not provide him with principles on which any foundation could be constructed for action in the real world" (Cf. Louis D. Rubin.1963.p.118)

Lukacs' theory of the 'problematic individual' can be established through Jack's relationship with the outside world which is seen through the psychological bond between him and Willie Stark. He rarely makes decisive actions and it is Willie who provides practical outlets to his psychological pitfalls. An interpretation of the premise to Lukacs' argument "the central character's biography is significant only by his relationship to a world of ideals that stands above him" (1971:71) delineates Jack's reliance on his environment for meaning. Jack tells the reader that his story is "The story of a man who lived in the world and to him the world looked one way for a long time and it looked another and very different way" (435).

We notice that Odili's changing attitudes are similar to that of Jack. Standing at a safe position, he shows dismay and disgust at Chief Nanga and the likes of his. Yet, falling under the spell of the Minister's charms, he comes even to question his own assumptions about politics and wonders if "I had been applying to politics stringent standards that didn't belong to it" (p.9). Odili's initial ideals are destabilized even more in his involvement in the arena of politics. His lack of personal definition is clearly shown in the charming power that Nanga exercises on him. When the minister recognizes him in public at the beginning of the novel, the latter is made to feel as if he had become a hero in the eyes of the crowd (p.9) the realities about politics that he has thought were fixed begin to shift as soon as he comes to experience Nanga's warm embrace.

At the end, the only glimpse of meaning Odili seems to offer the reader, coming along from his embittered experience, is “you died a good death if your life had inspired someone to come forward and shoot your killer in the chest without asking to be paid” (p.149).

Odili and Jack’s judgements are made trustworthy because of the seeming integrity of their persons; an integrity that suffers from their indulging in suspicious bargains. Their deep involvement as both narrators and protagonists in the narratives draws them to a vantage position that widens their knowledge of the game of politics and enables them to probe in the anomalies of their societies.

### **C-The Feminine Characters in All the King’s Men and A Man of the people**

The resemblance in Achebe’s and Warren’s characterisation is evident also at the level of their female characters. In All the King’s Men and in A Man of the People, women are given symbolic status; they stand for an image, a symbol or a class and are given significance only in relation to their male counterpart.

Our analysis of Achebe’s and Warren’s feminine characters reveals analogies between two groups. They are Lucy Stark and Margaret Nanga on the one hand and Anne Stanton and Edna Odo on the other. To start with the first group, both characters enjoy dignified social positions, they are respectively a governor’s and a minister’s wives. In All the King’s Men, Lucy stands as Stark’s prime mover. She is emblematic of the governor’s pure beginning and is disappointed by his failure to live up to her moral standards. She is a plain countrywoman who holds steady in her love for her adulterous husband and though retreating to her sister’s farm, she occasionally supports him by turning up for publicity photographs. Likewise, Mrs Nanga is a country woman, a beneficiary of colonial utilitarian education and “a homely loyal wife prepared to the penalty

of her husband's greatness" (p.36). Dissatisfied with her husband's extra-marital relationships and impending marriage to the young Edna, she complains to Odili (p.88). But when the latter sets out to unseat him, she reverts to her traditional role of helpmate to retain her precarious social position. She remains a dependent peripheral figure.

Anne Stanton and Edna share lot of traits. Both women seem not to have outgrown their childlike innocence and are incapable of finding self-direction. Though raised to believe in a strict moral code, Anne becomes for a time Stark's mistress. Edna is dotted by the polygamist Nanga. Both women have human passion and an active intellect but like Anne, Edna is passive and plays the role her society assigns her. At the end of the novels, both Anne and Edna achieve romantic fulfilment in marrying the men they love.

## **2- The Setting**

The analogies between All the King's Men and A Man of the People can also be illustrated at the level of the spatial and temporal settings. The actions of the two novels take place respectively in a post-war era and post-independence period; times of confusions, disparities and paradoxes. They are also conducted within different landscapes, oscillating between refinement and poverty.

Though Warren does not mention the state or its capital, it can be surmised, that the actions of the novel take place in Louisiana and its capital city Baton Rouge. Part of the novel is set in Mason City; in the words of the narrator "to go there you follow High way 58, going north east of the city" .The other two locations are: Burden's Landing, an aristocratic, cosy residential area and a place of wealth, filled with potent images of the aristocratic Old South and the bustling Capitol.

Along Highway 58 the reader is acquainted with the changing landscape as he moves North from the cotton fields of the flat, low land; the home of the aristocratic, conservative "old good boys" to the red-clay hills; the place of the dirt farmers living on the borderline of

poverty, more receptive to change and making possible the rise of a demagogue in the shape of Willie Stark. In Mason City Stark is greeted with reverence and enthusiasm by the plain folk and his speech flows naturally, filled with folksy metaphors and rural anecdotes. He tells them "I didn't come here to ask you to give me anything, not even a vote "I'm taking the day off, and I have come home" I reckon I'll be back for that.(p.11) The Capital, however, is the world of the political machine; a place of corruption, blackmail, scandals and impeachment. It is the world of Willie Stark and his political enemies. The Willie Stark of the city suggests a callous man crushing his opponents.

Throughout A Man of the People we are presented with two different contrasting landscapes: Bori (Lagos thinly disguised) and Anata. Bori has the allure of a modern cosmopolitan centre endowed with ministerial cabinets and international firms. It is also a place of social disparities where the International Hotel, the luxurious minister's official residence and slums exist side by side and beggars sleep under the eaves of luxurious department stores. Bori is full of paradoxes and resembles the Southern state in All the King's Men.

Anata is the village where people live in red- earth and thatched-roof houses, but it is in such place that the politician goes to court the villagers for their votes. In a semi-official visit to the village, Nanga tells the villagers that he has not come to beg them for their votes and that this is just a family reunion( p.13) .The contrast between the two landscapes is made even sharper; in Anata (the village), Nanga feels perfectly at home and seems close to his fellow country men. He responds warmly, has "a jovial word for every one" (p.13) and emphasises that "a minister is a servant" (p.14). His people extol him for his warm personality and spontaneity. The Nanga of the city (Bori) offers the spectacle of a vulture, yapping and snarling for the meaty prize of a ministerial seat.

Even in the city, the contradictions are great. Odili contrasts the cosy habitations of the privileged politicians with the slums. “The surprises and contrasts in our great country were simply inexhaustible. Here was I in our capital city , reading about pails of excrement from the cosy comfort of a princely seven bathroom mansion with its seven gleaming, silent action, water closets (p.41).

However, whereas Jack’s hope transfigures the new South into a place of hope, Odili’s revulsion transforms Bori into a decadent and suffocating place.

As regards the temporal setting, both All the King’s Man and A Man of the People are set in post- war eras and express their author’s respective contemporary background. As an illustration, Warren places his novel in the perspective of the 1920s and the 1930s. The author calls into question the American optimism of the 1920s and the ideal of opportunity and success it boosted to all the Americans. President Calvin Coolidge’s proclamation that “the Business of America is Business.” proved to be narrow since it favoured a class at the expense of others. Neither the farmer nor the workingman shared the piping prosperity of the twenties. We notice that Warren’s portrayal of the Roaring Twenties and the Depression era is far from being a flattering account of America’s political and economic achievements. It is rather an insight into Southern politics as it worked in the 1920s and the 1930s.

Similarly, the perspective offered by Achebe in his portrayal of the Nigerian post-independence scene is analogous in many points to Warren’s stand-point towards the contemporary shady politics. In his fiction, the African writer portrays the post-colonial period of the African history and describes the effect of corrupt government on the daily lives of the African people. Like Warren, Achebe places the emphasis on the period’s political, cultural, and economic shortcomings and the failure of the class of leadership to live up to the aspirations of African people.

Through their dealing with their contemporary reality, Warren and Achebe indulge in the common task of social criticism. Their portrayal of different landscapes has allowed them to distinguish between different social categories so as to underline the contrasts and disparities between these classes. One of these contrasts is no less than the opulence and the prestige of the leading classes that take profit out of the stratification of the other social categories

### **3- Themes**

Corruption by power and betrayal are important motifs which govern the reading of All the King's Men and A Man of the People and determine Warren's and Achebe's reading of their respective country's history.

Corruption in politics in the two novels is the outcome of human greed for power. Power, in fact, corrupts those who wield it and blackens their fair reputation. The characters which hold power in the novels are, most of the time, tainted by it. For instance, Willie Stark, the upright farm boy, rises by sheer force of will to become the governor of his state. He is portrayed as an idealist who rises to power by instituting liberal reforms which are designated to help the state poor farmers. But he sees his idealism corrupted and tarnished when confronted in a sort of David -Goliath fight with his political opponents. The fight introduces Willie to the dirty games of politics. From an advocate against corruption, he grows as dirty as the gang he sweeps out, believing that "goodness can come only from badness because there isn't anything else to make it out of" (p.257). We deduce then that Stark is an idealist turned cynic. In his "Introduction to All the King's Men", Warren tells the reader that his politician whose name was Willie Stark "would be a man who in many ways was to serve the cause of social betterment, but who was corrupted by power, even by power against corruption" (Chambers ed.1977:93) In fact, Willie Stark builds hospitals, schools and roads but he sustains his power with blackmail, threats and bribes.

Like Robert Penn Warren, Achebe permeates his novel with images of corruption. The novel reads its political actuality in the light of the problem of leadership in African states. With the same marked interest of the Armah of The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born (1969) and the Soyinka of The Interpreters (1966) in the politics of post-independent Africa, Achebe portrays the political mood of the first decade of Nigerian independence.

Chief Nanga is the portraiture of the African post-colonial leader; one among many who “ had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in” (p.37) and who is now resolved to remain in it whatever the means. In fact, Chief Nanga shares many of his traits with other politicians in many African novels of English expression. Many of his qualities such as acquisitiveness and self-centeredness are reflected in Koomson. Nanga has been once an idealist poor school-teacher much admired by his pupil Odili, who has even taken pride in him (p.3). He is a man of tremendous charm, and he uses it with consummate skill as a political weapon.

Betrayal in All the King's Man and A Man of the People is shown at many levels and may be classified in different kinds. It is represented in many characters. In Warren's novel for instance, the reader discerns behind the propriety and manners of the contemporary Old South a moral corruption. Judge Irwin and Mrs Burden, Jack's mother, have committed adultery and betrayed their fellow human-beings. Stark's extra-marital relations with both his secretary, Sadie Burke and Ann Stanton figure the same type of sexual betrayal. This kind of betrayal is portrayed in Achebe's novel, through the character Chief Nanga who betrays his wife and indulges in many extra-marital relations with other women. Once a minister, M.A.Nanga considers his wife who “toiled and starved when there was no money” (p.88) too “bush” to host his international parties.

In our view, Nanga's betrayal of his people is the most shameful. He uses his political position to enrich himself at his country's expense. His lack of moral conscience makes

him defraud his nation by colluding with a foreign company (British Amalgamated). This is one of the many instances of betrayal of revolution that indicates a loss of patriotic values and integrity and points to a change of ethics. They show also the greed of the “gummy eating and fat dripping regime.” (p.149).

Betrayal is also the kind of disavowal pronounced by Jack Burden to his aristocratic values. Odili also represents the same kind of betrayal. In spite of his high-minded idealism he is easily drawn in the dirty ways of politics and is not able to withstand being drawn. According to the critic Rosemary Calmer, “He ends the novel guilty of the same moral error and even the same crimes as Nanga” (Quoted in\_Cain.Ed. 2003, 103).

We believe that Achebe and Warren see corruption as a recurrent motif in their history. Both of them demystify their past. As an illustration, through Warren’s narrator, Jack Burden, the author reveals to us to the story of Judge Irwin’s corruption. ‘The case of the Upright judge’ validates Willie’s belief in the total depravity of men. For both Willie and Jack, the past also holds its share of unflattering cases of corruption. Analogously, Odili does not hold any romantic perception of his past. He is not proud of his father’s past as a collaborator of the colonial authorities which used him as “District Interpreter”.

Both All the King’s Men and A Man of the People present worlds in which the line between corruption and idealism or innocence is particularly unclear. What in truth is corrupt seems legitimate. Characters have the opportunity to learn what is going on but choose to remain ignorant. Jack’s characterisation of himself as a piece of furniture (p.113) allows him to distance himself from the consequences of the tasks Willie Stark assigns him. Similarly, Odili’s appeal to the people is heard but ignored. The villagers know about Chief Nanga’s corruption but take it for good sense. The narrator expresses their cynicism in these terms: “tell them that this man had used his position to enrich himself, and they

would ask you if you thought a sensible man would spit the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth.” (p.2).

We conclude from the above comparison that corruption and betrayal are common recurrences in both Achebe’s and Warren’s novels

#### **4- The Use of Irony in the Two Novels**

The similarities between All the King’s Men and A Man of the People can be found at the level of the ironic mood which permeates the two narratives. Irony is a literary mode which relies on the use of puns, paradoxes, and other forms of wit in order to unify the contradictions of an experience, deflate a serious situation or to create authorial detachment. Most of the time, irony involves an element of the paradoxical which allows the reader to perceive a dissonance between appearance and reality, the actions of the characters and their results, and the author’s words and their meaning. An ironic discourse may involve four types of irony: verbal irony, tragic irony, dramatic irony, and Socratic irony.

##### **Verbal Irony**

Verbal irony is the type of irony which abounds in All the King’s Men and A Man of the People. It is a Janus - faced statement; the context in which it is uttered or the tone of the speaker indicates that its meaning is opposite to the words of the announcement. Verbal irony allows Warren and Achebe to report about a paradoxical and complex reality that often challenges the reader’s ability for discernment.

A key illustration of Warren’s use of verbal irony lies in the epithet attributed to Willie Stark. Willie is, in fact, the king to many who ‘dance to his tune’. Yet, he is unable to boss over his son whose extravagant behaviour brings part of his father’s fall. The men who rally around him to help execute his plans cannot save his life.

In nearly a similar way, Achebe uses verbal irony to convey the inconsistency in his characters' position and their deeds. For example, behind all the descriptions of Nanga, there lays a stinging ironic tone which reveals the narrator's sarcastic attitude towards him. Achebe's novel is undercut by irony at every point; Chief Nanga whose epithet is the title of the book is supposed to stand for the traditions and the beliefs of his people. As 'a man of the people', he is expected to defend the common man. Instead, Nanga leaves his people behind in his pursuit of personal interests. As a minister of culture, Nanga shows cultural ignorance; given the fact that writers are so few in his country, Odili expects him to know them all personally. However, "it was clear Chief Nanga hadn't heard the man's name before" (p.62).

Another instance of verbal irony related to Nanga is conveyed by Odili who describes him as 'a born politician'. However, read in the context of the minister's ignorance, this tribute is no more than a liability "to get away with almost anything he said or did" (p.65). Verbal irony allows also Achebe to underline the hypocrisy of the minister who, despite his rejection of earned degrees, is proud of the honorary Doctorate he is to be awarded in the United States. Furthermore, Nanga tells Odili "If anybody comes to you and wants to make you minister, run away. True" (p.36). The reader is appalled by his double talk since, later in the novel, the same Nanga threatens Odili to leave the dirty games of politics to 'those who know how to play it'(p119).

Our investigation of verbal irony in All the King's Men and A Man of the People reveals that this rhetorical device is a means which allows their authors to achieve social criticism. This social criticism extends into a satiric attitude on the part of Achebe towards the class of leadership.

## Tragic irony

Tragic irony is also called irony of fate. It is attributed to works of literature in which extra personal forces, sometimes supernatural, alter the course of events and reorient them leading the protagonist to a tragic death.

In All the King's Men and A Man of the People tragic irony applies both to Willie Stark and Chief Nanga. The two characters are self-satisfied individuals who pursue the ideals of power and social position. However, at the end, extraneous agents frustrate their ambition, alter their destinies and bring about their destruction.

After Tom's accident, and in the wake of the swelling sorrow around him, Willie Stark undergoes a radical change and decides to clean up his shady political deals. To renew his commitment to the 'all together or none' of his idealistic beginning, Willie decides to build his people a hospital. He forsakes his mistresses Anne Stanton and Sadie and returns to his pious wife Lucy. Willie's idealistic reformation brings about his downfall. It is in the midst of these reforms that he is murdered by Adam Stanton who "wouldn't be paid pimp for his sister's whore" (p.389)

Willie dies unfulfilled; his quest for rehabilitation is tragically thwarted. It is obstructed by Sadie's bitterness and Tiny Duffy's 'welching'. In his death-bed Willie insists on Jack to believe that "It might be different if it hadn't happened" (p .400)

Like Willie, Nanga is drawn by the lust for power and like him, his ambition is frustrated by extra-personal forces. However, being himself an embodiment of vice and corruption, his failure can be less attributed to the moral laxity of his society than to his moral decadence. The force that contrives against Nanga and brings his fall is one of his own evil creations; the thugs he uses to help him secure his power, the unruly mobs and private armies "having tasted blood during election had got out hand and ruined their masters and employers". (p.144)

Tragic irony is a device through which Warren and Achebe comment on the social and political condition of their respective society. This comment stresses the different unrelenting forces that control and orient the destinies of the individuals. In front of these forces characters like Willie Stark and Chief Nanga remain powerless and impotent.

### **Dramatic irony**

Dramatic irony points at a discrepancy between the action of characters and their results. Its dramatic effects are achieved when the reader and the author share the knowledge of a present or a future circumstance of which the character is ignorant. Throughout All the King's Men and A Man of the People, dramatic irony can be examined in relation to the main characters

Jack is assigned the task to dig up the dirt on Judge Irwin for Willie to ensure the election of his senatorial candidate. Confident he will find nothing, and with the intention to substantiate the Judge's fine reputation, he sets out "to dig up the dead cut". (p.192). Jack believes that the integrity of Judge Irwin will stand as a refutation of Willie's cynicism about human nature, yet the success of Jack's investigation about the Judge's past, far from refuting this cynicism, serves to underscore the apparent truth of Willie's confidence in the universal depravity of men.

By digging up the past of the Judge, Jack cannot prefigure the tragic potential of his act and the amount of harm he causes. His revealing to the Stanton their father's involvement in protecting the Judge while he was a governor leads Anne in the way of Stark to become his mistress. The dramatic effect is achieved when Adam, informed about his sister's relation with the governor (Stark), kills the latter and gets killed.

Dramatic irony can also be studied in relation to Stark. While the reader is informed about the doom of Tom Stark, the father is shown anticipating the fatal outcome of his action. Stark sees his son as a refined version of himself, he forces the City's football

coach to play Tom despite the fact that he has broken training and is out of condition .The latter is mortally injured and is paralysed from the neck down. The feeling of guilt induces Stark to amend his life by keeping the hospital he intends to name after his son clean of graft. Ironically it is his reforming mood that brings about his fatal doom.

Achebe also achieves ironic effect in his narrative where we sense author-reader complicity at the expense of Nanga's fate .The signs which foreshadow his fall are clearly suggested while the latter still believes his life safe and immune.

During the event in Odili's introduction to the Minister of Overseas Training the latter supposes that he has been poisoned. Chief Nanga teases his colleague on the ostensible poisoning. Odili comments on this, telling himself that "In spite of Nanga's bravado, he had been terribly scared himself [...] he felt personally threatened" (p.35). The incident prompts Nanga's warning Odili to run away if someone comes and says he wants to make him a minister (p.36) .At the end of the narrative, it is Nanga who is reported to have been caught trying to run away dressed like a fisherman after the military coup.

### **Socratic irony**

Socratic irony is used when a character is self-deprecating or is unobtrusively treated by the author. The character takes an *Eiron* role by assuming a pose of ignorance and foolishness. He asks seemingly innocuous questions which gradually succeed to undermine his interlocutor' case and trap them into seeing the truth as he himself sees it.

Socratic irony in All the King's Men involves Jack's initial ambivalence towards the person of Willie Stark. He at times endorses the other characters (The judge, his mother, and Adam's Stanton) prejudices toward the governor who present him as everything that stands against the noble values of their old South. However, while the events unfold, Jack builds up a new image about the enigmatic personality of the boss and persuades both the reader and the other characters about the greatness of Willie Stark.

Jack's Eiron role shows in the way and process through which he comes to admire the Boss as he is gradually torn in the spiral of his dubious political actions to undermine his political enemies. He even comes to undermine the other characters' prejudices and tries to impose his point of view on them. For instance, when Jack meets Willie Stark for the first time, he underestimates him for his looks and reflects "There was Cousin Willie from the country, with his Christmas tie, and maybe you would take him to the park and show him the swans." (p.18) When he joins the Boss as his right-hand man, he is assaulted by his mother and the young executive's questions about him. He assumes ignorance and answers his mother's warning 'not to be mixed up in any graft' "...I'm very careful not to ever know what anybody anywhere does anytime." (p.126) When Jack comes to know the Boss's intentions he can't help admiring him for this greatness in spite of all the blemishes on his career. While in All the King's Men Socratic irony shows in Jacks' deprecating attitude, in A Man of the People, it is noticeable in the naive image of Odili. The latter is presented as naive character.

Throughout the narrative, Odili is subjected to petty and deprecating treatments and roles by the other characters: in the congratulatory festival for Nanga, Odili is summoned by his school's manager to stand with the other teachers in a queue to be introduced to the Minister. When Nanga emasculates him, and unashamedly beds his girl- friend, Odili is 'paralysed' by his inaction. At the end of the novel, he is made to feel ridiculous by Chief Nanga in the latter's inaugural campaign- meeting and is almost beaten to death by his thugs.

All along the narrative of A Man of the People, Odili has been portrayed as a naïve character. Nevertheless, at the end of the story he becomes the agent of a happy ending. His involvement with Nanga stands as an act of "enlightenment and self- discovery" (p.39),

it allows him to probe in the reality of power and politics. Yet, even if at the personal level he achieves romantic fulfilment and is safe, Odili ends the narrative bitterly disillusioned.

The achievements of Jack Burden and Odili are mainly ones of insight. They remain positive accomplishments because they modify both their own and the other characters' positions within the novels. Thus, while Odili asserts his contempt for his country's class of leaders, Jack Burden establishes the greatness of Willie Stark's dream. The two characters also hold the visions of their creators about their respective countries' history and reality.

### **5- Retrospective and Homodiegetic Narrative: Its Function**

One of the technical aspects of the modern novel is its swerving away from the traditional linear mode of narration. By the advent of the modernist trend in literature, it becomes evident that the way a story is told is as important as the story itself. The technique of the broken chronology allows the writer to avoid the simplicity and limitation of the mimetic mode.

In All the King's Men, the fractured chronology is a device that allows its writer to roam between present and past and reproduce the cyclic mode of history. It enables him: "to underscore one of the novel's basic themes: events in the present are the result of past actions, and they have a direct bearing on future happening" [Woodel: 1993, 27]. Technically, All the King's Men is a retrospective narrative. Jack tells the story from the perspective of 1939 when all is a good while ago "And Masters is dead now [...] And Adam Stanton is dead now, too [...]. And Judge Irwin is dead [...] and the Boss is dead". (p.49).

The story starts with the narrator's description driving down Highway 58, a new concrete road, the product of Stark's term in office, with his boss Stark and his family in the summer of 1936. As they pass an old school- building on the edge of town Jack's memory leaps to some fourteen years, back in 1922. As he glimpses the image of the school, the

reader is told of Jack's first meeting with Willie Stark. The extended memory that follows is the first of many flash-backs that occur throughout the narrative. Jack's memories in this flash back show the reader just how far Willie has come from the country sap to the astute politician almost cynical about his political allies.

The flash backs and recollection are also what forms the second chapter. The reader is told about Willie's career and his rise to the governorship of his state. From the perspective of 1939, chapter two covers the years from 1922 to 1930. Through the chronological ordering of two campaigns, Jack underscores the change in Willie Stark from the idealist, well-intentioned candidate to the strong demagogue; a painful transformation from the farm boy to the 'savvy' political tycoon.

Very significantly too, Achebe displays artistic sophistication in his handling of flash-backs. It is through this device that insights into chief Nanga's pre-parliament days are pictured and how he now rises from poverty to opulence.

Achebe's narrative also roams backward in time and forward in memory. It works in most of its points out of Odili's remembrances. The story is narrated from the vantage point of closure, when the experiences being narrated are all over and that all becomes clear enough for the narrator to be fitted in the pattern of a narrative.

The story thus starts in the present which is the moment of narration, then it roams backward, taking the reader to the afternoon when the narrator renews his acquaintance with Chief Nanga during the latter's visit to Odili's school in Anata. Instead of proceeding forwardly, the narrative leaps back further in time to about sixteen years, to about 1948 when Nanga "had been my teacher in standard three" and Odili "something like his favourite pupil." (p.2) The narrative moves forward to an immediate past in 1960 and the reader is told of a crisis that occurs in the government and causes Odili's disillusionment with post independence politics. In his Reading Chinua Achebe, Simon Gikandi attributes

the existence of so many temporal shifts and levels of narrations to “the struggle and failure of Odili to establish coherence even in the existence of a unitary theme (political corruption)” (1991:p.107).

The temporal shifts allow the narrator to underscore Nanga’s development from the popular young teacher to the nationalist or rather Odili’s idealistic projection of him, then to the nascent party -boss he comes to detest. Retrospective narrative enables Odili to impart sense and meaning to the contradiction of the historical moment.

First person narratives are generally found in disguised and fictional biographies. Like All the King’s Men, A Man of the People offers a consistent example of first person narrative situation. Odili, the narrator is always present at every point in the action, which is seen throughout his point of observing and is always mediated by his attitudes to events and other characters. The gap between Odili as a narrating self and an experiencing self increases the degree of realism. In presenting a scene which takes place sometimes just a few minutes before the writing, Odili says “I cannot now recall exactly what my feelings were at that point”. (p.5) Even though the presence of this gap between the two selves allows the narrator to set up the kind of frame he sees appropriate for the narrative, it also questions his reliability. By answering the question about Odili’s unreliability, Achebe said that “one thing that he wasn’t unreliable about was his own feelings and that saves him as a human being, as somebody who puts his own feelings under the microscope and analyses them honestly.” He adds that “such a person is worthy of respect”. (Wilkinson: 1990 P.51).

Like Odili, Jack Burden, the narrator of Warren’s novel is as much the protagonist as he is the informant. He tells about his experiences and shares his reflection on the events. The point of view of almost All the King’s Men is first -person subjective narrative. Jack’s story is so intimately related to that of Willie Stark that as the narrative develops

their stories are told simultaneously. Jack is a trained historian and an experienced journalist. As such, he attempts to record objectively the actions thereby providing insight into the personality of Stark and other characters. Yet, still what the reader knows about them (the characters) is what Jack shows him. In his analysis of All the King's Men, Norton R. Girault explains that the reader "can get an understanding of Robert Penn Warren's interpretation of the Boss through a perception of the way the Boss's story was experienced by Warren's first person narrator".[ Chambers.ed.1977:29] The story of the "king" and his men filters from Jack's mind in the same way that the story of Nanga is the flow of Odili's recollections and remembrances.

## **Section II**

### **The Differences Between All the King's Men and A Man of the People**

Our comparative study between Warren's and Achebe's novel has attempted to foreground the similarities between the two fictions in terms of characterization, setting and their ironical vision of history. We can build our arguments that the main characters in the two novels are archetypal figures. Northrop Frye defines an archetype as "A symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognisable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole" [1990:365] Willie Stark and Chief Nanga are among the archetypal figures described in the two narratives. Both incarnate the symbol of the self-made man who starts from hard scrabble poverty to succeed and achieve wealth and power.

The settings of A Man of the People and All the King's Men are no less similar. We can identify two types of landscapes which can be distinguished from each other by their potent wealth or by their fetid poverty. On the one hand, there are the villages: Anata, Urua and Masson City, they are poor areas, still waiting for development and change. On the

other hand, there are the residential areas in Bori and Burden's Landing. Unlike the former landscapes, they can be acknowledged for their sophistication, refinement and cosiness. Nevertheless, both settings assume a symbolic dimension. In Warren's and Achebe's novels, they point out respectively to a disjunction between the Old South and the New South emerging after the Civil War, the watershed that separated Southern History into an ante-bellum and a post-bellum and the social and economic discrepancies in the Nigeria of 1960s. They show the wide gap between the lower and the new classes of leaders and *nouveaux riches*.

Concerning the themes, both novels revolve around political corruption and power which are motifs that govern the authors' reading of their respective histories and elucidate the moral problems of both the American South and independent Nigeria. The structures of the novels are basically similar; both Warren and Achebe resort to the broken chronology technique of narration to reproduce human experience and erase the barrier between present, past and future. As regards the mode of writing, it is also the same because both Warren's and Achebe appeal extensively to irony. We have distinguished at least four types of irony which permeates the two narratives; verbal irony, tragic irony, dramatic irony and Socratic irony.

However, the affinities that we have underlined between All the King's Man and A Man of the People conceal deeper differences that mark off each fiction. These divergences can be located at the same level with the analogies.

### **1-Characterization**

In the previous section, we have brought to light the evidence about the close conception of Willie Stark and Chief Nanga. The similarities between the two characters stem from the fact that both are self-made men rising from insignificance to opulence and consideration and whose dreams are associated with social or political promotion.

Nonetheless, the two characters remain fundamentally different and fulfil distinctive roles in their respective novels.

The main difference between Willie Stark and Chief Nanga is best understood in relation to Aristotle's conception of the tragic hero in his *Poetics*. Aristotle defines the tragic hero as: "the sort of man who is not conspicuous of virtue and justice and whose fall into misery is not due to vice or depravity but rather to some error." (1982:48) In the light of the definition, it seems obvious that Willie Stark is the prototype of the tragic hero whose downfall is brought by his pride.

Nanga, on the contrary, embodies vice and depravity, he is not allowed a tragic status. His downfall after his re-election does not call for pity or sympathy from the part of the readers. All along the narrative Nanga is conceived as a hypocrite who cheats his people. His political success and social position are not the outcome of honest actions but rather the result of moral slackness and criminal actions. He is not allowed moral elevation. In reporting the crisis that occurred in the governing party the (P.O.P.) in 1960, Odili describes Nanga who was still a back –bencher in the Party with images filled with animality and grotesque physicality. Nanga "led the pack of [...] hounds straining their leash to get at their victims" "to share in the derisive laughter of the hungry hyena." (p.5). Nanga, seeing the vacant ministerial seats after the dismissal of the Minister of Finance and his team "had yapped and snarled so shamelessly for the meaty prize" (p.7) At the end of the narrative the reader does not identify with the fugitive minister who is arrested trying to escape by canoe dressed like a fisherman (p.147) and feels neither sympathy nor pity for his fall.

Unlike Nanga, Stark is a more morally complicated character. He carries a tragic potential and his fall affects the reader. He is described as 'a great man' who wins the hearts of his country folk. He offers them schools, new roads and hospitals. In spite of his

illegal means and dubious actions, his faithful dedication to his ideals sometimes forces the admiration of the reader. In fact, Willie's humanitarian projects cannot be taken as mere hypocrisy, even if they are intended to the aggrandisement of his own ego. Yet, even if the reader is sympathetic with Stark, he cannot adhere completely to the dishonest means he uses to bully his political enemies. Stark's fall produces a cathartic effect and the reader is left with a mixed feeling of fear and pity.

To provide his protagonist with a tragic hero stature while still keeping him within the limits of reality, Warren associates him with American mythic figures. For instance Willie's single-minded devotion to study and self-improvement, his populism and humanitarianism put him in the line of Benjamin Franklin and Abraham Lincoln. Stark's early life is a southern agrarian version of the American myth of the self-made person. Besides, his name is connotative and points to the duality of human experience. His name embodies at the same time the ideas of strong will 'Willie' and stark facts. Beside his association with historical figures, Warren links Willie with literary characters. For example Willie's quest for power sets him in the American literary tradition for the American dream documented in the works of Fitzgerald and Faulkner. His failure to materialize the dream can be easily compared to Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby.

In addition to the exalting associations, Warren's retrospective narration enhances the status of his hero. Jack relates from the vintage point of 1939 the preceding events of the rise and fall of Willie Stark when the latter is already dead. His point of view allows him to achieve temporal distance through which the story of Willie Stark becomes one evocative of the mythic stories of King David and Prometheus.

In contrast with Willie's heroic portrait, Achebe draws a caricature image of Nanga. He traces his portrait back to the images of the bales, cunning and lusty for wealth and women, and to ancient chiefs "wearing damask and gold chains" and "acknowledging

sheer with [their] fan[s] of animal skin” (p.7) . The portrait of Nanga does not merely allude to the greed and corruption of the African indigenous chiefs; it also parodies the present ruling class who mimics the white man’s manners.

To conclude, we can say that the portrait of Stark and that of Nanga diverge from each other. The reasons of their divergence relate fundamentally to the difference between Warren’s and Achebe’s artistic intentions. Instead of presenting Stark as a monster of evil and iniquity , a nightmarish demagogue who exploits the poor of his constituency, Warren’s sympathetic characterization portrays him as a disillusioned idealist whose actions –though pragmatic and frequently illegal lead to humanitarian progress because guided by the passion to make the ‘forgotten men’ share in the American Dream. On the contrary, the African writer mocks the image of the new African leaders and denounces their corruption and immorality.

## **2 -The Mode of writing**

Warren and Achebe’s use of irony has allowed us to highlight the similarities in their respective fiction at the level of their mode of writing. Now, investigating the main characters’ power of action, we can draw some differences between All the King’s Men and A Man of the People at the level of their fictional mode. In his first essay in Anatomy of criticism, Northrop Frye develops the theory of modes and classifies fictional narratives according to the degree of elevation of the main characters. His classification distinguishes five fictional modes in which the hero’s power of action moves between the divine authority inherent in mythical narratives and the state of lower freedom which characterizes the characters of ironic modes.

In between the extreme modes of myth and irony, Frye distinguishes three other literary modes: one, the romantic, where the actions of the hero are marvellous but retain a human nature; two, the high mimetic whose main character is superior in degree to other

men but not to his natural environment; the hero is a leader, he has authority, passion and power of expression far greater than ours , but what he does is subject to social criticism; three, the low mimetic in which the hero is one of us and we respond to a sense of his common humanity.

In Warren's narrative Willie's power of action is superior to other men; his success to materialize his dream for power and authority proves that he is the kind of hero who can challenge the power of the established Southern aristocracy. It shows that he is capable to transcend the status of ordinary men in overcoming the obstacles placed in his way by 'the old good boys' through audacity and strength of will. Therefore, All the King's Men can be classified in the high mimetic mode of fictions. The belonging of All the King's Men to the high mimetic mode shows also in the events and characters portrayed in the narratives .The images of Stark, Lucy Stark and Anne Stanton reveal affinities with legendary figures in the history of the American South. They send respectively to the mythical image of the strong American leader Huey Long of Louisiana, the Southern, pious devoted wife and the emblematic Southern belle; the mythic lady of perfection .

The political tumult of the American South of the 1930s reinforces Warren's tendency towards tragedy (high mimetic). It depicts an American atypical, volatile scene, an earthly kingdom under the almost complete domination of a dictator. The violent behaviour of the period is shown in the turbulent campaigns, the impeachment proceedings and in the attempts to blackmail people to induce them into submission. All these are political weapons and they are also the marked features of the American political scene. Their relevance to the history of the American South is highlighted in Warren's commentary on the novel. In the "introduction to Modern Library Edition of *All the King's Men*" (1953), the writer admitted the relationship between the actual Huey Long and Willie

Stark “It was the carrier of Huey Long and the atmosphere of Louisiana that suggested the play that was to become the novel” [Chambers: 1977.97]. Warren’s “All the King’s Men: The Matrix of Experience” (1964) dwells at length on the Long-Stark connection and the fascinating variety of life the author had discovered while he was teaching (Light ed. 1971.2-6).

In Achebe’s narrative, Odili’s power of action corresponds to that of ordinary men; it is neither superior to other men nor to his environment. His failure to bring a change to the prevailing chaos and withstand corruption shows that he is not the kind of hero who can challenge the established class of leadership and indicates that he cannot transcend the status of ordinary men. Therefore, A Man of the People can be classified in the low mimetic mode of fiction.

The belonging of A Man of the People to the low mimetic mode shows also in the events and the characters of the narrative. The images of Odili, Max and Nanga have their referents in the actual Nigeria of the 1960s. They send respectively to the educated elite who aspire to achieve positive political influence and to the class of leaders, acquisitive and guided by an insatiable lust for power.

The political climate of the 1960s manifests further Achebe’s tendency toward verisimilitude and the accuracy of description (the realism of the low mimetic modes). The chaotic atmosphere of this period is presented by the disparity between the classes, in the corruption in both business and politics and in the abuses. These features are not without foundation; In A Man of the People, Achebe exhibits his power of observation. He keenly recollects fictionally the Nigerian electoral malpractices, persecution of opponents, violence, thuggery and the confusion that led to the catastrophe of 1966. The striking parallel between the limited resolution that is projected by the novel and the nature of historical events can be seen as a vindication to Achebe’s realist presentation. The

fictional account becomes alarmingly life-like. The fictional coup ,that ultimately overthrows Nanga's system of abuse directly mirrors the real- life coup that took place in January 1966.

To conclude, we can say that the difference between Warren's and Achebe's narratives at the level of the mode of writing reveals their positions towards their societies and shows their literary fictional modes. Granted the fact that the overall atmosphere of A Man of the People is one that parallels real Nigeria , we consider Achebe's narrative as realistic novel narrated in a satiric vein. In the same way, given the fact that All the King's Men has its source of inspiration in the Southern political scene of the 1930s, we may approach it as a political tragedy. Both novels may be approached as *romans à clé* in which actual historical events are documented in vaguely fictionalized forms.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter has highlighted the analogies between A Man of the People and All the King's Men at the level of characterization, setting, form and structure, themes and the use of irony. It has also documented the differences in their mode of fiction and characterization. However important the common points between the two fictions, they do not reveal any intertextual relationship between them. Further more, Achebe has never acknowledged the influence of Robert Warren on his work, though he might have read Warren's novel. Indeed, Achebe visited the U.S.A in 1963 and on that visit, he "interacted with several writers and extended his acquaintance with literary works by Americans too" (Ohaeto: 1997.p.97).

At the same time, the divergences hide deeper significance; they point out to the uniqueness of each experience and the individual creative spirit of each writer. Accordingly, we are led to assume that the comparative relation between Warren's and Achebe's respective fiction is one involving literary affinity. Our conclusion is also

supported by the similarities in the two writers' experiences, careers and their historical background.

As we have already said, Robert Pen Warren began his professional career as assistant professor of English in Louisiana in 1934 at Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge. He saw Huey Long's political machine at close range and absorbed the factual and the mythical stories about him. These experiences he later records in "All the King's Men: the Matrix of Experience". In 1938, Warren received a Guggenheim fellowship that took him to Mussolini's Italy which allowed him to observe another variety of a dictatorship while spending a year there. It was in Italy that Warren began a play, Proud Flesh, about a man named Willie Tallos, a governor who ruled his state with an iron fist, the play that led up into the novel, All the King's Men.

The survey of Achebe's career reveals that the enabling conditions in which A Man of the People was produced are close to Warren's context and life experience. Achebe's career embodies the same closeness to the facts and realities of his Nigeria with that of his American counterpart. As we have already seen, most of Warren's literary career is spent in the U.S.A. like Warren, after he had completed his studies, Achebe was invited to Lagos to assume his duties as a Senior Broadcasting Officer in the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (N.B.C.) from 1945, this made it possible for him to perceive the political, social and economic events in the country from close quarters. By the time of the writing of A Man of the People his position allowed him to follow closely the events that led to the factual coup of 1966. The observation of these events resulted in a short story The Voter which used some of the material that had inspired his A Man of the People.

Warren's and Achebe's professional careers brought them close to the social and political realities of their respective countries and provided them with necessary material for their literary works.

Robert Penn Warren was very affected by the American South whose history and culture remained central to his works. His kinship with the Nash-ville group of writers called the Fugitives (because of their association with the magazine The Fugitive) who romanticized agrarianism and the Southern way of life is revealed through the novel's delineation of a historical milieu and investigation into the moral problems of the South. Most of Warren's large casts of characters are corrupt in some way; their corruption stems from an indignation traced back to the Civil War. A war fought by idealistic young gallants, humiliated less by losing the war than by watching their land being plundered during Reconstruction. In 1860, the American South was invaded by the Federal troops and waged the bloodiest war in American history which in the words of one writer "cut a gush through the history of the country" (Brogan: 1985.374).

The end of the war brought hatred between North and South. The Reconstruction which was thought to bind up the wounds of the devastated South proved to be one of humiliating and punitive intent. As years passed, it became evident that the South would know no peace until the Northern troops were withdrawn. As a matter of fact, the radical Reconstruction Acts were admitted to be a failure. Northern rule was ended in 1877, yet, it left the region devastated and overwhelmingly burdened by debts and demoralized by decades of dictatorship.

Achebe's interest in the realities of his country, past and present, is no less obvious. It is clearly seen throughout his writings. Nigeria, the homeland of the writer, witnessed foreign rule and political domination at nearly the same time as the American South. In 1885 Nigeria was declared a British protectorate and came to undergo the pervasive effects of the colonial encounter, the traumatic consequences of which Achebe records in his Things Fall Apart (1958) and Arrow of God (1964). Achebe's interest in the recent history of his country continued to grow, resulting in imaginative writings of concreteness

gained through strict precision and a realism of detailed historical presentation. The present to which he turns in the later writing (A Man of the People) is still impinged with the past.

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# Chapter two

## Neo- Imperialism, Failed Idealism and Corruption in Conrad's *Nostromo* and Achebe's *A Man of the People*

### Introduction

The relationship of literary affinity reached in the first chapter of our study seems to support the assumption that put under similar social, political and economic circumstances; writers of disparate geographical backgrounds may produce works with significant and striking similarities.

Apart from Robert Penn Warren's All the Kings Men, Achebe's A Man of the People bears points of resemblances with Conrad's Nostromo for nearly the same reasons. Both of them are regarded by critics as political novels addressing issues of neo-imperialism. In fact, Nostromo is Conrad's first extended venture into the political world. Similarly, A Man of the People is the first of Achebe's novels which is fairly and squarely about post-independent Nigeria.

In his The English Novel, Walter Allen (1954) describes Nostromo as "a political novel in the profoundest meaning of the word". (p.309) In Nostromo Conrad turns from his seaman memories to write about the western hemisphere. The Achebe of A Man of the People departs from the celebratory vein of his earlier novels to a more critical engagement with the contemporary reality and politics of the African nation state. Faced with the new realities of power politics in independent Nigeria, Achebe has had to reappraise his role in his society; the preoccupation with the creation of a usable past had to give way to concerns with the pressing problems of the present. In Satire & the Postcolonial Novel: Achebe, V.S. Naipaul, Rushdie, the critic William Cain draws attention to the fact that each postcolonial text, however unflattering its representations of post -

independence societies may appear to be, deserves to be read in the context of imperial domination and with attention to the multiplicity of targets that it may invoke in the context (Cain.Ed. 2003, p.12)

We consider that even if Nostromo is comparatively epic in its proportion to A Man of the People, Achebe could not have overlooked it in his departure from the initial attempt to restore the African man's dignity while portraying the pervasive effects of the white civilisation on his culture that he delimited in Things Fall Apart (1958) and Arrow of God (1964).

Conrad emerged from literary neglect in the 1930s -after his death –and critical works on his significant contribution began to appear. His novels, especially Nostromo propelled him into what F R Leavis in 1948 called The Great Tradition. In 1954 Walter Allen claimed that “Nostromo is Conrad's finest work and perhaps, the greatest novel in English this century.” (p.370) and in 1948 Ian Watt praised Nostromo as “Conrad's greatest novel [which] is a rich study not only of a typical South American country but [also] of the politics of any underdeveloped country and for this reason it is permanently topical”. (Watt .1992:1)

Granted the prominence attributed to Nostromo over Conrad's other works, we are led to consider that even if Achebe had not acknowledged its influence, he could not have escaped its impact. Conrad, as Achebe said, was once one of his favourite writers: "I used to like Conrad, I used to like Conrad particularly," he asserts in an interview with Lewis Nkosi (Lindfors Ed.1997: 6). Moreover, given Achebe's early hostility and criticism towards Conrad's Heart of Darkness and his decision to write his own story in “an act of atonement with his past” , we are inclined to think that he could not swerve enough from his precursor's influence when he “intend[ed] to take a hard look at what [they] in Africa [were] making of independence but using Nigeria which [he] [knew] best”. (Ohaeto: 1997.122).

Achebe's novel, in fact, is written out of extreme disillusionment with post- independence politics.

The hypothesis drawn above allows us to undertake the following comparison between A Man of the People and Nostromo. Our analysis will focus on the aspects of the novels already dealt with by tackling them from a new theoretical angle. The first aspect is related to the way Conrad and Achebe apprehend the notion of neo-imperialism. We can concede that modern themes of imperialism, misguided idealism and unbridled greed are embedded in Nostromo and A Man of the People. We can also say that Achebe's departure from the celebratory vein of his early fiction and the move from the creation of a usable past to a cynical indictment of politics in the modern sphere could have brought him well under the Conrad of Nostromo so as to 'uncrown' the theme of the dignity of the African man because of its weariness in the light of the corruption, disillusionment of post colonial African states.

In our comparison we shall develop the argument that in his change of tone and attitude in relation to his society, and the substitution of a critical realism to his initial social realism, Achebe has sought the influence of Conrad though he criticised him in public pronouncements and in his early fiction Things Fall Apart and in Arrow of God. We shall divide our comparison in to three sections. The first section investigates the two writers' enabling writing conditions through the study of their respective biography and background. The second section draws the different intertextual relationships between Achebe's and Conrad's novels, this part of our study is meant to support our claim to the contact between the two writers. In the last section of this second chapter we shall highlight the process through which Achebe misreads his 'father poet' to shed light on some aspects of his work. One of these aspects is the issue of his conception of the post - colonial subject.

Before starting our analysis, we suggest a summary of the theoretical paradigm which helps us to determine the type of comparative relationship that Achebe's A Man of the People bears to Conrad's Nostromo

### **Harold Bloom's Theory of Influence**

Harold Bloom's theory of influence attempts to explain the influence of a poet on another poet in terms of a Freudian "family romance" [1975:95]. In other words, Bloom's theory of poetic influence rejects the traditional "source study", "the history of ideas", and "the patterning of images", and likens the development of the poet through the other poets to an oedipal relation of son to father. In this son-father relationship, intertextual relations bear family resemblance to one another and involve a psychological *agon* (a parricide in the oedipal situation) where the belated poet's (the young poet or the ephebe) only weapon against his precursor is 'creative misprision'.

Creative misprision is the process through which the 'ephebe' -the belated writer- sublimates (the concept is Freud's) his precursor's influence. It employs defensive mechanisms similar to those of the Oedipal relations of son to father and aims at distorting the precursor's poem beyond the poet's conscious recognition. Bloom identifies six distortive processes through which a belated poet operates in reading his precursor poem. He calls them reversionary ratios and means them to represent the developmental stage of the ephebe. Bloom's six reversionary ratios are:

1- *Clinamen*: It is "poetic misreading or misprision proper" [ibid: 14]. In other words, it is a distortive process through which the ephebe's poem swerves away from the poem of his precursor. It implies that the precursor was correct up to a point, but the ephebe has made the right turn in his own poem.

2- *Tessera*: It is “completion and anti-thesis” [ibid]. It implies that the precursor did not go far enough, and that the young poet takes it upon himself to complete the parent's poem.

3- *Kenosis*: It is “a movement toward discontinuity with the precursor” [ibid]. The young poet empties out the poetic afflatus of the precursor so as to operate a similar ebbing on the father poem and deflates it.

4- *Daemonization*: It is “a movement towards a personalized Counter- Sublime in reaction to the precursor's sublime” [ibid: 15]. The ephebe resorts to the daemonic power which does not belong to the parent poem and achieves a new sublime.

5- *Askesis*: It is “a movement of self-purgation which intends the attainment of a state of solitude” [ibid]. The ephebe yields up a part of his own imaginative power so as to achieve a similar curtailment of his precursor's poem.yield

6- *Apopgrades*: or “ the return of the dead” [ibid].The ephebe engages openly the precursor and creates an “uncanny effect” which makes the reader perceive the precursor's work in terms of the later work, rather than vice versa.

## **Section One: Achebe's and Conrad's Enabling Conditions**

### **The Historical and Political Background**

Even if the antagonism of Achebe and Conrad is commonplace, it is necessary to single out the shared elements in the two writers' life experience and to place their two novels in context in order to see the pertinence of Achebe's use of Conrad's novel as an intertext.

Unlike other exiled modernists, like James Joyce and Henrik Ibsen, Conrad is one who has committed his art to 'Alien Concerns' and was the most incisive commentator on imperialism. If one can take the criterion of settings and themes as categories of the

definition of literary belonging, Conrad may easily be grouped with third world or African post- colonial writers. In fact, Conrad represents a predecessor to many Commonwealth writers. In his The Novel and the Globalization of Culture (1995), Michael Valdez

Moses says:

As an outspoken critic of Russian imperialism and ardent Polish nationalist, Conrad was in many respects closer to post colonial writers such as Chinua Achebe or Ngugi Wa Thiong'o than to turn- of the- century such as Kipling and Rider Haggard. (p.69)

Most of Conrad's novels are located in outposts of colonial Empire, in Africa, Asia and South America. Nostromo in particular is one among his earliest novels to be set in a neo- colonial world and register themes current in the post- colonial present condition of oppression and revolutions experienced at firsthand. The political correspondences between Poland's and Costaguana's complex political realities are revealing. In The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad (1630), the critic Gustav Morf argues persuasively that the novel owes a great deal more to Conrad's Polish background than to his short voyage to South America in 1876. (Quoted in Orr & Theodore Billy, 1999: 139).

### **Biographical Affinities**

In order to account for Conrad's and Achebe's interest in questions of imperialism and their engagement with morality, we need to examine their respective backgrounds. Achebe found himself at odds with his predecessor as a result of their contrasting positions with respect to colonialism. Though Conrad and Achebe grew up in disparate backgrounds, their lives tend to converge in many points. Like Conrad Achebe lived under Empire and their novels sought to portray the disruptiveness of the advent of change on societies. Ngugi points to the closeness of the African writers with Conrad. In his Writers in Politics, he asserts:

The African writer and Joseph Conrad share the same world and that is why Conrad's world is so familiar. Both have lived in a world dominated by

imperialism (...) a world in which societies are changing much of the time, with the proletariat and the poor peasants with a section of the petty bourgeoisie struggling against a combination of local big business and foreign business interests. (PP.73-74).

Both Conrad and Achebe are from oppressed and colonized cultures. But Conrad invented himself as an English man and spoke from the point of view of Whiteman elite. Like Conrad, Achebe is a figure of the crossroads. Each of the two writers used the English language to invent a cultural space for himself. Critic Gene M. Moore writes: "Conrad writes with the passionate irony of an exile from the necessarily false position of a colonist who speaks, in a language not quite his own for both the dispossessed and their dispossessors". (Stape Ed .1996, 223)

Born into the Polish gentry and wealthy land owners, Conrad felt the pleasures of being among the elite, yet since Poland was subjugated by Russia, he also knew the bitterness of being an underdog in an imperialist situation. Joseph Conrad was born Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski in 1857 in Berdyczow, located in a Ukrainian province of Poland. Conrad's early childhood is described as being rather harsh; he experienced, at first hand, the ruthlessness of Russian imperialism. When he was only three, his father Apollo was imprisoned in Warsaw for his supposed revolutionary political affiliations. In addition, at the tender age of eight; Conrad experienced the loss of his mother by tuberculosis. Furthermore, his father passed away when Conrad was only twelve, also another victim of tuberculosis. The apparent symbolism which linked Conrad's childhood as an orphan and his later fiction is best illustrated when he describes life as being a solitary ordeal and compares it to a nightmare (Stape ed.1996: 6). Since his father was a language translator, Conrad was exposed to literature from several nations while his guardian was still alive, including English, the literature of exploration, French, Spanish,

and American. Although Conrad's early years were difficult, he still managed to get introduced to a rich literary coterie.

As an orphan at the age of twelve, Conrad was placed under the care of his maternal uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski, who introduced a new approach to life to the young boy. Instead of the revolutionary beliefs that Conrad had got from his father, he was instead imbued with ideas of conservatism and strict social discipline. The above mentioned contrasting ways of life which Conrad experienced as a youngster contributed, according to critic Owen Knowles, to his awareness of himself as homo duplex, suspended between revolutionary and conservative, chivalric and egalitarian, romantic and pragmatic traditions. (Quoted in Stape, ed. 1996, 6) Conrad himself admits to the duality of his character "Homo duplex has in my case more than one meaning" he wrote to a Polish friend. (Quoted in Watts. 1993, p. 7)

Similarly, Achebe's childhood was marked by the rich ambivalence of a complex inheritance. Chinua Achebe was born in Eastern Nigeria on November 16, 1930, to Isaiah and Janet Achebe. Isaiah Okafor Achebe was a catechist for the Church Missionary Society, and he and his wife travelled to Eastern Nigeria as evangelists before settling in Ogidi, Isaiah's ancestral Igbo village, five years after Chinua Achebe's birth. Growing up in Ogidi, Achebe had contact with both Christian and Igbo religious beliefs and customs. Of this experience he says:

On looking back, if I had an advantage, it was that my father was a retired missionary when I was growing up; we were Christians and in our village you had two sides-the 'people of the church', as we were called, and the 'people of the world', the others. (Quoted in G.D.Killam, 1977.9)

Achebe's first lessons were taught in Igbo at the church school in Ogidi. He began to learn English at the age of eight. His education at government secondary school at

Umuahia and later at the university college of Ibadan brought him into further and more intense contact with European culture and especially with European literary traditions. He absorbed the myths created by the white man to dehumanise the Negro. He was exposed to the colonial narrative in its most carefully crafted form in the literature that the colonial educational system required him to read.

Conrad's and Achebe's mastery of the English language is especially notable; for though English was not Conrad's native tongue, his place in the British Canon was firmly established. Conrad's literary carrier involved a flight beyond his native tongue to the use of a foreign language. He declared that "English was the only language in which he could ever have written". In *A Personal Record* he declares:

The truth of the matter is that my faculty to write in English is as natural as any other aptitude with which I might have been born. I have a strange and overpowering feeling that it had always been an inherent part of myself. English was for me neither a matter of choice nor adoption. The merest idea of choice had never entered my head. And as to adoption--well, yes, there was adoption; but it was I who was adopted by the genius of the language, which directly I came out of the stammering stage made me its own so completely that its very idioms I truly believe had a direct action on my temperament and fashioned my still plastic character.

Conrad recalls that his first introduction to English literature was at the age of eight when he read his father's translation of Two Gentlemen of Verona (A Personal Record)

Like so many African writers whose own education was under European control, Achebe also has developed the very forms and styles of his writing from his contact with European and British literature. His claim to fame is his competence with the English language and the ease with which he handles this foreign tool. Achebe comes to English by choice intending to profit from this colonial legacy. However, he shaped English in such a way as to contain the African experience without distorting its nature. In The African Writer and the English Language (1964), Achebe, answering questions about the issue of

the language of African fiction- a question so much debated by African writers and critics in the image of Ngugi – he has claimed

The African writer should aim to use English in a way that bring out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience." (1975)

Much of his criticism testifies to the point that he has consistently changed the English language to bear the weight of his people's peculiar history.

Achebe's defence that "Those African writers who have chosen to write in English or French are not unpatriotic smart alecs" echoes Conrad's defensive protestation "It does not seem to me that I have been unfaithful to my country by having proved to the English that a gentleman from Ukraine can be as good a sailor as they and has some thing to tell them in their own language" (Letters II, 323).

Both Conrad and Achebe are men of many cultures. Their cultural relations to empire can be examined metonymically through their respective personal names. Conrad was a Pole who became a British citizen and whose change of name and cultural identity was brought about by the disorders of imperial Europe. Achebe was baptized Albert Chinualumogu, signifying the double cultural influences operating on his world. Shunning the "tribute to Victorian England," Achebe dropped the Christian name "Albert" and playfully wrote saying "if anyone asks you what her Britannic Majesty Queen Victoria had in common with Chinua Achebe, the answer is: they both lost their Albert" ( Achebe, Morning Yet on Creation Day.1983: 118).

Conrad's attitudes toward imperialism were significantly complex that controversy is still engaged about them. Like Conrad, Achebe's relation to empire is ambiguous. The former chose to be part of the empire and his allegiance created ambivalence in his attitudes. Critic Cedric Watts writes to this point: "Though Conrad could speak like a proud

British patriot on many occasions, he still held the view that imperialism in itself was always suspect and that the world would be a better place if there were no imperialism at all” (Watts, 1993, p.60). In fact, Conrad’s novels seem to excuse British imperial endeavours as they evince that the racist and exploitative practices of imperial works are partly redeemed by the ideals behind them.

The balance that Achebe strikes between those who would blame the West for every evil in Africa, past, present and future and those who celebrate colonialism as the magic wand that has saved the continent from barbarism is equally enigmatic. In his Writers in Politics, Ngugi attributes the writers’ attitudes to their privileged position. In this respect he writes the following:

Like Conrad -whose bourgeois position limited his vision making him unable to condemn British imperialism or rid himself of the very racism he correctly saw as inherent in colonialism- the African writer’s petty-bourgeois position could not allow him to see the nature of imperialism and the need for a continuous class struggle against it and its local comprador allies.(p.73)

## **The Imperialistic and Political Context of the Novels**

To begin with the social and political contexts, A Man of the People is close to Nostromo in terms of the historical period in which it is set. Even if the novels are not straight history, the boundary between history and fiction is not totally collapsed. Nostromo is set in a more fully integrated mature imperialist system than are Heart of Darkness (1899) or Lord Jim (1900).

The most important imperialist event occurring in the political world, in which Nostromo’s narrative was produced, was the secession of Panama and the construction of what became to be known as the Panama Canal. In order to provide a corridor of safety for the Panama canal, essential to the trade routes and control of the North American and European West, the province of Panama, a chunk of Colombia was detached and

reconceived as the country of Panama, just like the separatist revolution of Sulaco so that the 'material interests' can be most effectively pursued and the natural resources exploited to the maximum. This marked, in fact, the emergence of America as an imperialist power. Actually representatives of the new Panama Canal Campaign promoted a secessionist movement in Panama, North American warships prevented Colombian troops from landing to suppress the revolt.

Panama seceded from Colombia in December 1903; the new country received prompt recognition from North America. The fictional event is the international naval demonstration which ends the war between Costaguana and Sulaco led by the U.S cruiser *Powhattan*. Captain Mitchell tells his visitor that the United States cruiser was the first to salute the Occidental flag. (p.400)

Conrad was quite resolutely opposed to the American policies in the Spanish –American war. His interest in the Spanish- American war and his awareness of events in Central and South America were sharpened by his friendship with R.B.Cunningham Graham who had lived in various parts of Central and South America between 1869 -1884. In his Preface to Conrad, Cedric Watts has suggested that Conrad's book is a piece of imaginative invention based on historical research, and that his friendship with Cunningham Graham might have been instrumental in Conrad's writing, in Nostromo.

The history of post- independent Nigeria and that of the Latin America of the early post- colonial period reveal similar political failure. The history of Latin America is similar to that of many African States in that it witnessed colonization, independence after years of dire exploitation and then colonial continuity as post- independence economic domination. In his evaluation of the politico-economic situation of African and Latin American States, in Politics and Vision in Africa, Thomas Callaghy says: "In many ways Africa is most comparable to the early post- colonial period in Latin America. Common factors include

centralist and organic-statist colonial legacy; patrimonial forms of government in an early modern context of political breakdown...strong particularism" (Chabal (ed) 1986:36).

In fact, what makes of Latin America and Nigeria -and by extension many African countries - neo-colonial states is the fact that they have an economy dependent on and exploited by an external political economy, that of the internationalist capitalist order. In fact ,like Latin American republics established with the demise of the Spanish empire, many African States including Nigeria inherited a colonial administrative state; the coloniser imposed the administrative structure of an authoritarian State in Africa and African rulers' patrimonized it.

The background setting of Nostromo is the fictional country Costaguana which stands for the turbulent political histories of many South American republics at the time of Conrad. In a letter to Edmund Gosse in 1918 Conrad writes:

Of course you have seen yourself that Sulaco is a synthetic product. The geographical base is... mainly Venezuela but there are bits of Mexico in it. The aspect presented by the mountains appertains in characters more to the Chilean seaboard than to any other. (Quoted in Watts: 1992:16).

Though wars of independence had liberated most of the countries in this part of the continent, revolutions were breaking in this area as a response to British and American economic imperialism and interference. In fact, what happened after independence from Spain was a kind of informal economic colonization by European powers and finally North American ascendancy. This new form of domination is accurately registered in Nostromo.

The imperialist forces allow the national government to exist. However, they exercise control to ensure that the faction most sympathetic to their interests will be the ruling party. In Conrad's Nostromo, the Ribierist government is given legitimacy and approval from the point of its significance to the imperialist forces. The Ribierists reforms mean simply the taking away of the land from the people. Some of it was to be given to foreigners who

made the railway.” (p.169). the National Central Railway that president Rebierra hails as “a progressive and patriotic undertaking” (p.40) is revealed through the narrative to be part of the neo-colonial penetration of the occidental province Sulaco, the wealthiest part of Costaguana.

Costaguana is an independent country politically but it remains a colony in economic terms; the Blanco families –the remaining Spanish elite- are its leaders who in turn depend on foreign investments and capital. Nostromo stresses the continuity between the straightforwardly despotic (ancient regime) and the new era of Neo- colonialism directed by foreign Anglo-American capital.

Foreign capital is a catalyst for investment and production in Nostromo. In this Latin -American republic, the location of the novel, British and American mining interests hold power. International capitalism is personified by Holroyd who presents the U.S carving out an empire in the twentieth century without having to resort to arms or military force. Holroyd assesses Europe’s folly and the ultimate triumph of the U.S. (p.75) The American magnate helps Charles Gould to reopen the silver mine with the condition that “he will drop him in time at first sign of failure.” (p.79) He tells Gould that he “shall help him as long as he holds his way, but he must rest assured that he will be dropped” because the American Capitalist “will suffer no defeat” (p.80) The American millionaire influences Sulaco’s politics and dictates the trajectory of its history. The Americans (U.S.A) finances political revolution as an expedient means to economic exploitation.

The expansionist theme permeates both Nostromo and A Man of the People. This is seen in Sir John’s plans which involve a project for “systematic colonization of the occidental province”. We find it stressed to an ominous degree in the trumpeting speeches of Holroyd, who proclaims that the United State shall

Be giving the word for everything: industry, trade, law, journalism, art, politics, and religion, from Cape Horn clear over to Smith's Sound, and

beyond, too, if anything worth taking hold of turns up at the North Pole. And then we shall have the leisure to take in hand the outlying islands and continents of the earth." (p.75)

The location of A Man of the People is an independent country. Yet, the representatives of multinational economic imperialism are manifold; they are British (British Amalgamated) and American (firms). They sustain African dependency after the withdrawal of colonial political power. The presence and operation of western interests is more covert than it is in Nostromo. The neo-colony appears to be more independent in Achebe's novel, which depicts a neo-colonialism manipulated by native agents working with western powers rather than by westerners manipulating the country from within as is the case with Nostromo. Many African states preserved the economic and social structures left by the former colonizer and joined hands with imperialist forces in promoting a new form of colonialism, namely neo-colonialism.

Achebe's awareness of the foreign responsibility in the statuquo prompted him to attest in an interview:

The colonial departure from the scene was not really a departure. I mean independence was unreal, and people like Nanga were actually used as front men, as puppets, by the former colonial power. As long as they could go about saying they were ministers,(...) they are happy, and they would leave the real exploiter to his work.(quoted in Gikandi. 1999 :110)

The American presence in Achebe's novel is no less powerfully felt. The American ambassador's speech in A Man of the People seems to be written by

Holroyd, the American character in Conrad's novel. In fact, John admits:

We have made so much progress lately that I see no cause for anyone to despair. What is important is that we must press on, we must not let up. We just must not be caught sleeping on the switch again" (p 45)

John proclaims that his country is "the only powerful country in the entire history of the world, the only one, which had the power to conquer others and didn't do it." (ibid). As in the South American state, "the bottomless pit of ten-percent loans and other foolish

(European) investments”, foreign business and capital is a catalyst of investment in the new independent African country. It is also the mainspring of corruption. The political corruption that overwhelms Achebe’s Nigeria is stimulated by expatriate interests and foreign firms who reward the black politicians with ten- percent bribes.

A Man of the People is intended precisely to reveal to us the critical nature of the African state’s post-colonial, post-independence situation. At the time he wrote the novel, all through the 1950s and the 1960s, and even well into the 1970s, the exemplar of political instability was Latin America. Everybody knew that, and Achebe certainly had the Latin America situation very much in mind when he gave that ending to his book. Without being peculiar to Nigeria, the decade of the 1960s is known as the decade of *Coup d’états* . In fact, between 1960 and 1968 alone, there were twenty- five unconstitutional changes of government in Africa, of which eighteen were military coups and others were military-inspired. (Quoted in Obiechina 1990.p120)

The corruption crisis that brings the country to the verge of chaos in A Man of the People is, in part, the revelation that British Amalgamated firm has been told three months in advance of a twenty percent increase in import duties on certain types of textile goods when the Minister of trade announced this only on New Year’s Day. The opposition published detailed evidence of the conspiracy against the national economy and caused the split of the cabinet into savage warring camps. (p.99).

Chief Nanga , Odili tells us ,was rewarded by the same firm when he was holding the portfolio of Minister of foreign trade by building out of his gains three blocks of seven-storey luxury flat in the name of his wife and then leasing the flats by the firm at fourteen hundred pounds a month each. Achebe adds another instance for the involvement of the British in the corruption of the country when at the beginning of the novel, Chief Nanga

tells Odili that “British Amalgamated has sold him ten luxury buses and that [he is] getting them on never-never arrangement from the British firm” (p.43), another mark of ‘goodness’ to Minister Nanga. In his Achebe’s World, the critic Robert Wren states that in 1962, British fixed investment in Nigeria was £100.000.000 or more. He adds that “so large a stake in the national economy meant a high level of mutual understanding between the foreign corporation and the politicians.” (p.100)

A Man of the People reflects some of the malpractices and fraudulent charges that were current then in the 1960s. It shows that foreign involvement is one of the mainsprings of the corruption which brings the country to chaos. The expatriates become collaborators of the corrupt African leadership to hinder the course of progress. The news about the shady business transactions causes commotion. One instance of this turmoil is the actual general strike of 1964 to which Achebe points allusively in his novel in the words:” the country was on the verge of chaos” and “The Trade Unions and Civil Service Union...gave notice of nation-wide strikes.”(p99)

## **Section II: the inter-textual Relationship between Nostramo and A Man of the People**

Throughout the first section we have examined the context in which Nostramo and A Man of the People have been produced .We have tried, through the examination of the biographical similarities to shed light on the fact that neo- imperialism has been central to Conrad’s and Achebe’s concern.

In the present section, we shall try to examine how similarities in the context and biographical affinities such as those mentioned in the previous sections may explain the main textual convergences and literary affinities in Conrad’s and Achebe’s narratives. Our interest is to highlight the aesthetic forms shared by the two novels through the study of

characters, mode of representation and themes. The distinctive features in Achebe's novel shall confirm us in the hypothesis that, even if the African writer adopts the same attitude as his English counterpart and makes use of the same strategies, he seems to intend to clear for himself an imaginative space.

## **Characterization in the Two Novels**

### **Nostromo/ Nanga**

A similarity between Nostromo and A Man of the People lies at the level of their respective characterization. The characters which can be compared are Nostromo and Chief Nanga on the one hand, and Decoud and Odili on the other hand. The two groups are united by their predicaments in a neo-imperial world. However, while the intellectual figures are known for their scepticism of the politics of their countries, Nostromo and Nanga are there to serve the instincts of acquisition or power. They are united by a sense of subjection to the stakes of imperial capitalistic ventures and material interests.

Nostromo is a man of the people and is endorsed as such in the Author's Note; An Italian-born sailor who comes to Costaguana to make his fortunes. He becomes by sheer force of will the leader of its city's docklands and its *Corgadores*. He is the common folk's great man. Gian' Battista Fidanza is known to the European community as "Nostromo", meaning "our man." in Italian. He is that "fellow in a thousand" brave, charismatic, and streetwise leader of men. To his English employer Captain Mitchell who has unbounded confidence in his capacities, he is 'the indispensable man'. Nostromo is more of an instrument of material interests, he is a possession. "He serves material interests by exemplifying the slave morality that underwrites and sustains them". (Ross, 2004: 130) Captain Mitchell can rightly boast that Nostromo "is one of those invaluable subordinates whom to possess is a legitimate cause of boasting."(p 48).

Nostromo as his name indicates is a man to all of Sulaco. He lives for an ideal of reputation he has fashioned for himself. He has no ideal or purpose other than the love, the respect and even the fear of the people and the obtuse confidence of his employers. Nostromo's obsessive hunkering after reputation is embodied in the dangerous missions he performs for them. Nostromo is proud that the English elite of Sulaco trust him. For him, it is enough that his "name is known from one end of Sulaco to the other."(p.402) In his reputation, Nostromo is second only to Charles Gould 'the Rey de Sulaco' and even the sceptical Decoud is baffled by him. Decoud tells his sister that "the man [Nostromo] seems to have a particular talent for being on the spot whenever there is something picturesque to be done." (p.192).

The man of the people in Achebe's novel is Chief Nanga. His reputation as the most approachable politician is known to all his people. And his popularity "would be the envy of the proverbial traveller-to-distant places who must not cultivate enmity on his route." (p.1) Odili is impressed by his overwhelming charm and is under his spell. "there is something in Chief Nanga's person which attracts drama irresistibly to him" Odili tells the reader "Memorable events were always flying about his stately figure and dropping to his feet" (pp.45-46 ). He is a leader to his people. Yet, in this neo- colonial state, he is an imperial agent, a self-serving servant of Western capitalist imperialism. He sustains the imperial presence in his country through his involvement with their economic corporate and would rather work with a less obtrusive white expert than with the young university people he distrusts.

In fact, Nanga is presented as an extension to the former colonizer; through the depiction of his ethics, the novel voices its concern with imperialism. The imperial implication of the rivalry between Nanga and Odili shows in the latter's claim: "A man had treated me as no man had a right to treat another & not even if he was master and the other slave; and my

*manhood* required that I make him pay for his insult in full measure. In flesh and blood terms I realized that I must go back, seek out Nanga's intended parlour wife and give her the works, good and proper. (77)

Like Nostromo, Nanga is a man of action, an opportunist sizing on every opportunity to enrich himself. Both are self-absorbed egomaniac who glory in the attention paid tot them and both are lavish with their gifts .Yet, whereas Nostromo's gifts are meant to sustain the love and respect of the populace, Chief Nanga spends large sums on conspicuous consumption, i.e., on cars, houses, women and guests. In one of his outbursts of public generosity, Nostromo allows a local girl, Paquita to cut off the silver buttons of his jacket to preserve his reputation for generosity. "So long as he remains rich in glory and reputation" (p.343) he is ready to endure penury and poverty. Likewise, Nanga doesn't mind sticking red pounds on the perspiring faces of the best dancers and boasts his open-handedness "I no do keep Anini for myself". (p.15) In fact, Nanga is generous to those willing to do his biddings and willing to sustain him in his power.

Both Nostromo and Nanga are men of tremendous charm and attractiveness. Their presence is felt as the most realised characters blinded by vanity in a power and material-hungry environments. But while Nostromo is hungry for publicity and fame, Nanga is yearning for material possessions. Nostromo aspires to mythic stature and the high reputation he seeks is exchangeable for money. He wants to be remembered for his heroic feats, to "be talked about when the little children are grown up" (p256). It is only when he begins growing increasingly insatiable after the theft that the silver has come to mean something more to him. It becomes the secret of his safety, of his influence, of his magnificence, of his power over the future, of his defiance of ill-luck, of every possible betrayal from rich and poor alike. (P.431) Nostromo changes his name and lives by stealth on the stolen silver, giving himself airs of a rich tradesman.

Nostromo is given flattering adulation; he is the magnificent Capataz but his reputation does not go uncriticized. Nanga, likewise, is subject to criticism and while the former is scoffed by Teresa Viola his stepmother as one who “kowtows to the English unashamedly” (p.32) Nanga’s mother-in-law considers him a white people’s man (p .106)

On the purely physical level, Nostromo and Nanga are very attractive. Nostromo has mythic stature while Nanga’s handsomeness and physical qualities reflect the heroic stature of the Igbo leader. The woman singer in the novel likens his handsomeness to the perfect, sculpted beauty of a carved eagle. (p.1)

### **Martin Decoud and Odili Samalu**

If Nostromo and Chief Nanga are men of the people that are revealed to be shams, Decoud and Odili are conceived by their authors as the intellectual figures who have literary ambitions. The former is a journalist, a ‘dilettante’ who “had hoped in moments of exaltation to become a poet”, the latter had ambitions to write a book. They have no political aspirations, and at some points in the novels, voice their creators’ scepticism about the futility of modern politics. Decoud and Odili are comparable in terms of their lack of political commitment.

Decoud, ‘the man with passion but without a mission’ is drawn into Costaguana’s politics for the sake of his love for Antonia Avellanos and becomes the journalist of the Blanco party. He joins the Ribierist cause as a journalist and comments that “no occupation is serious.”(p.154); he dedicates himself to Antonia with the words “I have only the supreme illusion of a lover.” And like everyone in the novel, he becomes caught in the web of material interests. On one occasion, as though she has lost all patience, she flies out at him about the aimlessness of his life and the levity of his opinion. His idea of separating the occidental province is a means to save Antonia; because the latter would not follow him, the whole province of Sulaco has to separate from Costaguana. Decoud is

an uprooted character; “a plump dandy” whose French culture and upbringing distance him from his Costaguana's natives.

Likewise, Odili is a product of the new era. He typifies the hybrid class of western-educated intellectuals. His English education and prejudices stand him aloof from the very crowd he despises. He is ushered in the political scene as the founder of a new political party to avenge a wounded ego. Odili comes out of his ‘ivory tower’ into active politics but his motives remain obviously suspect. Nevertheless, he is honest enough to question the purity of his motives. Odili tells the reader that he has "twin hopes of a beautiful life with Edna and of a new era of cleanliness in the politics of our country". (p.130) He is an egotist, more enchanted with his own cleverness than concerned about the society he pretends to serve.

Another common trait between Odili and Decoud is that they are self –centred men and even snobbish. Contact is forced upon them and each enters action to possess or impress a particular woman. Like Decoud, Odili is vain and pompous, blind to his own flaws and critical of others. Yet, like Decoud, he is outraged by the glaring corruption and the political instability. At times both characters are aware of their shortcoming.

### **The Feminine Characters**

Although he explored the dilemmas of the male protagonists in the earlier part of his career and never relinquished these themes altogether, Conrad began in the Malay fiction by producing prominent female figures whose positions offered an important critique of imperialism, a role that women continued to fulfil in the political works of the middle years, such as Nostromo. Similarly, in her “Women in Achebe’s World”, critic Rose Ure Mezu has noted a progressive vision of women and a discernable change in the style of Achebe’s female portraiture in A Man of the People; a change that had begun with No Longer at Ease .

The closest feminine characters in Conrad's and Achebe's novels are Antonia Avellanos and Eunice, Max's fiancée. They display a strong character and a determination to change the prevailing situation. Unlike the other less realised feminine characters; they are the most patriotic and clear-minded.

Antonia is cast as an educated, independent woman who plays an active role in her country's history and politics. She assists and supports her ailing father Don José, and works for his goal of a reformed Costaguana. Antonia is the only being capable of inspiring passion in the heart of a trifle. When Decoud complains that patriotism to him, in connexion with the everlasting troubles of Costaguana, means an endless round of barbaric carnage, she defends herself in a revealing way: "But we are labouring to change all that." Antonia protests: "It is exactly what we desire. It is our object. It is the great cause. And the word you despise has stood also for sacrifice, for courage, for constancy, for suffering." (p.162). Her strength of character allows her to survive the death of both her father and Martin Decoud and "those who thought she would give away to despair were mistaken." (p.393)

A strong female character in A Man of the People is Eunice the lawyer. She is the fiancée of Odili's schoolmate Max, and founder of the Common People's Convention that opposes corrupt Chief Nanga and his ilk. She is a beautiful woman who "has brains as well". In addition, she interacts with the male characters on equal terms as a member of the revolutionary party being formed by her fiancé. When Max is shot by the thugs working for the political adversary Chief Koko (Nanga's colleague and counterpart), Eunice takes decisive, retaliatory action: "[S]he opens her handbag as if to take out a handkerchief, [takes] out a pistol instead and [fires] two bullets into Chief Koko's chest". (160). To this

strong portrait, Achebe adds pointedly: "Only then [does] she fall down on Max's body and begin to weep like a woman . . . A very strange girl, people said". (160)

### **The Foreign Characters**

Another similarity between Nostromo and A Man of the People is the presence of casts of characters representing First World capitalism. It has, in fact, been noted that Nostromo is a book about Westerners and South American (natives). In A Man of the People, the presence of this foreign element is no less felt. The portrayal of these foreigners is close to the roles attributed to the foreign elements in Conrad's novel. Despite the fact that these are but minor characters, the roles they perform show the predatory nature of their imperialist endeavours as they manipulate the politics of (in) dependent countries.

Most of the foreigners in the two novels are the representatives of the financial power of Europe and North America. They are the guarantors of their countries' share in the wealth of the African state and the "Treasure house of the world" as *The Times* man calls Sulaco in his book. (p397)

In Nostromo, the American and British expatriates are the embodiment of exploitation and speculation and the relentless drive to expand their material interests. The British engineer Sir John, called in the novel, 'the Napoleon of railways' builds the National Railway; a progress that benefits the few at the expense of the many. Sir John projects to acquire land for the railroad by impressing the landowners with a Presidential tour, but he makes it clear that the railroad will get the land regardless, "even if it had to use force for the purpose" (p.43). Aware of the fact, Decoud sums up the new colonial venture. When he hears the explosive noise of the railway building, he points out: "This sound puts a new edge on a very old truth" yes the noise outside the city wall is new, but the principle is old (p.151). The National Central Railway 'is to put money in the pockets of Englishmen,

Frenchmen, Americans, Germans and God knows who else' Decoud adds. The engineer's goodwill toward the Ribierists enables his railway to buy land cheaply.

Modern capital in Nostromo is associated with the American character. As an advocate of America's interest, Holroyd voices the belief in America's Manifest Destiny; he confesses it as follows: "Time itself has to wait on the greatest country in the whole universe" (p.75).

The Marxist presence is also strongly felt in the novel and designates another looming power. At the end of the novel the Marxist who watches over Nostromo's last moments; a pale photographer, small, frail blood-thirsty, the hater of capitalists, asks the dying Capataz for money to fight the rich with their own weapon.

In A Man of the People the presence of the western element is also strongly felt. Through the exposition of intrigues involving the British who support Nanga and American Diplomats advising the African state on how to improve her public image in America, Achebe dramatizes foreign involvement in Nigerian politics.

The Americans hold a place of importance in Achebe's novel; this is made clear through the conversation Odili holds with the American couple during the dancing *soiree* to which he is conveyed.

The Eastern Block countries are equally represented; the Common People's Convention party is probably lunched with the blessing and help of a European communist party. At the meeting in Max's house, Odili comes to know a white man who happens to be Max's friend and who is satisfied that young intellectual come from their "tower of Elephant tusk" into active politics (p.79).The roles assigned to the foreigners in Nostromo appears to have a close affinity to that performed by the expatriates in A Man of The People. They are the bringers of progress, the banking magnates, big businessmen and

owners of firms. These are the investors who, in the time of the country's crisis, are assured by the Prime Minister that their money is safe in the country.

The British are also in the economic and political scene. British Amalgamated has a great influence and a potential for directing the political machine. It is discovered that Alhaji Chief Senator Suleiman Wagada, the POP Minister of Foreign Trade, has been involved in shady dealings with the British conglomerate that serves as one of the central emblems of the ongoing neo-colonial exploitation of Africa. The resulting scandal forces the Prime Minister to resign and call for new parliamentary elections. The same firm finances Nanga's political campaign. Other multinational firms in the image of the European building firm of Antonio and Sons builds Nanga's four-storey house, 'a dash' for his gift of the half-million pound contract to build the National Academy of Arts and Science

Though Achebe's chief satirical targets in the book are corrupt African post-colonial politicians, he also suggests that the legacy of colonialism and the ongoing machinations of neo-colonialism must bear part of the responsibility for this corruption. Thus, near the end of the book, we find that the cynicism that Odili attributes to the general population arises largely from their inability to imagine a system that is not corrupt, given their past experience with colonialism. Odili informs us that the popular attitude toward corrupt politicians is simply, "Let them eat." After all, during the colonial era, the country's foreign rulers did exactly such eating, yet "where is the all-powerful white man today? He came, he ate and he went. But we are still around". (P. 145)

Admittedly, given the neo-colonial situation described in the book, the reader expects to find the white man is still in Africa, where Western forces continue to exert a considerable influence. The principal white characters in A Man of the People are John and Jean, an American couple who have come to Africa because they are serving as part

of a team of foreign experts offering advice to the government on how to improve their public image in America, presumably to encourage further American investment in their country. However, it is also clear that such investment comes with considerable strings attached. Both the Americans and the British (largely through the corporate operations of British Amalgamated) continue to reap huge profits at the expense of the local populations, while at the same time offering tantalizing visions of wealth and glamour that are among the central enticements that lure local politicians into corruption.

Indeed, the American and British interests in A Man of the People further their own ends by securing the cooperation of the local government through bribery and flattery. For example, when the new parliamentary elections are called late in the book, both British Amalgamated and American interests make huge donations to the POP to help ensure that the cooperative ruling party will stay in power.

In this sense, both the British and the Americans appear in the book as looming powers, pulling strings behind the stage while offering dazzling and seductive public visions of capitalist wealth. However, Achebe makes it quite clear that the British and Americans who are exercising such influence in Africa are hardly godlike figures. Indeed, they are almost ludicrous in their arrogant assumption of their own superiority and in their ignorance of African culture. John and Jean, in particular, are comic figures who come in for some of the book's funniest satire. Odili, for example, is quite shocked in chapter 4 when he hears the Americans address Chief Nanga by his first name, despite their young age and the minister's lofty position. Then again, what is even more shocking is that Nanga seems to be pleased and honoured to be on such familiar terms with the two Americans.

In this and other ways, Nanga is the prototypical postcolonial bourgeois leader described in the important work of Frantz Fanon, especially in The Wretched of the Earth, where Fanon issues stern warnings that the coming of independence will not lead easily and naturally to freedom in Africa because the new black African leaders will have been trained to behave very much in the same way as their white European forebears.

John, in fact, comes off as the prototypical ugly American, bragging loudly of his country's greatness and assuring his African hosts of America's benevolence and lack of racism. Thus, in his first conversation with Odili, John proudly boasts that lynching in America is on the wane and was never really racially motivated in the first place. Thus, he displays his arrogant confidence in American superiority by offering up some of the ugliest and most reprehensible racial crimes in world history as evidence of the virtues of America. John then goes on to offer, as another bit of evidence of American generosity, the fact that his country did not drop an atomic bomb on Moscow after World War II, ignoring the fact that the Americans and Soviets had been allies during the war (45-46).

Indeed, John expresses surprise that no such bombing occurred, suggesting that Americans are probably just too naive in their desire to avoid interfering in the affairs of others—even as he sits in an Africa where Americans like himself are busily involved in manipulating local affairs for their own gain.

### **The Setting in the Two Novels**

Besides characterization and mode of representation, the intertext of *Nostromo* allows Achebe to portray a temporal / spatial setting similar to Conrad's work. In Conrad's fiction, the town at the dawn of the twentieth century serves as the vehicle on which the writer conducts his rather ironic design. This reminds the reader of the town of Achebe's novel.

Nostromo and A Man of the People are set in urban locations. There are in Costaguana and the African state all the forces that shape the modern world: finance capitalism, colonial exploitation, political parties and movements named after their leaders - Monterists and Ribierists - Nangaism because in Costaguana, and in Odili's country, despite the talk of "democracy" and "liberation", there are no ideas, only personalities.

Even if Sulaco, the Occidental Province, is not the capital city, it is the stronghold of the Blanco families. The San Tomé mine –the Gould Concession- rises as a nascent state (an imperium in Imperio). It spreads security, attracts foreign investments and establishes its own government with the Blanco Don Vincente Rebierra at its head. Sulaco is the wealthiest province "It is the blessed province of great opportunities and largest salaries." (p. 106) the politicians of the Capital Santa Marta reserve the posts in this old occidental state to those dearest and nearest to them."(Ibid.)In fact, the material interests of all sorts are gathering substance in that part of Costaguana; various political and economic forces are at work in Sulaco making of the province a place of political intrigue. The Gould Concession dominates the political life of Sulaco

Achebe's Bori bears the same dimension with Conrad's setting, a fictitious country which is supposed to stand for an African country that has recently regained political independence. As a town, it witnesses intense political and economic activity which makes it the destination of all those who aspire for civil service. It is also the kind of international mart exposed to "all kinds of foreign wares, from ideologies to tractors" (p.50) Chief Nanga invites Odili to come to Bori and press for his own share of the "national cake".

### **The Grotesque Mode of Representation**

Conrad's and Achebe's modes of representation caused many critics to discern in their respective fiction derogatory generalisations and even offensive treatments of characters. Frederic Jameson notes an imperialist bias in Nostromo, he remarks: "we

have the classic 'Anglo' picture of a Latin 'race', lazy, shiftless, and the like, to which political order and economic progress must be 'brought' from the outside" (1981: p.269) . As for Achebe's narrator's undermining of his African characters, it has prompted critics like C.L.Iness to detect an attitude similar to that of Joyce Cary's Louis Aladai in The African Witch (1936). The unflattering representation has induced Danielle Stewart to perceive in the narrator "ce mépris d'intellectuel frotté de culture occidentale [qui] n'est pas sans rappeler Lakunle", (p.58) Soyinka's teacher in The Lion and the Jewel. It can be surmised that the superficiality of the characters of A Man of the People has, in part , owned the novel misevaluation ; critic Charles Larson maintains that the characters are ineffectual and have none of the magnitude or the nobility of those in Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God . (1972.72). More to the point, Achebe's negative delineation of his African characters has led the critic Keith Booker to argue "This strategy entailed the risk of contributing to a negative image of Africa overseas at a time when many well-wishers were still optimistic about the continent's future." (2003: 149)

The aim of the present essay will be to substantiate this assertion by illustrating the degrading mood that permeates the two narratives.

Conrad's novel is set at the beginning of the twentieth century, which witnessed the emergence of a mature imperialism and new forms of political domination. It projects a vision of empire beyond the demise of European colonialism. Yet, as a novel, Nostromo does not comply with the boasting of economic progress and political and social emancipation. On the contrary, it sets to undermine the banking and industrial magnates in the same vein as it vilifies the natives and degrade the South American republic's politics and its elite's idealism.

By having Gould, Holroyd and Sir John advertise the virtues of material interests; even in the face of their obvious detrimental effects, the writer provides an implicit critique

of these material interests. (Ross.2004:114). Conrad associates the United States with new insidious forms of capital development. Nostromo's disdain of Spanish colonialism and modern imperialism is matched with a negative perception of those who seek its overthrow. His irreverent attitude towards the natives is the same as his disdain of the American bringers of light and progress.

In Nostromo, the native politicians are presented as caricatures and grotesque figures. Disgust at their corruption and shallowness is linked with repulsiveness to their bodies. Their primitivism is emphasized in the animal images used to describe them.

Conrad's irreverent attitude towards the Blanco leaders is conveyed through the grotesque posture of president Rebierra; he is presented almost as a cripple "short in body, obese to the point of infirmity, more apathetic than promising (p.108). After the lost battle of Socorro, the Excelentissimo Senor Don Vinecente Rebierra comes to Sulaco pelting eighty miles over mountain tracks on a lame mule and is rescued by Nostromo. The politicians "had to run like rabbits" Captain Mitchell tells the O.S.N.'s company superintendent. The Blanco Don Juste Lopez is almost a caricature; "he had had half his beard singed off [...] and as he turned his head from side to side it was exactly as if there had been two men in his frock-coat, one nobly whiskered and solemn, the other untidy and scared" . (p.199)

Conrad treats the Montero brothers with rather genteel sniffing distaste; General Montero "has an accomplished attitude of a savage fighter" the obscure army captain has spent time abroad hanging about cafes in European capitals, and later finds himself back home, nursing resentments, and at the head of a rebellion provoked by soldiers who drink heavily. For Decoud, he is "un grotesque vaniteux et féroce"(p.135) Conrad's narrative, in fact, is dismissive of every one except the expatriate elite of Sulaco.

Captain Mitchell, exhibiting the scars, tells a visitor that he had been fighting “the worst kind of niggers out there”. (p24). Even the inn-keeper Giorgio Viola, a committed nationalist who had fought with Giuseppe Garibaldi and now lives in Costaguana with his dying wife and two daughters, has no sympathy for the masses. He believes, moments after several bullets strike his house and a mob tries to set fire to his roof, that “these were not people striving for justice, but thieves. Even to defend his life against them was a sort of degradation to a man who had been one of Garibaldi’s immortal thousand in the conquest of Sicily”. (p.30)

Don Pepe, the overseer of the mine workforce, refers habitually to the native politicians as ‘negro liberals’, the politicians running the republic of Costaguana as no more than “thieves, swindlers and sanguinary macaques.” (p.101). The O.S.N company’s lighter men, natives of the republic are described as ‘an outcast lot of every mixed blood’ (p.25) and the *Cargadores* commended by Nostromo as an unruly brotherhood of all sorts of scum”. (p.89)

Costaguana dictators and functionaries are presented as simple, childlike, and frequently quite funny. General Montero, upon whom Decoud cynically fixes the label ‘*gran’ bestia*’, Sotillo who is made paradigmatic of Latin America brutality and the various provincial authorities are presented as buffoons, ruled by the immediate impulse of greed. In the second chapter of part three of the novel, the rebel leader Sotillo is described as being fond of jewels, gold trinkets, of personal adornment, he “becomes so fascinated with Mitchell’s watch that for an instant he forgets his precious prisoner”. This fact is extrapolated further in the generalization:

There is always something childish in the rapacity of the passionate, clear-minded, Southern races, wanting in the misty idealism of the Northerners, who at the smallest encouragement dream of nothing less than the conquest of the earth. (p.278)

As she accommodates herself to life in Sulaco, Mrs Gould “heroically conceal[s] her dismay at the appearance of men and events so remote from her racial conventions.” (p.144) another native, Hernandez is demonized. The people are afraid of him as if he were the devil.

The unnamed Marxist of the novel is pejoratively handled. He is described as a vulture. The image of ‘the weird figure perched by [Nostromo’s] bed side’ (p.460) places the latter in the helpless position of a prey, a victim of competing ideologies and interests.

Achebe’s fiction is permeated with the same degrading images. His satirical stance is directed at both the class of leaders, the people and even the educated elite are undermined. In fact no one is free of blame for the social disaster. Furthermore, the novel demystifies the ideals of African independence and its political and economic autonomy. Achebe represents his country as a market where all foreign trinkets are sold to his people from tractors to ideology. In an interview with Bradford Morrow and returning again to Nigeria’s first military coup Achebe declared : “Nigeria was six years free from the British but in all practical ways, its mind, its behaviour, the way its leaders looked to the British, the way the British advisers continued to run the country, worried the more radical elements in our society’

The targets of Achebe’s excoriation in A Man of the People shift from the foreign conquistadors to indigenous exploiters and oppressors. The politicians bear all the brunt of the writer; they are portrayed as greedy, Machiavellian, unscrupulous, opportunistic and hypocritical stooges; “they went into politics when people did not know its cash prize”(p.42) to acquire for themselves as large a piece of the national financial cake as possible by whatever means produce the best results.

The epithet 'Minus Opportunity' given to Nanga testifies the profoundly opportunistic quality of the African leaders whose morality and total tone is based on "you chop, meself chop, palaver finish" (p149). The implication of Chief Nanga's hypocrisy is read in Odili's allusion; he refers to how Nanga "came to [him] in the dark like Nicodemus and offered [him] two-fifty ponds." (p.123)

Achebe directs most of his disguise at the bulk of the people who not only fail to stand up to the overt corruption but legitimise it as good sense. The people who only recently passed through a period of colonial rule and dire exploitation adopt a cynical attitude towards political corruption.

Odili describes the villagers as silly and ignorant; gullible and resigned. They dance themselves lame to please the politicians. They regard the rigging corruption of Chief Nanga and the likes of his and their siphoning of public goods as good sense. The narrator identifies them as the "the real culprit" (p 148). Chief Nanga and Chief KoKo are much less leaders than they are the expression of what their people allow 'leaders' like them to be. Achebe adheres to Fanon's creed that "A government or a party gets the people it deserves and sooner or later a people get the government it deserves." (p.198)

When in the final section of the novel the people react, it is not their awareness of the prevailing chaos that propels them into revolt but cynicism. "To say that people have been moved to anger by the corruption of the politicians", Odili thinks, "is sheer poppycock". Rather, it is a case of the people having become more cynical and apathetic than their leaders. What happened was simply that unruly mobs and private armies having tasted blood and power during the election had got out of hand and ruined their masters and employers. And they had no public reason for doing it. Let's make no mistake about that". (p.162)

The cynicism of the villagers and that of the educated elite becomes the target of the novel in the same way as is the greed of the leading group who are presented to the reader in the most unflattering ways and postures. Achebe castigates the western-educated element in Odili who is incapable of independent and resolved action. Odili has nothing but contempt for the tradition of his country; he doesn't care too much for "our women dancing". He speaks as any prejudiced foreigner might of the hunters' guild. 'Bush' is the nastiest epithet Odili can use to qualify Nanga. Odili's sense of superiority is shown in the dismissal of his colleague's (teachers') passivity and resignation, for him they "were all dead from the neck up" (p.7). He describes his friend's refusal to support his opposition to line up to greet Chief Nanga as 'primitive loyalty'.

The intellegencia and would-be leaders represented by Odili, Max and Eunice presume the role of Messiah and saviours. However, they are no better than the likes of Nanga who have discredited them; they are false and entirely as corrupt and do not mind 'soiling their hands a little.' Odili compromises his initial idealism and misappropriates Party funds while Max takes a bribe from an adversary party.

### **The Plot of the Two Novels**

Neo-colonialism is the significant political determinant of the plot of Nostromo and A Man of the People. Achebe and Conrad's respective reliance on historical events to provide the structural frame for their plots raises ambivalence. The novels offer the bleak image of leaderless and ungovernable nations. Sulaco is steeped into anarchy of competing factions while Achebe's country is torn by competing parties and their hired thugs at the end of the novel.

The downfall of Rebierra after a coup that exploits anti- foreign feelings precipitates the civil war out of which mining interests emerge strengthened after Sulaco's

independence .Yet, 'simultaneous with Nostromo's death comes the outbreak of labour unrest in the mine "some trouble with the workmen to be feared."(p. 416) , the people awoken to their exploitation. The trouble is an index to the failure of material interests to bring the prosperity to Costaguana; the result is the prospects of a new revolution. The San Tomé mine grows pitiless

Hanging over the Campo, over the whole land, feared, hated, wealthy; more soulless than any tyrant, more pitiless and autocratic than the worst Government; ready to crush innumerable lives in the expansion of its greatness (p.427)

The actions in A Man of the People are also staged in an atmosphere of chaos, made of warring groups. The coup at the end of Achebe's narrative is also an indication of the failure of modern politics in bringing a viable progress and security. Yet, even if political revolution implies Nanga's downfall, the reader is left apprehensive that the same methods will not reassert themselves under new leadership.

### **Achebe's Misreading of Conrad**

Despite the similarities between Nostromo and A Man of the People, there is a fundamental discontinuity between the goals and visions of Achebe and Conrad. This is partly evident in the contrast between the two authors. Achebe's discipleship to Conrad is no slavish imitation; A Man of the People makes significant revisions in the Conradian schemes.

A Man of the people and Nostromo are involved in the depiction of neo- imperialism and the complexities it creates. As post -colonial novels, they show that neo-colonialism not only leads to the economic exploitation of a former colony ,but that it is also inimical to true democracy .The themes of corruption and failed idealism emerge as major issues in the two novels

Corruption and failed idealism are important motifs that govern the reading of Nostromo and A Man of the People and determine Conrad's and Achebe's understandings and perception of the contemporary moment they document.

The two authors develop their themes through the conception of their respective characters whose lives are undermined by the corrupting potential of political power and silver and the turmoil they engender and whose idealism is compromised. Political power like material interest –silver, proves to be of overwhelming influence and neither Nostromo nor chief Nanga nor other characters are immune to their temptation.

Set in the fictitious South American republic of Costaguana, Nostromo gives a keen assessment of imperialism and provides an incisive critique of its predatory instincts. It reveals the effects that misguided idealism, unparalleled greed, and imperialist interests can have on a fledging nation. Conrad, the critic Eloise Knapp Hay claims in her The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad (1963) “foresaw, at the outset of the century, dead into the heart of the personal and political dilemmas that still vex us”. (Quoted in Orr Leonard and Ted Billy .ed. 1999:126)

Like Conrad's, Achebe's novel is the product of a decade in which neo- colonialism was one of the principal themes of international politics and a crucial ideological dividing-line in superpowers' conflicts. A Man of the People denounces the betrayal of the hard-won independence to British and foreign interests. It shows that political independence was not a panacea, new black power elite stepped into the place vacated by the former imperialists. In fact ,the 1960s was an era marked by the general collapse of hopes and dreams that, a decade earlier, had attended the attainment of political independence in such states as Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and Senegal .The liberation the African celebrated

at independence, was one to suit the narrow class- interest. People came to learn the bitter truth that little separated the new African oppressor from the European one.

Corruption is a recurrent motif in both Nostromo and A Man of the People. Yet Achebe holds a vision contrary to that of his British counterpart. Conrad places corruption in the context of business rather than in the world of politics but shows that the financial world is the mirror image of politics.

The focus of Conrad's novel is the defunct San Tomé silver mine, once run by the late father of Charles Gould, an Englishman. Gould's father had been ruined by corrupt Costaguanan governments that sunk their teeth into his mining profits. Nostromo implies that the disease is endemic in this South American country. The tragedy of Sulaco is conceived in terms of the Europeans- the English mainly - who are corrupted because their ambitions are acted out upon the stage of a corrupt volatile country and thwarted by revolutionary mobs.

In A Man of the People, Achebe, far from excusing the local compradors, makes it clear that corruption is a hybrid product of the meeting between the traditional African and the European culture. The trouble with the African country, Odili tells us is that all the Nigerians and by extension all the Africans "had all been together in the rain until yesterday (independence), then a handful of [them] had scrambled for the one shelter [their] former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in." (p.37) Loyal opposition came to mean for these smart lucky ones anathema.

Achebe seems to argue more generally that the problem of corruption lies in western imperialism and it is not only a matter of individual shortcoming or public decadence. He obliquely attributes the source of this disease to the introduction of an alien administration and a money-based economy. Odili tells us that his father is a retired District Interpreter and that during the colonial era, the native interpreter was like the

principal minor god who carried prayers and sacrifices to the District Officer who then, was like a supreme deity.

In the essay "The role of the writer in a new nation" Achebe admits that African society has always been materialistic, but he asserts that in those days wealth meant the strength of a man's arm: "No one became rich by swindling the community and stealing government money." (p.3)

Gould's mine corrupts Sulaco and, rather than bringing progress, it brings a civil war. As the people of Costaguana and the workers of the mine awaken to their state of exploited neo-colonial subjects, the prospect of a new revolution fuelled by a different ideology that seeks to dominate international affairs becomes eminent.

The silver of the mine corrupts and has the same potential for perversion and destruction as has unbridled power. Silver is mercantile wealth, it is also a form of power that fastens upon the mind and corrupt those who seek to acquire it

### **Failed Idealism**

Like Nostromo, A Man of the People is a critique of the self-deception and misguided idealism of people. Idealists are invariably the targets of Conrad's irony but also the object of his affections. Don Jose Avellanos, the conservative of high aristocratic honour is presented as hopelessly archaic in the modern world. Studying Conrad's approach to characterization, Cedric Watts observes: Many of his patently honourable characters can be seen as Quixotic either because their values are anachronistic or incongruous or because their idealism has the quality of a delusion or monomania. (p.70)

Conrad's novel depicts American and British investment capitalism, yet it focuses on an American financier and overlooks the British role in financing the new imperialism. This tends throughout Nostromo to validate the ideals of the British imperial project.

According to Arnold Kettle, Conrad's avoidance of the properly historical 'word' imperialism by his use of the slippery phrase "material interest", constitutes a political sleight-of-hand "Conrad's phrase erases from the imperialist project an historically identifiable set of responsibilities" ( Quoted in Orr & Ted Billy ed.1999 :139)

The failed idealist in Nostromo is the quintessential representative of the material interests, Charles Gould, the "idealist-creator of Material Interests". (p.12) Charles Gould pins his faith to these material interest; he legitimizes them and by implication capitalism by its eventual promise of order, security and democratic institutions. "The rumour of work and safety had spread over the pastoral Campo," and each consignment of silver is "like another victory gained in the conquest of peace for Sulaco." He defends his motives:

What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, and security. Anyone can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. That's how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. (81).

His dreams are thwarted as the country is plunged into revolution. His desire to use material interests as a means for democracy and peace is however misguided; Dr Monygham's statement shows how modern imperialism is a repetition of the vicious cycles of the past and a return of exploitive practices, he tells Mrs Gould : "there is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests" he adds that all that the Gould concession stands for shall weigh as heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty, and misrule of a few years back" (p.419)

The idealists in Achebe's novel can be recognised in the characters of Odili and his friend Max, the most desiring people to promote the common good and bring viable change. Odili's idealism especially at the beginning of the novel helps assess Nanga's moral integrity as he presents us with his rather puritan ideals and hopes.

In his political struggle, Odili is guided by moral principles; he rejects violence as a weapon for political struggle. Odili rejects the bribe offered to him by his political adversary. Yet, Odili does not live up to his principles when his idealism collides with lust.

To posit that Charles Gould fails as an idealist because his dreams are thwarted by violence is to reiterate a Conradian theme. Gould's idealism, like Kurtz's, degenerates into obsession; he reaches the point where he prefers being blown with his silver rather than let it for the Monterists

The fatality of Nostromo shows the inability of men to keep ideals pure and withstand the catalyst of silver and material interests. Nanga uses illegitimate means to ensure his remaining in power. The difference in the two approaches resides in the fact that Nanga and Odili, contrary to Gould, are on the periphery not in the dead centre.

It seems throughout Conrad's and Achebe's novels that no traditional or social code withstand the catalyst of silver or the thrust of power; silver itself being endowed with a secret power to pervert even the most idealists.

### **Conclusion:**

It follows from the foregoing chapter of our comparative analysis that the contact between Conrad and Achebe is of the order of influence, that of Nostromo on A Man of the People. Through his pronouncement, Achebe has shown that he has read Conrad's novels. Achebe, in fact, was among the first critics to point out to Conrad's novel's potential complicity with the imperialistic project. In a 1975 lecture, Chinua Achebe declared that Conrad was 'a bloody racist' ('An Image of Africa', 788). This influence has been documented at different levels. One of these levels is the grotesque mode of representation which may easily be traced to the writers' consistently critical stance that permeates the literary discourse of each narrative. The satiric mode extends also to other

aspects of Achebe's and Conrad's works and determines their conception of characters and their portrayal of setting.

Because they are modern types caught in the web of material interests, Achebe's and Conrad's characters are no less similar. Most of the time, their ethics are inconsistent; the ambivalence in their portrayal presents them as anti-heroes. Achebe's and Conrad's outlined characters are inscribed into the so called anti-heroic attitude.

The plot of A Man of the People illustrates further the influence of Conrad on Achebe, the social upheaval it prophecies at the end is thematic of the whole structure of Nostromo. It shows that the African writer construct a different narrative permeated with the same discourse of power and material interest. Achebe holds the same assumptions developed in Conrad's view of neo-imperialism and applies them on his own political narrative in order to vindicate their failure.

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# Chapter Three

## The Individual and Social Morality:

### *A Man of the People and An Enemy of the People*

#### Introduction

The present chapter investigates the common elements between Achebe's A Man of the People and Ibsen's An Enemy of the People. In spite of the difference in genre, the former a novel while the latter a play, the two works share substantial similarities. We consider that even if Ibsen's work is drama, Achebe could not have overlooked it especially if we consider the fact that like Ibsen, Achebe is the father of (African) social realism. Second, the publication of Achebe's novel came only some years after Arthur Miller's adaptation of An Enemy of the People in 1950 revitalised Ibsen in the United States making him accessible to contemporary audiences.

Ibsen earned his label as the Father of modern drama with a solid and provocative body of work. The controversial and provocative nature of his plays earned him notice after the initial attacks he had witnessed at the hands of both the critics and the press. By the 1890s, Ibsen had become Europe's most famous avant-garde modernist playwright. Irish critic Bernard Shaw's Quintessence of Ibsenism (1891) crystallized the view that Ibsen – among other things was a champion of political radicalism in a time of great political upheaval. Ibsen, in fact, challenged the values of the existing middle class society and formulated the basic rights and liberties of individuals.

A social play of Ibsen's middle period, An Enemy of the People generally ranks as one of the thinnest of his mature works, one which, to use William Archer's phrase, is 'not so richly woven, not as it were, so deep in pile'. (Postlewait ed 1984.p.228) Archer goes on: 'Written in half the time Ibsen usually devoted to a play, it is an outburst of

humorous indignation, a *jeu d'esprit*, one might almost say, though the *jeu* of a giant *esprit*. . . . *An Enemy of the People* is a straightforward spirited melody" (ibid)

In terms of critical reception, Achebe's A Man of the People has stood in the shadow of his other novels, such as Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God. Like No Longer at Ease, Achebe's fourth novel, A Man of the People, seems rather lightweight in comparison with the two historical novels. It is a satire on local politics and corruption.

The true parallels between A Man of the People and An Enemy of the People are unmistakable. The two works disclose striking similarities, the plainest being their bold trenching on the domain of politics. Critic Esselin remarks that An Enemy of the People is Ibsen's "most clearly political play". He adds that it is "an archetypal image of political conflict" (Ibsen. 1967).

An Enemy of the People is one of the very few plays that deal with the present and where politics are most in the foreground. It was conceived in the heat of battle of democratic transition in Europe. It was published in 1882. There were parliamentary elections in Norway that year. It is one of the most important election years in Norwegian history – if not the most important. The liberals' plan was to set the impeachment tribunal. The upcoming impeachment trial was a major cause of the first parliamentary government in Norway at the end of June in 1884. So 1882 was an important year in the democratic transition. An Enemy of the People could as much be seen as a commentary to this transition and as a response to the critique over his preceding play, Ghosts (1881).

Like Achebe's novel, Ibsen's work was born out of disillusionment, as his attack on the hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness of the Norwegian society of his time. A reaction Achebe would have experienced in the Nigeria of 1960s. In fact, the form and mood of A Man of

the People seem to have been over-determined by its author's disillusionment with the ideals of the nation evoked in his earlier writings.

Both Ibsen and Achebe are in essential agreement about the relationship between the writer and society. Given such proximity between Ibsen's and Achebe's ideas about the social situation of the writer, the social grounding of his art and about his responsibility to and role in society, one is inclined to posit that much more convergences than differences may be found in their works. Ibsen remarked to one of his biographers:

All that I have written is closely wedded to what I have lived through if not personally experienced. For me the purpose of every new work was to serve as a process of spiritual liberation and purification. For no man is ever free of responsibility for the society to which he belongs, or without a share in its guilt." (Quoted in Mehring.1900)

### **An Enemy of the People and A Man of the People: A Study of Characters**

One of the striking similarities between A Man of the People and An Enemy of the People lies at the level of characterization. Achebe's novel is on much the same subject as Ibsen's play; in both, there is the picture of an individual pitted against a hostile environment, waging war on the ground of his integrity and superior knowledge against the forces of moral corruption, civil dishonesty and ignorance.

Of all the characters in Achebe's novel, three at least bear resemblances with Ibsen's protagonist, Dr Stockmann. They are all pillars of societies, who can bring effective change and viable progress, but who are hindered by the forces of capitalism. They are lonely individuals who succeed in preserving their moral integrity at the expense of social acceptance. The degree of their resistance which involves serious physical danger and even death signals their vindication and individuality.

Noting the resemblances in the positive attitudes of Ibsen's characters in An Enemy of the People with Achebe's intellectual figures, the critic Emmanuel Obiechina writes in Language and Themes: essays on African Literature: "Odili and Max present a more positive challenge to social corruption. Their response, like Dr. Stockmann in Ibsen's An Enemy of the People, is to fight back, not to turn their faces to the wall."(1990:148)

First ,the conception of Dr Makinde owes much to Thomas Stockmann, the doctor in Ibsen's play; even if Makinde is but a shadowy character in that the reader knows about him from an anecdote by Odili the narrator, his story resembles, in many respects, that of the Ibsenite creation. Besides, in their stand in the face of political corruption, Odili and Max bear many points of resemblance with Dr. Stockmann.

### **Dr Makinde /Dr Stockmann**

Though he remains a shadowy figure in the background; the reader knows about him from an anecdote inserted by the narrator to describe Nanga's self-serving political opportunism, Dr. Makinde's fate is one reminiscent of Ibsen's figure of science Dr. Stockmann. Makinde is the former Minister of Finance in the fictional African post-colonial nation of A Man of the People. A first rate economist with a Ph.D.in public finance who has been deposed by the Prime Minister, leader of the ruling People's Organization Party (POP) .The Minister has feared that Dr. Makinde's honest and intelligent plan for economic reform in the midst of a crisis might prove unpopular with the voters. His removal and subsequent public vilification as an enemy of the state and the people and a member of the "Miscreant Gang" serves as an example of the dishonest, self-serving, and ruthless practices with which the POP-the governing party- rules while paying little heed to the good of the nation. The attack is spearheaded by Chief Nanga, who uses the occasion to reach his political goal.

The link between the two stories is made completely clear in the town -meeting that forms the play's denouement. Achebe's construction of the scene owes much to the citizens-meeting in Ibsen's play. Conflict and mass confrontation is common occurrence in the two works. Both Ibsen and Achebe have their characters confront their townspeople who treat them aggressively. Although called by Dr Stockmann, the event is upstaged by Peter Stockmann, who uses a mix of his business support and legal chicanery to convince the town's people that his brother is an environmental lunatic. Ultimately, Dr Stockmann is cast out and branded "an enemy of the People".

Makinde, like Stockman, is thoroughly outwitted by the forces of politics and capitalism. The howling mob disparaging the disgraced minister is reminiscent of the roaring crowd reviling Dr. Stockmann. Politically naïve, Stockmann does not consider the fact that, because there is an election coming, his discovery has a broader scope than he thought. Makinde's lot, in fact, is one which reminds the reader of Stockmann's exclusion. Both are reviled, the former because he places truth before self and the latter because he has proposed an economic program that might have proved politically unpopular.

### **Odili and Stockmann**

Thomas Stockmann is the intellectual academician. Odili, on the other hand, typifies the Nigerian elite frustrated because they are unable to influence the trend of events. Like Thomas Stockman, Odili is a radical idealist wholly on his own, an individualist without political allegiances and affiliations. Thomas Stockmann allies himself with the younger radicals he thinks have outgrown the ideology of his brother the Mayor and his associates. He begins with an apolitical mission. Similarly, Odili enters politics late in the novel, challenging Nanga for his seat in parliament. Both are characterized by intellectual sophistication. Like Stockman, Odili exhibits a boundless egotism and has a rather grand

and exaggerated way of seeing himself in relation to the political squabble. The champion of Ibsen's play, William Archer, described the doctor as "a character of irrepressible, almost Dickensish amiability, a model of rectitude, public spirit, and all the domestic virtues, a lover of his kind, if ever there was one". (Postlewait Ed .1984.p.60)

Dr. Stockmann discovers that his town's water supply is poisoned, but when he tries to warn the townspeople, they turn on him. The Mayor, who happens to be Dr. Stockmann's elder brother, sides with the people assuring them that their water is safe, he blames "progressive" science for spreading the poison of doubt. Having heard what they wanted to hear, the townspeople ostracize Dr. Stockman.

Although Stockmann has been ostracized from his hometown, much of the outcome was caused by his own idealism. In society, he comes to realise bitterly that it is not enough to be right. You must have might as well. Speaking of Dr. Stockman in a letter to his friend Georg Brandes, Ibsen declared:

The majority, the mass, the multitude, can never overtake him; he can never have the majority with him. . . At the point where I stood when I wrote each of my books, there now stands a fairly compact multitude; but I myself am there no longer; I am elsewhere and, I hope, farther ahead. (Postlewait ed.1984:227)

Unable to win the majority of opinion he deserves, Stockman eventually turns against the very people he seeks to help. In his article, 'The Alienated Moralist in An Enemy of the People', the critic, Mordecai Roshwald discerns in Stockmann's grandiose declaration to let everyone in a country based on a lie 'be exterminated', "A rather misanthropic streak". In the play's most dramatic scene, he rejects democracy itself, shouting that: "the majority is never right. Never, I tell you! That's one of these lies in society that no free and intelligent man can help rebelling against." (p.76)

Going down to defeat, Stockmann, nevertheless, refuses to be "beaten off the field by public opinion, by the compact majority, and all that sort of devilry. . . I want to drive it into the heads of these curs that the Liberals are the craftiest foes free men have to face; that party-programs wring the necks of all young and living truths; that considerations of expediency turn justice and morality upside down, until life becomes simply unliveable." (p.104)

Like Stockman, Odili is blind to his own flaws. He suffers from pride and beams with arrogance and even superciliousness. Both of them believe in the moral and social supremacy of the intellectual. The doctor's scientific inclinations and Odili's intellectual integrity lead them into precisely the kind of eliticism and arrogance that result in alienation. They lack any deeper understanding of the motives of human conduct and are even perhaps too easily misled about their own.

Doctor Stockmann does not find it easy to relate the immediate problem of the pollution of the baths to any wider context of things and fails to grasp the other issues involved. His scientific insight does not extend to an understanding of human nature; that no scientific truth will have validity apart from human acceptance. Stockmann has spent much of his adult life in a remote part, stuck away in Arctic Norway as a doctor. His conduct lacks the corrective of the 'reality principle', that which could tell him what may be presumed socially possible, and what may not. Odili's western-inspired education, on the other hand, leaves him out of touch with its indigenous traditions. It has made him prone to the kind of radical alienation that is typical in the capitalist West.

Moreover, neither Dr Stockmann nor Odili are capable of manipulating others. Their aristocratic and bookish idealism is beyond the grasp of their townsfolk. Dr. Stockmann's principled idealism exacerbates the conflict. By his insistence on instant public action,

which would wipe out the town's income from the baths, succeeds only in turning every leading citizen against him. What he doesn't take into account is the reaction of his brother and rival, Peter, the mayor who views the poisoned water as a financial and economic disaster that neither the taxpayers nor the town's elders are able to shoulder. Dr. Stockmann's own limitations and his own ignorance explain the failure of his warning as much as the interests and ignorance of the citizenry do.

The play concludes with Stockman as a broken man. The sheer ugliness of the doctor's rage and disdain prevent unconditional sympathy; he is nearly lynched by the people of a solid middle-class town when he dares to tell them that their comfortable lives are based on a corrupt source of income, that their life is rooted in a lie. The doctor is so reckless a character that even his creator, Ibsen admitted to his muddle-headedness. Having had his home and reputation destroyed, he sits in ragged clothes, able only to joke that one should "never wear your best trousers when you go out to fight for freedom and truth". (p.90) He can console himself only with the bitter sweet lament that "the strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone."(p.69)

Odili himself has come close to admitting something similar. The attitude and predicaments of Thomas Stockmann are reminiscent of Achebe's narrator.

Odili intends to set up his campaign headquarters in Anata but he is barred from the school assembly hall and intimidated. Ignorant of the perilous road that lies ahead of him, he ultimately destroys his own electoral hopes when he decides to disguise himself and sneak into Nanga's inaugural campaign- meeting. Pointed out in the crowd, Odili is set upon and beaten so badly that he winds up hospitalized with a cracked skull, a broken arm and multiple bruises. He remains hospitalized and officially under arrest for four weeks, missing the election itself. He learns on Election Day that he has never even really been a

candidate because Nanga and his people have succeeded in preventing the official filing of the paperwork that would have made his candidacy official.

Like Dr. Stockmann, Odili inevitably has to pay the penalty of his credulity. He has naively valued the support of the people, the solid majority; he has believed, like Dr. Stockmann, that they would be responsive to truth and evidence and form an ally in the face of corruption and deceit. Driven out of the place, hooted and jeered by the mob, Dr. Stockmann barely escapes with his life, and seeks safety in his home, only to find everything demolished there. Petra Stockmann, the doctor's daughter and his chief ally in his fight against corruption is fired from her job at school.

Believing in the necessity of change, both Thomas Stockmann and Odili resolve to found a school. Committed to truth and justice, the former decides to found a school at the very place where he was ignominiously declared an enemy of the people to teach his own children and the poor boys in town. Dr. Stockmann will try to develop a new humanity and mould new minds by means of educating a new generation and raising the individual's moral. [He] will train the curs to the point where they can drive out the wolves."(105), they are to be brought up as free and noble men, who will chase away the conformists of the older generation when they grow up.

The same thought turns up at the closing chapter of A Man of the People; Odili proposes to erect a school –a new type of school in his village to the memory of Max, the Hero of the Revolution. The new type of school indicates that a new kind of education has to be administered to form a new generation and contribute to solve the problems of the nation.

Odili's attitude towards his fellow countrymen reminds the reader of a similar grudge on the part of Ibsen's protagonist. Stockman is vehement in rejecting common folk as "curs".

He firmly intends to educate them. Odili, on the other hand, take them for responsible for the crisis; he regard them as the real culprits.

Odili, like Dr Stockman, is no exception to the rules of self-interest and his motives are not pure. Stockman is interested personally if not financially and politically in defeating his brother the mayor. In Act III, he parades about saying "show some respect, my dear Peter. I'm the one in authority in here, now." (p.62) it becomes obvious that what is going on here is more than political. This denotes clearly that the doctor is jealous of his brother's success and authority. In fact, Dr. Stockmann's radiance is the result of his supposing that he has at last defeated his hated older brother.

Though some of Odili's motivation in this campaign is genuine political idealism, he is also driven by motives of jealousy and sexual revenge. The parallels in the Stockmanns' fratricidal relationship with the deadly antagonism between Nanga and Odili are obvious. The verbal battles between the doctor and the mayor get so personal -- so "you always" and "you never" -- that it is clear that more is at stake than facts and principles.

Odili hopes to impress Edna with his new-found importance as a parliamentary candidate. He even admits that he is unable to separate out his various motivations: "How important was my political activity in its own right? It was difficult to say; things seemed so mixed up; my revenge, my new political ambition and the girl". (109-10). In light of events narrated later in the book, it is quite possible that some of Odili's distaste for the elaborate ceremonies held in honour of Nanga's visit arises from sheer envy, from a desire to receive such attentions himself.

However, the investigation of the similarities between the central characters of these works takes us only very far; there are major differences too. Odili in fact, lacks the principled idealism of Dr Stockmann, which can help him abide by his principles.

In An Enemy of the People, the central character is one whose inner and outer selves are the same and remain so throughout, while the hypocrites around him seek to make him compromise and then, when he refuses, try to destroy him and his reputation. Opposition, instead of hindering his zeal spurs him; his idealism makes him stubborn and unrelenting. On top of public resentment and intimidation, Ibsen exposes his hero to the lure of temptation; Stockmann's father-in-law, Morten Kill, a rich tanner, whose tannery pollutes the water, takes advantage of the fall in the share value of the baths to buy up the shares. He intends to leave them in his will for the doctor's wife and children, if Stockmann recants his report, thus making the shares soar. Though this may mean shortage to his family, the doctor refuses to follow this road to moral capitulation. Neither intimidation nor temptation makes him swerve from the path of righteousness. He stands instead as defiant as the mythic Prometheus.

On the contrary, Odili compromises his initial principles. He is unwilling "to lick any Big Man's boot." (p.17) yet, in spite of his criticism of the Minister, Odili accepts Chief Nanga's invitation to visit his household. He begins showing signs of weakness and succumbs to the lure of political power and material wealth. Under the chief's spell, he even sees the temptations of the politician with sympathy and compassion. If there were no personal grudge involved in his relation with the chief, he might easily be drawn, for all his appealing diagnosis, into Nanga's corrupt political machine. Odili in fact "is himself a potential Nanga." (Arab.1982.271)

Max, on the other hand, seems to have succumbed to the lure of materialism. By accepting the bribe, Max "had jeopardized our moral position, our ability to inspire that kind of terror which I had seen so clearly in Nanga's eye..." (p.103): Odili intimates. However, in light of their radicalism, honesty, revolutionary decision to fight corruption without

compromise, one is tempted to see closer relation and affinity between Max and Dr. Stockmann than between Odili and the Doctor in Ibsen's play.

### **The Antagonists: Mayor Stockmann and Chief Nanga**

The main antagonist to Dr. Stockmann and Achebe's three characters is corruption and deceit. In Ibsen's play, these are clearly symbolized in Peter Stockmann, the mayor. He is the leader of the money-minded authorities and a representative of the Old World order. Unable to understand the ethical aspects of any issue, the Mayor, the influential representative of entrenched authority, is horribly experienced in the manipulation of others by veiled threats and the promise of favour. He masks self-interest and self-preservation as 'the common good'. Mayor Stockmann displays political mastery; his assumption of authority, the cool politeness that expresses contempt for his opponents while he seems to befriend them and his thorough understanding of their opportunism are not without reminding of similar traits of Chief Nanga, Odili's chief antagonist in Achebe's novel.

Peter Stockmann resents his brother's attitude in divulging the unsanitary condition of the baths. He also believes that all individuals should subordinate themselves to the authorities. Dr. Stockmann disapproves of these attitudes of his brother, and the Burgomaster is aware of his feelings. As a result, Peter destroys his brother, rallying the town's 'politicos' and proletariat into branding the doctor a dangerous turncoat and conspiring with Hovstad and Aslaksen to have Dr. Stockmann declared an enemy of the people. In his review of the play, critic Bernard Shaw, speaking about the detractors of the doctor, declares: "feeling the disadvantage of appearing in their true character as a conspiracy of interested rogues against an honest man, they pose as society, as the people, as democracy". (Shaw.1986: 95). In fact, Mayor Peter Stockmann sees his

brother (Dr. Stockmann) as an eco-warrior idealist who plans to wreck the town's economy on a whim, and destroy the hard-won social stability and prosperity on which his mayoralty rests.

In A Man of the People, Achebe speaks of the tendency of the post-independent politician in the image of Nanga to persuade every one else that “all argument should cease and the whole people speak with one voice” lest the whole house be brought down. (p.37) Just like Ibsen, Achebe thrusts his criticism at the unscrupulous leaders. By analogy, the mayor is in the position of the more powerful characters in Achebe's novel - Chief Nanga and Chief Koko. Because they have vested interests and secret agendas, the leaders mislead and misguide the public in order to get away with what they want and stay in their positions of power. Like the Mayor in Ibsen's play, Chief Nanga is a clear-minded pragmatist. He is, in the words of critic Benedict Chiaca Njoku, “a pragmatist; his interests are local, regional, practical, and immediate”. (1984.p.76)

With the support of the Common People Convention, Odili seems to take his candidacy quite seriously, driving onward to the point where he, at least, becomes a genuine nuisance to Nanga. In response, Nanga tries threats, intimidation, and bribery but is unable to convince Odili to withdraw from the election. His integrity regained, Odili can answer his tempter “It is NO in capital letters!” (p.119) Meanwhile, Nanga exercises his political influence to put further pressure on his opponent. Odili is fired from his job at the grammar school. His father, Hezekiah Samalu, though the leader of the (People Organisation Party) in his home village of Urua, suddenly receives word that his taxes have been increased in an obvious bid to coerce him into trying to convince his son to withdraw.

The detractors of Dr. Stockmann and Odili are presented as mean-spirited and ravenous rogues. They are often associated with hideous animals pointing to their gluttony, dirty tricks and myopic vision. One instance in Ibsen's play is the tannery owner Morten Kill who is called the 'old badger', a kind of pig that lives on filth. The association points to the corruption of Dr. Stockmann's father-in-law. Another instance is no less than Peter Stockmann who, along with the authorities, is associated with 'blind bats' to indicate that they have a myopic vision and are narrow-minded. Achebe also resorts to animal imagery to castigate the ravenous nature of post-independent politicians. Chief Nanga's continuous "yelping", "yapping", and "snarling" show the ferocious nature of a mad dog.

### **The Common People**

Though Ibsen's An Enemy of the People and Achebe's A Man of the People address the hypocritical and corrupt natures of the political system, they nevertheless join in attacking the irrational tendencies of the masses. The villains - ordinary respectable citizens - are good for one thing at least. They provide pictures, or at least caricatures, of the murk whipped up by untrammelled ideology, political ambition, hypocrisy, egotism, herd instincts and short-term material interests. Both Achebe and Ibsen use the masses to develop their themes: the townspeople (the majority) represent how people go in favour of the more popular side.

In An Enemy of the People, Ibsen portrays the collective masses as self-involved and easily swayed toward a more favourable prospect. In Act Four, Dr. Stockmann pours blame on these very masses he holds responsible for the ills in society. For him it is not the authorities but rather the masses that are most responsible of the political morass. "It is not they [the authorities] who are most instrumental in poisoning the sources of our moral life and infecting the ground on which we stand . . . it is the masses, the

majority."(p.77) .The play highlights the terrible power of the uneducated masses. When the mass forms into an indiscriminating mob, toxic with hostility, they become very dangerous.

Ibsen was convinced that the mob could be influenced very easily by demagogues. In An Enemy of the People, characters like the Burgomaster, Hovstad, and Aslaksen exploit mass psychology to the hilt and succeed in having the public judge a good citizen as an enemy of the people. Ibsen's play is ironically named, for the real enemy is the people themselves.

The townspeople in Ibsen's play seem to be ignorant and sheep-like. This is shown in the scene of the citizens meeting when a man in the group asks: "what's going on here tonight?", and a second replies: "It's Dr. Stockmann. He's holding a protest meeting against the Mayor."(p.67) .The citizens come to the meeting but fail to find out the real reason and issues. They believe the case to be one of personal protest of a man against his older brother.

Ibsen challenges the idea that the masses can be trusted to cure the ills; it's the enlightened few, "attuned to the future," who by rights should rule. Of the iconoclastic, defiant Stockmann, he wrote to Hegel: "Dr Stockmann and I got on excellently together; we agree on so many subjects. But the Doctor is more a muddleheaded person than I am."(Postlewaited.1984:227)

The author of A Man of the People seems to believe that change can only emerge from the minority. The dismissal of the people as cynical and ignorant and the victimisation of the enlightened elite: the vilification and the denigration of Dr. Makinde, the crushing of Max and the ill- treatment Odili suffers at the hands of both the politicians and their allies,

reveal a certain elitist bias on the part of Achebe. The writer castigates this class of educated elite. Yet, Makinde, Odili and Max seem to have his sympathetic approval.

Ibsen's point in the play is that ideals dissolve when self-preservation is threatened, and that normally placid people can turn toxic with hostility. An Enemy of the People shows to what depth of meanness people can descend when they allow themselves to be influenced exclusively by self-interest. In Ibsen's play, the people know that the water is contaminated, but they know also what is at stake, they are fearful of the cost, unwilling to pay the price to cure the situation.

Similarly, the masses in Achebe's novel know the truth about the corruption of their politicians but because they are fearful of change, they are willingly accepting the fact. They accept Nanga and reject Odili. Nanga's thugs make a fool of Odili to the joy and approbation of the crowd. Edna's father threatens him with a machete and Mrs. Nanga abuses him.

At the end Dr. Stockmann and Odili come to share the same disillusion. For both, the real menaces are the masses and their party leaders. Odili, like Stockmann, comes up with the same solution: the rule of the enlightened. It becomes clear from the play and the novel that the further the individual consciousness develops the fewer beliefs he has in collective solutions. Ibsen's and Achebe's juxtaposition of such complacent and hypocritical leaders and the credulous masses in An Enemy of the People and A Man of the People creates an unsettling atmosphere of immorality and deceit through the intense greed of both parties. In his effort to clean up the water supply, Dr. Stockmann goes up against political cowards, sold-out journalists, short-sighted armchair economists, and a benighted citizenry. Odili, likewise, faces cynical people, violent and roguish politicians and duplicitous and swayed journalists in his endeavour to bring radical politics.

## The Power of the Press

Through the roles they are assigned, the journalists in both Achebe's novel and Ibsen's play seem to perform a crucial role in the trend of the events witnessed by the central characters. Ibsen launches a scathing attack on the press and portrays it as duplicitous and complicit. In his opinion: "the press was no better than a parasite on a grotesque and deformed body politic, forever talking about freedom, but terrified of the realities of it" (Walter .1994:12). These views are clearly expressed in

An Enemy of the People, in the portraits of the liberal journalists.

There is in An Enemy of the People the supposedly liberal press, which is the medium for the doctor's purpose. The staff of the **People's Messenger**--Hovstad, Billings and Aslaksen- is deeply impressed by the Doctor's discovery. With one eye to good copy and the other to the political chances, they immediately put the **People's Messenger** at the disposal of Thomas Stockmann. Hovstad sees great possibilities for a thorough radical reform of the whole life of the community. "But an editor can't always do as he likes. He often has to yield to public opinion in small matters. After all, politics is the chief thing in life--at any rate for a newspaper" (p.52) he tells Petra Stockmann.

When the authorities, who are opposed to the disclosure on the contamination, begin to make their political moves, they convince the editor of the paper of their point of view and persuade him to publish their statements rather than Stockmann's article. It becomes clear throughout the play that editors of the stamp of Hovstad seldom dare to express their real opinions. When their own interests are jeopardised, they generally yield to the most ignorant and vulgar public opinion. They do not set themselves up against established authority. Therefore the **People's Messenger** drops the "greatest man" in

town when it learns that the Mayor and the influential citizens are determined that the truth shall be silenced.

Hovstad, the newspaper editor epitomizes the liberal media man's dilemma of squaring his convictions with his need to please his readers. He is a hypocrite who easily switches his opinion to side with the popular viewpoint. At the beginning, the journalists have called Dr. Stockmann 'the people's friend' but as soon as their interests seem to be laid on the line they reverse the term and call him "the people's enemy". Aslaksen, the head of the home owner's association, who as a "graduate of the school of life", lives by the principle of moderation (in other words, compromise) clearly points out in An Enemy of the People that it is not readers, but capital interests which put pressure on the newspaper. He admits also that in a free state the press has great power (p.100)

Against the politicians and the press, Stockmann turns out to be powerless; he can console himself only with thoughts of the future and with the closing reflection -- an individual consolation- out of a social defeat that "the strongest man in the world is he that stands most alone." (p.106)

Similarly, the press in A Man of the People is duplicitous and goes with the most powerful side. The government is backed by the national press. We learn from Odili that the **Hansard** boys distort Dr.Makinde's speech and, instead of reporting his words," wrote a completely new speech suitable to the boastful villain the ex-Minister had become." (p.6). instead, the newspapers and the radio carry the Prime Minister's version of the story. **The Daily Chronicle**, an official organ of the party (P.O.P) sets the tone of the campaign against the discredited minister and the intellectuals as a whole:

Let us now and for all time extract from our body-politic as a dentist extracts a stinking tooth all those decadent stooges versed in text-book economics and aping the white man's mannerisms and way of speaking. We are proud to be Africans.

Our true leaders are not those intoxicated with their Oxford, Cambridge or Harvard degrees but those who speak the language of the people. (p.4)

This cry, Odili tells the reader, was taken up and amplified by the press. And other local newspapers pointed out that even in Britain where the miscreant gang got its 'so-called education,' a man need not be an economist to be Chancellor of the Exchequer or a doctor to be Minister of Health. The intention of this virulent attack from both the authorities and the duplicitous journalists is, according to critic Emmanuel Obietchina, "to silence the voice of enlightened dissent and of sanity". (1990, p.141)

During the political campaign, Odili discovers to his detriment that the national radio has said not a single word about the existence of his new party the C.P.C. But instead it has announced Nanga's campaign which, Odili knows, has not even taken place. The duplicitous nature of the Editors is clearly shown in the episode where the Editor of the *Daily Matchet* is given a dash of five pounds by Nanga so that he would not go and write rubbish against him. The journalists who approach Nanga show complacency with the prevailing situation. Just like the journalists in Ibsen's play, they do not set themselves up against constituted authority.

### **Filth as a Symbol of Corruption**

Next to the similarities in characterization, filth is used in the two works as a referent to immorality and corruption. It is often associated with persons of responsibility and position to imply their moral decay. Ibsen's An Enemy of the People has many details which, while still being acceptably probable, have also a deeper and symbolic significance.

Ibsen's play takes literal pollution as symbolic of the "swamp" in which the people's conscience had sunk. After two years of careful investigation, Dr Stockmann finds that the healing baths are built on a swamp, full of poisonous germs. The contamination of the

healing springs becomes a metaphor for a poisoned and corrupt society. The particular context for Ibsen's condemnation of majoritarian foolishness is, however, the discovery of a scientific fact that is kept hidden by political bias and economic interests.

In An Enemy of the People, Ibsen turns what he considered the rotten centre of bourgeois Norway into the metaphor of the corruption polluting the baths. He transfers the idea of filth from the physical to the moral sphere. The contaminating sewers, the cesspit on which the health spa is built, act as a metaphor for all civil and political institutions. Thus, the decontamination of the water supply acts as the metaphor of social and political reforms. It is Hovstad who begins the process of transforming the physical pollution into a political metaphor. As Dr. Stockmann's awareness of the political and ethical implications of the social situation widens and deepens, he too, begins to use the transformed language of politics instead of the scientist's language.

In Act Two, Hovstad explains that the morass which the town is built on is not physical but moral. In Act Three, Stockman realizes that it is the whole community that needs cleaning up, disinfecting. (p.47) In his reply to his brother, Dr Stockmann says: "The source is poisoned, man! ...We live by trafficking in filth and garbage. The whole of our developing social life is rooted in a lie! (p.41) Stockmann sets up a campaign to drain the swamp of deception in his society. He declares that the whole society has to be purged and disinfected.

Filth as both a symbol of decay and moral corruption is common recurrence in many African writings. The moral corruption that swamps Odili's post-independent state is presented as dirt and filth. In 'Conspicuous Consumption and the Body Politic in the Writings of Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo', critic C.L.Iness writes: "in Odili's flight of

rhetoric, the association between political and cultural corruption or pollution is assumed and so powerfully interwoven as to pass easily unquestioned by the reader".(1995: 1)

Speaking of Nanga's shady dealing and his defrauding of his nation, Achebe uses filth again to point to the numerous scandals of the Chief ; in wanting to expose the corrupt politician to the electorate, Odili tells us that "there was already enough filth clinging to his name to disqualify him" (p.108 ). When Nanga comes to bribe Odili to withdraw from election the latter does not capitulate. He instead, tells him that he is mistaken if he thinks that he can buy him with his few "dirty pounds." He rather orders him: "You can take your filthy money and clear out of here" (p.119) The expressions: 'dirty pounds' and 'filthy money' send, at the same time, to the nature of the money which is a bribe inviting moral capitulation and to Nanga's fraudulent and illicit ways in acquiring it.

News of shady bargains and corruption of the politicians and leaders are referred to in the novel as "filth began to flow". (p.99) in Armah's *The Beautiful ones are not yet Born* and Soyinka's *The Interpreters* and to a lesser extent in Achebe's novel, dirt and filth become, according to Emmanuel Obiechina, "dialectical instruments for attacking false gentility, philistinism masquerading as civilisation and hedonism and voluptuousness disguised as good living" (1990: 128) . Odili enters the dirty game of politics but intends his fight to be clean. He reproaches Max for 'soiling his hands a little'. He has hopes of a new era of cleanliness in the politics of his country. Dr. Stockmann, on the other hand, feels that "a free man has no right to get messed with filth" (p.95)

## **Themes**

Corruption and deceit are common motifs in An Enemy of the People and A Man of the People. Corruption in the two works is tied to a body politic, to a venal business world, a

tainted media and a vacillating and self-serving people for which compromise is the fundamental tenet. Ibsen's play depicts the actions of a strong-willed character who challenges the hypocritical morality and materialistic values of the middle class.

Dr. Stockmann exposes bourgeois immorality, self-interest, and blindness that had masqueraded as communal justice, enterprise, and wisdom. Similarly, behind the comic mode of A Man of the People is a serious questioning of the nature of power in which, principles are balanced against expediency, integrity weighed against quick profits, and the 'individual' involved in a fight against those who wish to maintain the statu quo, the inertia and the intolerance of the undifferentiated masses who are their dupes.

The crushing of a dissenter is another important theme that governs the reading of the political actuality of both An Enemy of the People and A Man of the People and determines Ibsen's and Achebe's reading of their societies. The two authors develop this theme through the conception of both their plot and characters especially the intellectuals Dr. Stockmann, Odili, Max, and Dr. Makinde. Ibsen's play and Achebe's novel represent the infamous treatment to which high-principled and able men are subjected. Like Dr. Stockmann, Achebe's intellectual figures are in conflict with their social environment and are disgusted with motifs of interested behaviour and abhorrent corruption. All of these characters have met with tragedy in their attempt to withstand both the seduction and the violence of conformist degeneracy.

Basically, An Enemy of the People is the story of an individual who is under the pressure from his society to conform to its ethics. His refusal to do so leads to his increasing alienation. Dr. Stockmann is a dissenter who suffers for his independent and unbending stand. When he discovers through reliable tests that the water supply of the baths is contaminated, he is elated by such discovery as it will prevent dire consequences.

He has little doubt that the baths committee chaired by his brother will accept his judgement and takes the appropriate steps. He even expects to be acclaimed a hero. Instead he is branded as an enemy of his people, as someone aiming at a revolution, an individual deliberately estranging himself from his fellow citizens. Stockmann finds himself reviled because he places truth and social well-being before the self.

Similarly, in A Man of the People, loyalties are often rewarded while opposition and dissent are violently oppressed. The ex- Minister of Finance, Dr Makinde is ignominiously dismissed, thrown out of the party and denounced as a traitor. His car is destroyed by angry mobs and his house stoned.

Integrity and austerity are the means by which the individual stand temptation as well as violence. Chief Nanga comes to bribe Odili in order to press him to withdraw his candidacy. Odili's temptation in this case knows no bounds. Odili is then fired from his job. Even Odili's father, who is the local chairman of the party in power, cannot support his educated son without getting reprisals from the party. His tax assessment may be increased as a consequence, and if he fails to pay, he may be arrested for non-payment. On the very night of the voting, Max Kulamo, Odili's friend is attacked and killed by Koko's henchmen. It is only later in the book that the latter is pronounced a "Hero of the Revolution".

## **Section II: The Comic Dimension in An Enemy of the People and A Man of the People**

Though it seems clear that An Enemy of the People is played against a current and realistic background in the sense that it advocates radical politics, it is in some sense a

comedy about democratic institutions. It also mocks the idealistic Dr Stockmann. An Enemy of the People has been approached both as a social play and a comedy. In his letters and journals, Ibsen refers to the play as a comedy. After the completion of the play, the playwright wrote to his publisher in Copenhagen the following: 'I am still uncertain as to whether I should call it a comedy or a straight drama. It may have many traits of comedy but it also is based on a serious idea.' (Postlewait ed.1984:227)

Certainly there are overtly comic scenes in the play: Dr. Stockmann chases Aslaksen and Hovstad out of a window with an umbrella; Morten Kiil is a flawless caricature of selective mental density and acuity. The comic timing of the dramatic beats in the town meeting scene could have informed many a vaudeville act. Another critic, James Mc Farlane holds that "comic vision constitutes the drama's mode of seeing". And that "It is the subject -matter that is essentially un-comic". (1997, p.65)

Achebe's A Man of the People has very often been regarded as a satirical novel and a comedy. The ***New Statesman***'s assessment of the novel is "...a modern comedy as distinguished and as relevant to his society as those grander essays in homage to the past."(Quoted in *A Man of the People*. 1966). In his assessment of Achebe's novel, critic Bernth Lindfors writes: "Although *A Man of the People* was a comedy and ended happily with Nanga's removal from government, it remained, like Achebe's other novels, a disturbingly pessimistic work." (1997.p.8)

Achebe treats the weighty issues of political leadership in a satiric mode. In the novel, Achebe displays a great sardonic sense of the comic. A Man of the People's appeal is, according to critic Keith Booker, heightened by the irony that pervades it and by numerous finely wrought incidents of comedy. There are several fine incidents of comedy that may give the novel a stagy quality. For instance, the episode of a job interview for the position

of a cook- steward is comic. Moreover, A Man of the People has the singular distinction – among Achebe’s novels- of being made in a comic strip. The serial comic strip form was designed by Oke Hortons and appeared in the *New Nigeria* daily newspaper from September 1974 to October 1975. (Booker and Gikandi, 2003,p220)

It ensues from the critical assessments above, that A Man of the People and An Enemy of the People, in spite of the seriousness of their subject-matter, display common comic traits traced in them by the critics that we have mentioned. However, it will be useful, before looking at the comic elements which may be found in the two works, to define the theory of comedy as is formulated by Northrop Frye in his Anatomy of Criticism (1957).

#### **Northrop Frye’s theory of comedy:**

In his third essay, “Archetypal Criticism”, the author of Anatomy of criticism classifies four archetypal narratives: comic, romantic, tragic and ironic; mythos associated with the seasons. Northrop Frye recognises six phases of each mythos, three being parallel to the three phases of a neighbouring mythos. Comedy in this classification corresponds to the mythos of spring. Though he does not provide a definition to comedy, the theorist refers to the “*Tractatus Coislinianus*” which defines comedy as an imitation of an action that is ludicrous and imperfect, of sufficient length [in embellished language]. [ (Cooper .1922 :224)]

The first three phases of comedy are parallel to the first three phases of irony and satire.

Concerning the characters in comedy, Northrop Frye, referring to “*the tractatus*”, distinguishes three types of characters: the *alazons*, the *eirons* and the *buffoons*. The hero is central to the *eiron* group. The *alazons* (the humorous blocking characters) are nearly always impostors and the *Senex* is central to this group.

In an ironic comedy, the plain dealer corresponds to the *eirōn*, the foil of *Alazons* in low norm satire.

The plain dealer is an outspoken advocate of a kind of moral norm and has the sympathy of the audience. The obstacles faced by the hero form the action of comedy, and the overcoming of them the comic resolution. Rivalry and conflict- most of the time linked to parental, family relationships- is the essence of comedy. The opponent to the hero's wishes is a rival with less youth and more money, - the 'Senex', an older man who must be overcome or won over. By extension, the Senex is any representative of the established social order, and the extent to which he has real power implies some criticism of the society which allows him this power.

Conflict in comedy may reach a point of climax. Frye stipulates that an extraordinary number of comic stories, both in drama and fiction seem to approach a potentially tragic crisis near the end, the "point of ritual death"; a point near the end, at which the tone becomes suddenly serious or ominous of potential catastrophe. (p.179). In ironic comedy, the demonic world, the theorist notices, is never far away and "The action of comedy moves toward a deliverance from something which, if absurd, is by no means invariably harmless" (p 178). The normal comic resolution is the surrender of the *Senex* to the hero.

Contrary to tragedy which raises fear and pity, comedy very often moves towards a happy ending and according to Frye "seems to raise sympathy and ridicule" (p. 177).

### **Comic Elements in An Enemy of the People**

An Enemy of the People takes at its aim an absurd society. It is a drama on the absurdities of political rule and the alienation of the intellectual. A reading of the play reveals that its plot is simple and linear. When we first meet him, Stockmann is happily

surrounded by family and friends. These include Hovstad, the newspaper editor and Aslaksen, the head of the home owner's association, a 'graduate of the school of life' who lives by the principle of moderation.

Dr. Stockmann, absent for a long time from his hometown and economically at loose ends, now basks in the glow of having hatched a plan for a health spa that is reinvigorating his and the town's fortunes. The baths are, in fact, heralded as the heart of the town's future. They begin as an ideal reality, as the idea which in his lonely exile, the patriotic Dr. Stockmann thinks up for his community. It is appropriated by the chairman of the baths Peter Stockmann and the town's local authorities who use it for personal profit.

The potential for conflict is announced at the first Act of the play where Mayor Peter Stockmann begins showing antagonism to his brother the physician. The first hint of fraternal rivalry that is to agitate the three acts of An Enemy of the People emerges from the Mayor's bad-tempered response to Hovstad's praise for the Dr. that his brother is good at ideas unfortunately. The mayor insists that when it comes to practical matters "another man is needed". (probably implying himself). The division between the pragmatist and the idealist becomes clear.

The contest between Dr. Stockmann and the Mayor deepens over the issue of the baths. The Burgomaster wants to hush up the matter to save his own face, but Dr. Stockmann is adamant about making the people aware of the true conditions of the baths. The Burgomaster wins over Hovstad and Aslaksen to his side and uses them as pawns to checkmate his brother at the citizens' meeting. The moment of climax comes when Dr. Stockmann is declared an enemy of the people and hounded by the citizens.

Next to conflict, the action of the play turns around the plain dealer who is made a fool by the *Alazons* to the approbation of the crowd. Filling the perfect role of an *eiron* figure, Stockmann is made a fool by the blocking characters in charge of the society.

Thomas Stockmann's enthusiastic entry to argue against the public demonstration at his honour that he believes his friends Hovstad and Billing to be planning is very comic. His shock at the discovery of the mayoral hat and stick on a chair in the offices of the ***People's Messenger*** builds up the fine comedy of the doctor's assumption of these symbols and his dismissal of his brother from public office. In false hope of victory, Thomas Stockmann takes up his brother's hat and sceptre, the symbols of his identity as a mayor and struts about burlesquing his brother. The struggle of the two brothers for these symbols of authority constitutes one of the most comic scenes of the play.

In Act Four, however, Dr. Stockmann meets with tragedy. He comes to the catastrophic moment Frye calls 'the point of ritual death' at the hands of the crowd at the meeting. Yet, even if the play has a tragic ending, there is an aura of hope at the close. Although Dr. Stockman has lost the battle, he has not lost the war. Dr. Stockmann accepts that his battle against the corrupt authorities will not be easy, but he also realizes that his isolation has made him stronger. In fact, he believes that the strongest person in the world is he who stands most alone. Dr. Stockmann becomes a malcontent, a 'railer' according to Frye's definition, a character superior to his society but who is motivated by envy and arrogance. (p.176) An Enemy of the People, in the final analysis, turns out to be the ironic comedy of a man so convinced of his own rectitude that he expresses contempt even to those in whose names he supposedly acts. Stockmann's self-righteousness is comical.

To conclude, we may say that Ibsen's play contains elements of ironic comedy and may be easily situated in the first and most ironic phase of ironic comedy. The conception of the main protagonist who is played down by the dramatist, the conflict-based structure of the play, and the contest between the *eiron* and *Alazons* are all elements of comedy according to Frye's standards. However, it is worth noting that Ibsen's play does not strictly conform to the rules of comic plays according to the theorist.

The conception of Dr Stockmann is akin to tragic heroes and his literary ancestry can be very easily traced to Prometheus or Galileo. In addition, the play ends in catastrophe. An Enemy of the People is a dark comedy. Although the protagonist, Dr. Stockmann, fails in his battle with the powers-that-be, he is clearly triumphant, at least in his own mind, over some malevolent forces of the universe. Ibsen's play tends to stand on the edge of the mixed realm of the comic and the tragic, entering the realm of tragicomedy. This mixed genre is what happens to many notable modern comedies. As Mc Farlane writes:

Much of the energy of this play derives from the confrontation between Dr Stockmann -really a larger than life- comic character and a social situation which is and remains unregenerately serious and potentially tragic in its implication. (Mc Farlane: 1994 p.65)

At the end of the play Stockmann seems to have achieved his goal, after having successfully opposed the corruption of the town's leaders with the strength of his personal knowledge and moral rectitude. He stands alone but strong, surrounded by his admiring family, high above the repressing corrupting power of society.

### **Comic Elements in A Man of the People**

The contest between Odili and Nanga is the structural device of A Man of the People. Chief Nanga is more than a political rival to Odili. The two men fight over women as well as over politics.

When A Man of the People begins, one hardly apprehends the deadly antagonism between Odili and Nanga. There is even a note of cordiality in their renewed relation. Yet, this friendliness, the reader will see, will not last forever; the turning point comes when Odili's girl friend Elsie is bedded by Nanga. Odili sees this as a betrayal by Elsie, even

though he himself feels no special commitment to her. More important, Odili feels humiliated by Nanga, who does not take such incidents with women at all seriously. Elsie sets in motion the rancorous rift between Nanga and Odili. His vanity touched by this incident, Odili suddenly reactivates his conscience over political corruption and vows to seek revenge. The attack is twofold: to steal Edna, Nanga's young fiancée, who is to be his second wife, and to defeat Nanga in the next elections.

Odili is younger than the middle-aged Nanga. And even if he has less money than the Minister, he can claim that he has "other advantages like youth and education" yet he knows that "these [are] nothing beside wealth and position and the authority of a greedy father" (p108.) The obstacles to Odili's desires come both from Chief Nanga and greed-filled Odo, Edna's father. His running an election against Chief Nanga in a parliamentary election only ends in chaos. He undergoes ridicule and scorn many times during his electoral campaign. In the perfect rule of an *iron*, he is made the foil of the blocking humours. He is kicked and smacked on a platform to the sheering of a derisive crowd.

At the closing chapter of the novel, the action comes close to a catastrophic overthrow of Odili; he is beaten senseless and hospitalised while his friend Max Kulamo is killed. A twist in the plot comes in the form of a military take-over. The military coup permits the latter to win over his rival Nanga who is ousted and to marry the girl. However, In spite of the military coup, the society remains unchanged. There are few indications in the book of any impending solution to the political morass that it depicts. And it seems from the pessimistic note that closes the novel that more disaster is in store for both Odili and his society.

The overthrow of the blocking characters and the uniting of Odili and Edna conclude the novel, satisfying the requirement of comedy. However, the disaster that ensues and the grim peroration and the bitterness in the final passage set the grim mood of the comedy of A Man of the People. Pr. Arab writes: *A Man of the People* is the kind of work which makes one want to cry after having been made to laugh at it.(1982:268)

Our survey of the comic elements in Ibsen's An Enemy of the People and Achebe's A Man of the People allows us to place them in the first or most ironic phase of comedy which, according to Northrop Frye, is one in which a humorous society triumphs or remains undefeated.

### **Conclusion:**

In the foregoing chapter we have brought into comparative analysis Ibsen's An Enemy of the People and Achebe's A Man of the People. In the first section we have pointed out to the theme of the opposition between the individual and society through the study of characters. The second section has investigated the comic traits of the play and the novel. It has been observed that irony is common to these comedies. Though they adopt a rather comic mood in the handling of characters and situation, the subject of the play and the novel is rather serious. The comic aspects of the two works have been examined in the light of Northrop Frye's theory of comedy in his Anatomy of Criticism.

The findings of the second section have pointed to the tragic-comic nature of both the play and the novel. It has been noted that, even if Achebe's political scene is broader than that of An Enemy of the People's, the political machinations are almost the same. In fact, Achebe's scene is national politics while An Enemy of the People's prospects is municipal or local politics.

In the light of the substantial similarities we have come to the conclusion that the comparative literary relationship between Achebe and Ibsen is one involving impact.

Impact goes further than the relation of affinity which relates mainly to similarities in the background. It is, as defined by Charles Altieri "a matter of the currency of ideas and of a logic informing how writers shape ambitions and develop styles" (1977:189). The relation of impact does not involve any intertextual relationship. This type of comparative relationship suits the conclusions reached in our analysis because the analogies are too substantial to be said to stem from affinities between Achebe's and Ibsen's enabling conditions.

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# Conclusion

Adhering to Kwame Anthony Appiah's contention that African literature is not an autonomous entity separate and apart from all other literature, our dissertation has attempted to draw parallels between Achebe's last novel and other writings belonging to the western literary canon. We have assumed that the African author's work can be read in the light of almost three distinct literary traditions: The American Southern literature, the Edwardian Literature of the turn of the 20th century and the Norwegian (Victorian) literature of the second half of the Nineteenth Century. This assumption has been more or less demonstrated in the present dissertation. The intertexts of Achebe's A Man of the People are of three orders: literary affinity, influence and impact.

The first chapter of our study has explored the similarities between A Man of the People and All the King's Men and has highlighted the differences between them. The analogies have been identified at the level of characterization, setting, themes and modes of writings. They have revealed the fact that Achebe reads very like his American counterpart Robert Penn Warren.

The most important analogy between Achebe and his American counterpart Robert Penn Warren lies in the fact that both writers have steeped their novels in their local context but have given universal dimension to their works. As an instance, the central character in A Man of the People is recognizable both as an African leader and the archetypal embodiment of the falsest values that can bedevil any nation. His portrait in the novel makes him akin to such anti-heroes such as Fitzgerald's Gatsby and Warren's Willie Stark. Achebe's women characters are no less similar than those of the American literary tradition. The comparison between Warren's Lucy Stark, Anne Stanton and Achebe's Margaret Nanga and Edna has disclosed many affinities. The comparison can be

extended to include other female characters in the American literary tradition. Like Achebe's female characters in A Man of the People who are identified in relation to their male characters, their American counterparts, have real existence only in relation to their male counterpart, as wives and mistresses.

In terms of setting, A Man of the People, as has been attempted to show in the first chapter, shares many points in common with All the King's Men, such as the disparities created between the city and the country and the gap between the class of leaders and the lower classes.

The comparative analysis made between Warren and Achebe has been qualified as one involving literary affinity, the choice of this critical category to define the relationship between the African writer and his American predecessor is due to the fact that Achebe has made no explicit statement in the novel, a public pronouncement or testimony about the inspiration of his novel from Warren's All the King's Men. Even if the African writer is known to have a sensitive relation to Western writers such as W.B Yeats and T.S. Eliot .

Being mainly a question of (direct) contact between reader and author, we have thought it inappropriate to jump to the easy category of influence to identify the type of comparative relationship that Achebe's novel sustains with his American counterpart's fiction. In the absence of Achebe's acknowledgement of influence, we have used the more appropriate category of analogy (affinity) that relates possible comparison in fictions to the similarities of the enabling conditions in which works are produced. That Achebe has sustained a comparison that can easily be extended to include other American novels such as the Great Gatsby, is an indication that Achebe's fiction is part of a larger literary tradition, and not a separate autonomous African entity.

The second comparison in this dissertation has involved Achebe's A Man of the People and Conrad's Nostromo. The comparative relationship between the two novels is

said to be of the order of influence. In our analysis we have tried to show that by few deft inter-textual touches Achebe has pointed out to similarities and dissimilarities in the two novels where he explicitly alludes to Conrad's Nostromo. The phrase 'a man of the people' which is the title of Achebe's novel recurs more than twice in capitals in the Author's note to Nostromo. **at the suggestion of Achebe**, we have undertaken an influence type of study whose methodological tools are borrowed from Harold Bloom's Anxiety of Influence. The comparison has illustrated the similarities between Achebe's A Man of the People and Conrad's Nostromo. The analogies are located at the level of characters, plot and mode of representation.

The influence of Conrad's Nostromo on Achebe's fiction is mainly shown in the way the grotesque is used in order to structure and to portray his characters and build his plot. We can sum up his artistic attentions by saying that his use of a type of realism very akin to grotesque realism serves mainly as a tool through which he aims at the grotesque self-interested political class in his society and denounces its imported ideology. Beside the mode of writing, Achebe echoes Conrad's preoccupation with the theme of (Neo) imperialism and failed idealism. The comparative relationship between Achebe's A Man of the People and Conrad's Nostromo has been qualified as one involving Apophrades. This distortive process evidences the way the African writer amends the main assertions of Conrad's perceptions of neo- imperialism and failed idealism. To paraphrase Harold bloom we can say that Achebe's talent lies in the way he suggests his precursor's relative ambiguities and clarifies them.

The Achebe of A Man of the People seems to have adopted Conrad's attitude in handling his characters. In his attempt at criticizing the reality of his country and in contradicting the prevalent ideology, Achebe takes Conrad's Nostromo as a model. As it has been shown in the comparison of characters and mode of representation, there is a

change in Achebe's literary stance caused mainly because of what Simon Gikandi calls "the ironic moment of independence".

The third comparison in this dissertation has involved Achebe's A Man of the People and Ibsen's An Enemy of the People . The comparative relationship between the two works is said to be of the order of impact. In our analysis, we have tried to show that both Ibsen's and Achebe's fictions are politically grounded in the sense that both engage in the domain of political machinations either in the national or the municipal spheres.

Both of Ibsen and Achebe resort to comedy to handle their characters and situations in treating the serious themes of power and leadership. This results in irony that is very often generic of modern comedies. However, it is not the simple fact that Achebe's novel sustains comparison with Ibsen's play that entails us to describe this relationship as one of impact. If we have opted for the concept, it is precisely because Achebe has not set himself consciously to the imitation or parodying of his Norwegian counterpart. There are no indications in the novel or in Achebe's public pronouncements that support the argument about any conscious inter-textuality that Achebe would have intended to establish with Ibsen. Throughout the chapter we have tried to show that the dialectic that had brought Ibsen's character to the situation of Socratic rebel offers an example to Achebe and other African writers to follow when both these writers and their characters are caught in the same dialectic of individual morality and political ethics

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## ملخص البحث

يرتكز بحثنا المتواضع على كاتب من أكبر كتاب الأدب الإفريقي المعاصر: النيجيري شينوا أشيبي من الأمريكي روبرت بان وارن و البريطاني من أصل بولوني: إفريقيا الغربية وثلاثة من عمالقة الأدب العالمي جوزيف كونراد و النرويجي هنريك ابسن . وهذا لإظهار أوجه التشابه بين المواضيع المعالجة في الروايات والمسرحيات المقترحة بالرغم من اختلاف البلد واللغة والثقافة.

ومن الأسباب التي دفعتنا إلى دراسة هذا الموضوع نذكر ما يلي

- إن الدراسات التي تناولت بالبحث روايات الكاتب النيجيري قد عمدت في غالب الأحيان إلى مقارنتها بروايات لأدباء أفرقة و افروأمريكيين معتقدة أن التقارب في التجارب و الانشغالات خاصة في العشرية الأولى من الستينات التي شهدت استقلال الكثير من بلدان القارة الإفريقية كقيل بان ينتج تقاربا في شكل ومضمون هذا النتاج الأدبي لا يمكن إيجاده في الأدب الغربي، مضيقه بذلك دائرة البحث في الأدب المقارن

حاولنا من خلال بحثنا هذا تجاوز هذه الحدود بمحاولة إبراز العلاقات القائمة بين أديب من إفريقيا الغربية و ثلاثة أدباء غربيين

A نتفرع دراستنا إلى ثلاث أجزاء. أفردنا الجزء الأول للتشابه الموجود بين رواية شينوا أشيبي

و قد خلصنا إلى أن الظروف All the King's Men ورواية روبرت بان وارن Man of the People

الاجتماعية و التاريخية ساهمتا بقسط وافر في ظهور نقاط تشابه بين أشيبي و وارن

A و رواية Nostromo جوزيف كونراد خصصنا الجزء الثاني من البحث لمقارنة رواية

لأشيبي بهدف البحث عن تأثير الكاتب الأول في كتابات الأديب الإفريقي . Man of the People

مع رواية An Enemy of the People وتطرقنا في الجزء الثالث إلى مقارنة مسرحية ابسن

A Man of the People أشيبي

وأشرنا في الخاتمة إلى بعض الاستنتاجات التي وصلنا إليها بعد المقارنة بين كتابات

الأدباء وأهمها أن رواية شينوا أشيبي يمكن أن تقرا في ظل ثلاثة تقاليد أدبية

- أدب الجنوب الأمريكي

- الأدب الانجليزي ( الادواردي) في بداية القرن العشرين

- الأدب النرويجي ( الفكتوري) في منتصف القرن التاسع عشر

ونتمنى، في الأخير، أن نكون قد ساهمنا ببحثنا المتواضع في تغيير هذه الفكرة.