FORM AND VALUE IN THE POETRY OF OKOT P'BITEK

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ABSTRACT

This study maintains that any principled reading of the poems of Okot p'Bitek will have to start with the recognition of them as aesthetic objects created by an artist who is deeply concerned with the nature of, and the problems facing, traditional African culture, vis-a-vis the political and social realities of modern African nations. Literary creativity in the pre-scientific cultures of Africa is realised through a performer who possesses a repertoire of permanent records, including utterances and the various forms of songs and dances. All those parts of the utterance which are outside the permanent records are areas in which the performer is left free choice, and judgment on the comparative excellence of the performance depends upon the choices he makes. Okot p'Bitek has consciously chosen the role of such a performer in order to grapple with the relationship between the individual and the culture that encloses him.

The form of the poems is thus crucial for understanding their meaning, for it is conceived as a song which carries through the voice of the individual as he sings about the meaning of life in the particular human society in which he finds himself. The song is projected towards listeners who not only watch to see that traditional ethic is left inviolate, but also judge the performer's skill in manoeuvring within the areas society allows him.

There are four kinds of performers. In the Song of Lawino, the performer is a woman whose husband has abandoned the traditional African culture for a new 'modern', European one. This threat to the stable order
of traditional society will not be tolerated, of course, by her conservative audience. In presenting this threat to them, however, Lawino is careful to slip in enough of her own personal wishes, anxieties, opinions and triumphs to make the song an elaborate panegyric on herself. The performer in the Song of Ocol is ill at ease in traditional society and is brash enough to say so. His song is a failure not because he seeks to destroy his inherited tradition but it is due to a deep-seated weakness in his character as an individual. He does not have an acute perception of the relationship between himself and the reality around him, hence his inability to see even the areas of freedom society allows. Where he fails, the prisoner succeeds. In his song, the prisoner starts from the position of outcast from society and culture and ends by turning himself into the principle of freedom in society. If his performance depicts the individual's ability to rise above circumstance and contingency, the Song of Malaya portrays the opposite. The malaya is one who has deliberately chosen life outside the moral boundaries of society. Okot suggests, as in the case of Ocol, that the true individual is one who will live in traditional culture, even in spite of itself. Freedom from societal tyranny is earned, not usurped, and the individual attains it because he has the strength and skill to struggle for it.

There is thus a thread that runs through the four songs. That thread is the poet's own performance. What he achieves is a subtle examination of one moral problem from four perspectives. His conclusion seems to be that here is no conflict when society is seen in terms of the separate individuals who are part of it. If there is a threat to it, or injustice against its members, it is the individual in any of the guises he may assume, who is ultimately responsible.
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How one approaches the poetry of Okot p'Bitek seems to be the question raised by the few critical works on the poems. One line of criticism places them in the context of the social and political realities of modern Africa. In the view of these critics the poems are Okot p'Bitek's stylized ways of commenting on both his native Acholi culture and African social and political affairs. The other approach is more anthropological and taxonomic. Like the anthropologist, the critic discovers self-enclosed literary experiences which the author has either transposed from his earlier native culture to the modern culture of his works, or at least made the working bases of his works. While there is nothing wrong in construing the poems in these two ways, one must observe nevertheless that as critical strategies they are unprincipled and weak. For in the first place, they do not provide any serious bases for looking at the works as purely literary creations, existing uniquely and enclosing a symbolic world. Secondly, as heuristic tools they fail to offer the perspective necessary for looking at the works as structured wholes. Thirdly, these approaches do not suggest, as all serious-minded criticism must, any basis for a critical language with which more than one individual reader may examine these works. Lastly, the tools of criticism must be able to suggest to the reader ways in which literary discourses of the type one finds in the songs of Okot p'Bitek may be judged as aesthetic objects. Neither the discovery of social and political relevance nor influence-hunting seems to be able to satisfy this crucial requirement.

A more principled approach is to suggest that these poems are objects of cultural experience and cognizable only as such. They are
uniquely willed by the author by means of the "mental sets" or forms which make cognition possible and which therefore make them sharable entities. The mental sets, being as they are the product of the application of cultural categories to the facts of cultural experience, are also key units in the apprehension and expression of meaning. For the moral order of human affairs (the one which is constantly expressed in imaginative works) is a series of arches that enclose formulations and configurations of perceptible and expressible meaning. These arches are the forms and genres of meaning, and it is impossible to conceive of meaning outside the suggestion (and delimitation) of their shape. If this is the a priori shape of the moral world, it follows that any expression, any understanding, any meaningful communication refers to an 'agreed' common basis that makes expression or understanding or communication possible. In other words, one perceives or understands something only if one has somehow shared in its creation.

African literature is in desperate need of principled criticism, one that will eschew the vagueness of universalized categories of perception and judgement, and instead seek to establish objective criteria for understanding, describing, and even judging a work of art. For there are no universal categories of perception of cognition. Rather, as Kant says, our very cognition of a shared cultural object presupposes a shared system of feelings and attitudes with respect to it:

If cognitions must be able to be shared, then that mental state in which the cognitive powers are attuned for cognition must also be able to be shared. And in particular that proportion or ratio of the cognitive powers that is required to turn a representation (by which an object is given us) into knowledge must be able to be shared. For this ratio i.e., "mental set" is the subjective condition of knowing, and without it knowledge as an effect could not arise.
If we do not bring this kind of knowledge to bear on the works of Okot how can we even begin to describe them? And if we cannot describe them, how can we set up any criteria for carrying on any intelligible discussion about them?

The first principle of criticism is therefore to recognise that the poems to be considered are unique entities which exist as they are by virtue of their ability to contain meaning in 'wholeness'. This means that for author and reader there is a 'field' of referential validity. It also means that, in a text, an author chooses from this field the type of meaning he wishes to communicate. This is not to say that he may not mean more than he is aware of meaning. The more relevant point is that verbal meaning is a willed type expressed in linguistic symbols and apprehended through these symbols. As in all instances of that conception, the idea of type suggests that an entity has delimitations by virtue of which something belongs to it or not. The second feature of the conception is that as a class, a type may be represented by more than one instance of it. In other words, a type is an entity that is cognizable, independent and autonomous; it also belongs to or embodies another type. My coffee cup belongs to a broad class of objects called 'cup'. They all have certain characteristics by which 'cup' may be known. But my cup shares other traits with other cups that are painted red on the outside and white inside. They are thus precluded from yet another type that are black on the outside and white inside. One can go on generating more types as one learns the principle for discovering more shared traits.

What emerges from the above is that the idea of the whole is not
the same as the sum of parts. Rather the whole is a mental and formal type which embodies the principle for generating parts. In criticism, this principle comes into play when the critic is faced with the problem of justifying the details of the construed meaning of a text. His understanding of details, his construction of meaning, and the bases of his expectations, all depend on how he apprehends the form (genre) of the text.

One of the central questions in the criticism of African literature in English concerns the interpretation and the determination of verbal meaning. The matter boils down to one basic question: do the English words one sees on paper mean the same thing for the African writer (or reader) and a native speaker of the language? The answer is, of course, negative; for meaning is determined neither by syntactic coherence alone nor the referential relationship between a word and whatever entity it points to. Rather, one expects it to be a function of higher organizational laws, a grammar of context and significance.

Consider, for example, the following lines:

Her lips are red-hot
Like glowing charcoal,
She resembles the wild cat
That has dipped its mouth in blood,
Her mouth is like raw yaws
It looks like an open ulcer,
Like the mouth of a field!
Tina dusts powder on her face
And it looks so pale;
She resembles the wizard
Getting ready for the midnight dance. 4

There are no difficult or unusual words. Sentence structures are of the simplest kind. A reader who does not examine the piece from its intrinsic base would take the force and knife-edge sharpness of the images as evidence of bitterness of feeling on Lawino's part. His
interpretation would not be wrong, of course, but it would not provide a base that is powerful and comprehensive enough to draw in all the suggested forms in the piece's field of meaning. For example, it would fail to explain why one kind of image (rather than another) has been chosen in this context, or why the group of similes here receive full dramatic and rhetorical treatment.

What controls the type of meaning expressed in this passage is the form in which it is put. (Without this necessary link between form and meaning, it may not be possible to construe the text in a principled manner). The form is in its turn a function of verbal and extralinguistic necessities that the author's culture-type (African) has established. As a result, any meaning construed at the level of syntax is inevitably superseded by such utterance-controlled variables as the formal context, rhetorical suppositions, and the appropriate dramatic situation. Hence, one can say that the context of the utterance is the formal 'abuse', which is a rhetorical form that is very characteristic of the verbal art of African oral tradition. It is a verbal battle between opposing contestants, rivals, or antagonists, with each side searching through the world of words for the most deadly weapon with which to destroy its 'enemy'. It always presumes an audience, since there has to be an undeclared arbiter. This of course makes the situation highly dramatic, with the contestants attempting to maximise their own resources, the opponents' weakness, and the sympathy of the audience, even when the latter is not physically real. The 'abuse' is a very potent verbal form, as it allows a skilled protagonist to range freely between high solemnity and low comedy, to counterpoint 'tones' of meaning and to demonstrate his rhetorical re-
sourcefulness.

This means that any understanding of the passage would have to begin by recognising the mental sets that constitute this particular type of meaning configuration. The first step in this direction is to determine the constitutive elements; and these are not the verbal devices in the passage (e.g. simile and imagery) but the meaning-units that are part of a whole, definable and determinate structure. In other words, any determination of meaning is more of an attempt to explain why a certain meaning-unit is employed than a mere indication of its psychological value (either for the bearer of consciousness or the reader, or both). It also involves the ability to relate verbal processes to the relevant formal motifs around which they are constructed. Thus, we can say with regard to the passage quoted above that it is because the form is an 'abuse' that certain key verbal processes are particularly prominent. These processes include comparison, quantification, cumulation, and witticism, all of which are rendered poignant by the enveloping dramatic situation. It should be noted, however, that while these are in the category of what Kenneth Burke calls the basic "forms of the mind" we expect that each culture, each literary tradition, would have particular conventions for handling or emphasizing any of them. The innate forms of the mind, in other words, are not only the means by which an artist's work affects human consciousness by expressing them in a concrete form. They are also the means by which our consciousness predisposes itself to being affected. The symbolic structure of literary discourse is thus a complex of innate forms of the human mind; and the manner in which the artist approaches this task is subject to certain 'laws' and conventions which are part of his cultural and
artistic tradition.

When one talks about the form of the poetry of Okot p'Bitek, then, one is referring to uniquely definable symbolic structures which derive from a context which is typical of many non-scientific cultures of the world (the so-called 'primitive' cultures), and is characterised by the following: first, there is a deep-seated assumption that all of nature is unified.⁶ (Notice the contrast between this and the science-oriented view that nature is ordered). The idea of the unity of all of nature derives, paradoxically, from the view of natural phenomena as divided into 'human' and 'non-human', the realm of man and the realm of physical nature. The relationship between the two is not a moral one - as we find in Medieval and Renaissance thought - but one that is based on balanced and mutual co-existence. Man exists; and plant and animals exist, and neither side is better or worse for it. However, as Rev. Tempels indicates, this mutual existence is in fact controlled by higher laws which he calls 'metaphysical'.⁷ That is, the relationship between any two things or two people is based on force. "We can conceive," he says, "the transcendental notion of 'being' by separating it from its attribute, 'force', but the Bantu cannot. 'Force' in his thought is a necessary element in 'being', and the concept of force is inseparable from the idea of 'force'. Without the element of 'force', 'being' cannot be conceived".⁸

It follows from this that the most fundamental aspect of existence is the augmentation of man's vital force. This culture-type is thus subject-oriented, in the important sense that realities extraneous to human consciousness are apprehended only in so far as they are part of the individual in the process of augmenting the force that defines his
being. "An object is whatever it becomes under the impulse of the situation at hand. Forms are often open. Causality is often set aside... But above all there's a sense-of-unity... A reality concept that acts as a cement, a unification of perceptive linking

poet and man
man and world
world and image
image and word
word and music
music and dance
dance and dancer
dancer and man
man and world...

all of which has been put in many different ways - by Cassirer notably as a feeling for 'the solidarity of all life'..."⁹ Although this is a picture of a subject-centred unity in nature, we should, however, note that there is a basic difference between subject-orientation and subjectivism. Referring to the latter, Whitehead says,

... I mean the belief that the nature of our immediate experience is the outcome of the perceptive peculiarities of the subject enjoying the experience. In other words, I mean that for this theory what is perceived is not a partial vision of a complex of things generally independent of that act of cognition; but that it merely is the expression of the individual peculiarities of the cognitive act. Accordingly what is common to the multiplicity of cognitive acts is the ratiocination connected with them. Thus, though there is a common world of thought associated with our sense-perceptions, there is no common world to think about. What we do think about is a common conceptual world applying indifferently to our individual experiences which are strictly personal to ourselves...¹⁰

According to this definition, subjectivist cognition involves a projection 'outward' to an object, although that object may vary, depending on individual peculiarities. In the former, however, the opposite is the case: the purpose of cognition is not to transcend individual per-
sonality by discerning "a world applying indifferently to our individual experiences". The individual personality projects the 'colouration' of his consciousness onto the objects around him, say, by calling a table a monkey "under the impulse of the moment". This does not contradict the observation made earlier, since the individual actually selects from the objects of his experience those that may fuse into his personality. This is the sense in which there is a fusion, or solidarity, in all of nature. Hence, an important principle in this culture-type is fusion (rather than resolution), which is also an aesthetic principle.

The second characteristic of this type is implied in the first—that is, its assumption of a self-contained universe. The human subject is the centre of reality. There may be other 'higher' beings, but their reality is defined strictly in human terms. Thus, for example, the idea of 'god' is conceived as a form which may or may not augment the force of the individual person. Deity is not the object of spiritual desire, and therefore there is not the pressing need (as in Western thought) to know it. The absence of emphasis on the desire to know as a condition of being is part of an assumption that to seek to know a thing is, among other things, an implicit acceptance of an extraneous Good that is superior to the individual person, and the throwing open of oneself to doubt - two conditions of existence that are negative within the context of this culture-type. Hence, "if our world is open to multiple influences and data, theirs is largely self-contained. If we are committed to search for the 'new', most of them are tradition-bound... If the poet's purpose among us is 'to spread doubt and create illusion', among them it is to overcome it".11

The third principle, which should be obvious by now, is that the generalising tendency in the thinking process is always conceived nega-
tively. The reason is that generalisations and abstractions are, as it were, the end point of an upward-bound thought process, a process largely supported by such principles as causality, excision, and simplification. Also, a generalisation is associated with the attempt to arrive through individual thought at a possible fixed and invariant entity. Verticalism in thought, on the other hand, is characterised by "a highly developed process of image-making... concrete or non-causal thought in contrast to the simplifications of Aristotelian logic, with its 'objective categories' and rules of non-contradiction; a 'logic' of polarities..." Because this manner of thought is subject-centred, it emphasises uniqueness as a factor which determines its very nature. Thus, all thought is about uniqueness, whether man is affirming the solidarity of all of nature, or decrying the 'experience' of Ocol (as he seeks to assert another kind of uniqueness) in the first two songs of Okot p'Bitek.

In this culture-type, then, art is primarily a performed expression rather than a thought-directed craft. (We noted how Professor Whitehead placed value on the objective transcending of personality in any mode of thought. This is of course part of the Western tendency to subsume, harness, and polish the 'primitive' energies inherent in individualism). But here the end of art is the maximization of individualism, so that the verve and sinews of individual personality are always held in front of us. The artist expresses himself through performance; he must also be seen to do so. The result of this is two-fold: first, there is nothing like private experience, although the culture allows private expression of experience. This means that what the artist expresses is not as important as how he expresses it, since the thing to be expressed is supposed to be already well-known; or, again, since the individual should have no cause to be interested in private exper-
ience. Second, the idea of fictionality or 'otherness' has no place within this frame of reference. In fact, the artist is supposed to work against any 'virtual' situations, especially if they exist on terms not defined by real human situations. In other words, the artist is not a craftsman imitating some higher reality - as the Greeks have taught us to believe - but a craftsman who discovers himself every single time he performs his work with the materials culture has offered him.

A work of art is therefore not a bodily, perceptible, or tactile thing but the activity of the artist. This definition may apply also to works of art in most culture-types, but in the type with which we are concerned there is an important difference. That is, the work of art has no reality separate and apart from the public which is an integral part of it. It is a public experience in two important senses: in the first place, there is a strong element of the artist's exhibiting his wares in the open. Not only is he expected to show his ability to manipulate complex elements, the product of his activity must be instinct with the same feeling for the outward projection of the energies of the human ego. This point is suggested by the classification Ruth Finnegan makes of traditional African literature. One notices that what runs through the major forms of African poetry is the desire to praise. The poet often praises his patron and friends, a good or heroic deed, an animal, a dead relative or acquaintance, and even himself. The praise is not however the same as formalised flattery; neither does it afford the poet a formalized foothold to get on to other issues, directly or obliquely. Hence, the feeling that creates a work of art, whether it is a panegyric, an elegy, a lyric, or a piece of music or sculpture, is the desire to energize the ego, of both the artist and
his product. As a result, it is difficult to isolate these forms into different genres. Or rather, principles for genre definition should be radically different from those employed for the same function in the literature of, say, the Western culture-type. This point will become clearer later.

The suggestion that within this culture-type art is an activity performed by an artist for an audience, is accompanied by another, which is that art (particularly written literature) is also an activity performed with an audience in mind. The difference between the two is that the artist who performs for an audience may exploit the 'aural correlatives' of language, and other technical forms that an oral context may demand. As for the artist who performs with an audience in mind, the situation is such that the audience is an important element in the construction of any work. An artist performing with an imagined or real audience in view inevitably comes under certain constraints regarding the forms of the mind he may embody in his work. He is no worse for it, since he often expects to work from a premise (moral or technical) usually shaped into a 'given' by the audience. The test of artistic skill is to see what the individual - as - artist can do with the given entity. This makes the performance of art a 'play'. The idea is that the audience (representing the collective ethic of culture) witnesses how far an individual can stretch the sinews of his personality while still keeping within the normative constraints of society.

A further feature of the 'African' culture-type is that it utilises a different kind of historical thinking by recognising only life "lived more or less in the absolute", and finding no "reason for recording a reality which was always identical with itself". It does not view
man or his spiritual development as subject to any time-space imperatives. In this context, the individual self does not 'develop'; neither does he normally aspire to a consciousness superior to culture in any serious sense. Rather, what defines the individual - his vital force - is obtained directly from, or through the intercession of, those with whom he is ontologically connected, i.e., his ancestors. If, therefore, there is any 'purity' of being, it is located in the past, rather than in the present or future. Hence, art in this context expresses a different kind of individual consciousness. The artistic expression is an effort to find a place for oneself in culture rather than outside it. This is precisely why there are two complementary and constitutive elements in any artistic situation - the artist (performer) and the audience, (culture). The latter expects the former to 'entertain' it by 'playing-out' images and ideas of attachment and identity: while the former must be encouraged to seek out and consolidate a consciousness that is at once pertinent to the individual and culture.

The implications (for technique and execution) of the idea of 'playing-out' derive from the overall mimetic principle that governs the art of this culture-type. This principle, in its turn, arises from a deep-seated approach to the representation of meaning. Because art is expected to portray images of cohesion and identity, representation of meaning involves the employment of key and familiar units (words, images, symbols, etc.) as part of invariant schemata, and the 'interpretation' of their meaning in the relevant artistic context. Here one is talking not only of the unity principle underlying 'primitive' thought, but also of a type of complex mode for representing meaning.
The aim of the artist in his performance is to stretch thin a particular scheme to its irreducible unit, that is, the final meaning he wants the audience to understand. His role is to discover answers (and thrill his audience by the process through which he accomplishes this), and state them in clear, unambiguous terms. The techniques and processes of discovery are usually associated with mimetic truths about human nature rather than those about man's physical nature.

It is this 'oracular' sensibility that seems to clothe the artist in some magical aura. This particular aspect of 'primitive' art is often misunderstood. Most critics concentrate their efforts on the personality of the artist - as - seer. Usually, the aim is to ascertain his social 'position', and what influence he may have in society. A few others associate this kind of art with magic, that is, art which serves an end not wholly imaginative. Both approaches are a very simplistic view of the matter. We should remember that the context of the so-called 'primitive' art is an "open 'visionary' situation prior to all system-making ('priesthood') in which man creates through dream (image) and word (song)...". The absence of systematised thought makes the creative process extremely difficult and complex. That it takes a man of genius and extraordinary insight to construct imaginative meaning is borne out by Blake who saw himself as a creator beginning all over again to mould a new universe of meaning. Herein lies the 'magicality' of art: every construction of meaning is a process of reducing an 'open' situation to some form. Because this is a process of divining or conjuring into being, as it were, the clarity of meaningful form out of the multi-referential symbols that inhere the 'open' domain, it makes an unusual demand on the imaginative resources of the artist. As a
result, the artist is put at a remove from ordinary people, hence he is seen as one who possesses uncommon insight and knowledge. On closer examination, therefore, one should find that the artist is no more supernaturally 'gifted' than ordinary people. Rather, the idea of his unusualness refers to the extraordinary difficulty of the artistic process. The more difficult it is, the more it demands of the artist's imagination.

The question begged is an obvious one - with regard to the possible conflicting demands of a personal imaginative vision and the constraints imposed by culture. In the culture-type we under discussion such a conflict cannot possibly occur since there is no personal existence apart from collective existence: 'Summus, ergo sum'. Art does not seek to destroy the collective frame of reference, since that would mean its own destruction. Thus, to create is not to die but to solve the riddle of identity which is constantly posed for the artist. He must grapple with such questions as, 'Am I made of the stuff that is included in this (that) human group?' 'Who is worthy to be included in this (that) human group?' 'How is worth determined?' 'Who are the enemies of the collective ethic?' The suggestion is not that individual artists have not challenged the 'given' frame of culture. They have and will always do. The aim here, however, is to indicate the type of sensibility that characterises many works from this culture-type.

The discussion above concerns ways in which the principles that define this culture-type also define the nature of the forms in which meaning is put. The point to be pursued now is that the homogeneity of cultural outlook and sensibility (arising from the fact that it is
essentially an oral, rather than a writing, culture) has a profound influence on the texture and shape of meaning constructions. In the first place, the homogeneous sensibility arises out of the principle that the form of anything is the process of recognising and manipulating its 'given' and 'incidental' elements. This principle is central to the difference in the approach to artistic form in this culture-type and the other type which has been called 'Western'. To illustrate: Kenneth Burke says that "form in literature is an arousing and fulfilment of desires. A work has form in so far as one part of it leads the reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence. The fine aspects of form may be discussed as progressive form (subdivided into syllogistic and qualitative progression), repetitive form, conventional form, and minor or incidental forms". In the context of this study, these must be seen as only as types, vis-a-vis the question of imaginative form. Moreover, it is possible to infer from the definition that the meaning of a work is inseparable from its affective function. Thus a work is what it is, depending on how it arouses and fulfils the desires of the person experiencing it. But affectivity is something which may not be generalised about for the obvious reason that people respond differently to the same literary process. "By a varying number of details," writes Professor Burke while discussing the repetitive form, "the reader is lead to feel more or less consciously the principle underlying them - he then requires that this principle be observed in the giving of further details" (p. 125). This may or may not be so.

One should say, however, that in so far as a work is the process by which the artist expresses meaning, the artist chooses and emphasises the mode that should control his work. This mode is essentially a strategy of process and may or may not be important to the person ex-
periencing the work. But it is crucial to the artist; for, he will have
to decide which of the two larger groupings of form (progressive and
iterative) should govern his expression. It may not be unreasonable to
suggest that in making that choice the artist may come under certain
cultural and literary constraints, particularly in culture-types where
the artist and his activities are part of the public domain. For example,
it is noticeable that the form that dominates African art (whether
literature or music) is the iterative. Here, the principle of composition
involves the "imposition of some constant or 'key' against which all
disparate materials can be measured. The key could be a sound, a rhythm,
a name, an image, a dream, a gesture, a picture, an action, a silence", and so on. The iterative mode thus enforces composition 'by field'
rather than along a progressive, syllogistic line. Whereas the progressive
mode has as its end resolution (of emotion or thought), the iterative is
interested in balance and preservation of emotion and thought. The reason
for the pervasiveness of the iterative mode is because of the oral nature
of the culture, hence the artist's tendency to employ bold verbal gestures
and to sustain them with all sorts of rhetorical devices.

It is true that every consciously-organised and expressed form of
meaning has a 'grammar' of rhetoric by which it is articulated. It is
also true that any context of verbal expression can draw our attention
to the employment of rhetoric qua rhetoric. What is really important
about the latter is that our attention is drawn to a condition prior
to a rhetorized utterance. That condition is a quarrel; hence, rhetoric
is "'par excellence' the region of the Scramble, of insult and injury,
bickering, squabbling, malice and lie, cloaked malice and the subsidized
lie". If the quarrel is a sign of division, then identification is
the weapon with which implications of division are confronted. As has been observed, the human ideal of the collective ethic culture-type is the fully integrated person whose spiritual and psychic interests should be in consonance (indeed identical) with those of society. It follows that the artist for whom the search for, and expression of, ideas of identity is the 'raison d'être' of his work, rhetoric is the logical, indeed the only, mode of utterance.

In examining literary works which are 'spoken' in this mode, one naturally expects a flourishing number of rhetorical devices, but it serves little purpose to enumerate them. What is important here is that the instinct for the rhetorical is so basic to verbal expression that there is a thin line between a literary character (as a human being) and the artist's conception of him as a rhetorical device. Often, a character is a verbal sign, distinguished, however, from other signs by the potency of its normative power. As a result, it is often employed as the key rhetorical device in any utterance, the means through which the author attains eloquence in dealing with specific moral problems.

Indeed, the feeling one gets after reading most of the poetry of Okot p'Bitek is that he sees poetry primarily as a rhetorical performance. He is always conscious of utterance as being most poetic when heightened by the exigencies of a 'quarrel'. A quarrel may be between two human adversaries or opposing forces. Indeed, it may involve a situation in which a person is engaged in augmenting his ego. Here is an overriding conception of utterance as utterance. In fact, it is taken to be the basis of poetic structure. This point is important in reading Okot p'Bitek, because it suggests an approach to poetic form which may be unusual for a reader trained particularly in the Western critical tradition. Thus when one talks about the form of a poem one means
the structure of heightened behaviour or action through language by the
bearer of consciousness in the poem. As a result, the speaker (inconceivable apart from his speech or song) is the poem and its form.
The general rhetorical principle in the four songs of Okot p'Bitek
seems, therefore, to be whatever matters to the speaker, and is communicated to a listening audience - the structure of each song being the fusion of singer, song and situation.
The nature and meaning of individual approach to experience is the issue which Lawino considers serious enough to be the centre of the quarrel in her song. As was suggested earlier, her world is that of traditional African culture, with its set ideas, among other things, about life and how it should be lived. The threat to that world is the occasion for her song. However, she is less concerned that her husband should live according to the ethic of traditional culture than she is to bear the substance of her soul. Thus, she intimates, this early in the song, that there are two kinds of individualism. One is characteristic of the insulting, uncultured person who because of his deep-seated lack of confidence seeks to destroy anything that seems to prevent him from always discovering a new self. The other is typical of a person, like Lawino, who assumes that there is no necessary conflict between tradition and the individual. While tradition nurtures the individual, the latter is expected to glorify it in any manner possible. Herein lies the individual's opportunity to go beyond a mere demonstration of skill to suggest, as Lawino does, that she rides high above tradition. To Lawino, there is only one life - that lived by the individual soul. Every other mode of being is divisive and incoherent. Her song is thus a celebration of personal autonomy and individual psychic coherence. As one moves through the thirteen dramatic situations in the poem, one notices she is centrally present in each of them. Her song is herself, in so far as it is a celebration of the ego.

The poem starts with a subtle handling of meaning. The basis of the quarrel is Lawino's feeling that her personality and the world which sustains it are seriously threatened by Ocol:
Husband, now you despise me
Now you treat me with spite
And say I have inherited the stupidity of my aunt...
... you compare me
With the rubbish in the rubbish pit ...
You insult me...

Any insult has the effect of chipping away at her personality. To her, one should not only exist but must be seen to exist. That is why she deliberately makes her case in public. The result is that she is able to involve the audience in the issues in question and make them sympathize with her interpretation of them. She also begins to demonstrate her skill at sustaining the precarious balance between what she wants and the demands of her listeners. This is accomplished through a clever juxtaposition. The first "movement" is an address to, and complaint against, Ocol. This is balanced by an address, and a plea for sympathy, to her clansmen. The issue has become larger. Ocol is attacking Lawino's person; he is also rejecting the way of life the clansmen sympathize with. The issue is clear: if they do not sympathize with Lawino, then they are party to their own destruction. By making her case public, Lawino puts herself in the advantageous position of choosing the weapons for the duel. Her technique here is part of her tendency throughout the poem to choose a rhetorical strategy and work it out in each of the prominent dramatic situations. In the opening situation the dominant strategy is the complaint. Lawino puts herself in a weak position so as to win our sympathy. This is important structurally because at the end of the poem when her personality has prevailed, the audience has been made to feel her triumph is well-deserved.

But emotional sympathy is not enough. The audience must be more involved in her case. In the second situation she slowly begins to
create the image of Ocol she wants us to have. Here it is done obliquely through a most powerful and satirical depiction of his lover. The picture is a triumph of subjectivism; for Clementine is made the target of hyperbolic abuse:

Her lips are red-hot
Like glowing charcoal,
She resembles the wild cat
That has dipped its mouth in blood... (p.22)

We thus see Clementine through Lawino's extremely biased eyes, and the image is that of extreme ugliness. But the ugliness does not really stop at physical unattractiveness. The reason Clementine is ugly is that she wants "to look like a white woman", that is somebody other than herself. Everything about her is artificial - her skin, hair, and entire figure. She is even lacking in the positive value (fertility, that is, the ability to perpetuate oneself, and the race) by which Lawino defines human beings. In other words, by identifying himself with the "modern" woman, Ocol is destroying his identity and autonomy as a person. What is at stake, Lawino clearly points out, is not the moral implication of Ocol's infidelity ("Who has ever prevented men/From wanting women?") but the threat to one's very being deeply-rooted in the old customs, which are "not hollow/... not thin, not easily breakable". Notice that she refers to the ways of the ancestors with an eye to her audience. What is more important in this context is her feeling that against inevitable natural processes the ego must assert itself, whether in enjoyment or as a defiance:

A woman who is jealous
Of another, with whom she shares a man,
Is jealous because she is slow,
Lazy and shy,
Because she is cold, weak, clumsy! (p.28)
But now, she changes her rhetorical stance because she feels she has the audience's full sympathy. Those who are a threat to her have been exposed for what they are. She has presented herself as a wedge against the onslaught of a foreign culture, and is so confident she begins to tell her audience about the two cultures. In reality what we see is life as the ego lives it— that is, as a triumph of the will.

Hence, to dance is to put oneself in a heightened state of being. It is an intensity of existence based on the indulgence of healthy spirits and sheer physical vigour; a celebration of personal supremacy, albeit supported by the deepest ontological forms. Above all, it is a public activity which puts the ego under severe test:

It is danced in broad daylight
In the open,
You cannot hide anything,
Bad stomachs that have swollen up,
Skin diseases on the buttocks
Small breasts that have just emerged. (p. 33-34)

What is wrong with Ocol's ballroom dance is that it seeks, at its best, to achieve a harmony of movement between two partners by curbing the exuberance of the individual. This point is made through a contrasting pattern of image and metaphor: for dancing to be truly meaningful and desirable, it has to be an activity that liberates the spirit. The dancer must "shine forth" in the arena "like stars on a black night". "All parts of the body/Are shown in the arena!".

When the daughter of the Bull
Enters the arena
She does not stand there
Like stale bear that does not sell,
She jumps here
She jumps there. (p. 34)

On the other hand, the dance Ocol prefers is a 'closed' activity. Dancers carry on their activity "inside a house" where "there is no light" and in
the choking atmosphere of cigarette smoke.

They close their eyes,
And they do not sing as they dance,
They dance silently like wizards. (p.35)

What is fostered here is not psychic freedom but a blurred consciousness that not only lacks the power of discrimination but also the confidence to sustain its own autonomy. Lawino hopes at this time that the contrasting pattern of intense and brilliant, as against lustreless, images will leave no doubt in the mind of her audience that her side of the quarrel is the more authentic and articulate. To ensure this, she conjures up from the depths of the dancing hall images of corruption and decay. There is something exaggerated and comical about the parade of the families of dung. Yet the section is effective because it is a witty inversion of the image of the ideal dancer "shining forth" in the arena. The balance of one vivid image against another initiates the ironic tone with which the section and theme ends.

At this point, Lawino is totally confident of the loyalty of her listeners. Even if they are uneasy about her personality and morals, nevertheless they know that the alternative to her is by far worse. The angry tone of quarrel is now less audible as it is replaced by the more tempered voice of one who is interested in rapport through communication. Her strategy at this point is to tell her listeners about herself. We learn of her youthful past when she was a 'Primus inter pares'. She had been the "leader of the girls", and Ocol ("the son of the Bull") had acknowledged her eminence even as he wooed her. In other words, her youth was characterised by the supremacy of her ego. On this depended not only her conception of her being but Ocol's respect for her. All the
marks by which she existed in his eyes in the past (that is, all the marks of personal supremacy) have not, and cannot be, altered. The suggestion here is that what is at issue is not hers but his loss of his sense of value through a concomitant loss in the sense of self. What Lawino is saying as she works her performance up to a climax is that the personal self firmly rooted in tradition is the only assurance against moral drift and psychic instability. Because of his lack of a firm sense of himself, Ocol exists outside the realities of human society and must be restored to them:

My clansmen, I ask you:
What has become of my husband?
Is he suffering from boils?
Is it ripe now?
Should they open it
So that the pus may flow out? (p.46)

This passage is a masterful stroke in the manner it amalgamates three aspects of Lawino's rhetorical strategy. We must remember that she has succeeded in wooing the audience to her side. At this point she is coasting solo, but still allows a glance backwards at the main matter of the quarrel; hence the urge to convince that we detect here. But the issue is tactfully placed in the laps of her audience as she piles one rhetorical question on top the other. The responsibility for finding answers to these questions is clearly theirs. Wedded to this is the poignant effect achieved through the imagery in the metaphor. Lawino carefully balances the deliberately flattering picture of herself against that of her husband marked by unflattering but clearly vivid physical features. The effect of this juxtaposition is further reinforced by the ambiguity and almost proverbial potency of the metaphor itself. Ocol's boils are evidence of physical disease. They are
also marks of his 'madness' in not living fully in the society that Lawino and her audience know. The effect of all this is that Lawino is able to bring before us two highly individualised pictures of the antagonists.

The last two sections that follow further underscore the rhetorical design have just been referred to. Considered as a whole, they illustrate the dexterity of her verbal footwork. From the ironic juxtaposition of the thematically relevant image of herself as the "chief of youths", she quickly moves into the substance of the quarrel. In this regard, one notices the remarkable use of summary as an effective tool. But while telling us why she has lost favour with Ocol she tactfully exploits the ambiguity now implicit in the fact that she cannot "follow the steps of foreign songs". Those who do, that pregnant phrase implies, are guilty of what must be at this point in the poem a grievous sin - the loss of the sense of individual existence. The result of this loss is presented in the most vivid and graphically telling imagery. Thus, because they lack the sense of personal autonomy, they have no volition and are psychically incoherent. "Like beggars/ they take up white men's adornments"; "Like drunken men/ they stagger to white men's games"; "Like halfwits/... turn to white men's dances". The accumulation of images continues with racy intensity to the most devastating

Perhaps you are covering up
Your bony hips and chest...

You are hiding
Under the blanket suit...

And the dark glasses
Shielding the rotting skin around your eyes... (p.49)

These are images of people who inhabit a dim world because they lack the
confidence and native verve that enables the individual to shine "solo/in the arena".

The self which exists autonomous and alone like a star seen against a dark sky is defined essentially by two principles - the one external, the other internal. The first includes all the things the individual does to enhance a public image: the ostrich plumes, the necklaces, the ochre - red skirt and the red oil, all are part of the body that triumphs in a dance. They are aspects of the best in physical beauty, as Lawino shows her audience by means of several sensuous images. Yet she maintains, very importantly, that beauty involves much more than physical adornment:

Listen,
My father comes from Payira,
My mother is a woman of Koc!
I am a true Acholi
I am not a half-caste
I am not a slave girl;  (p.52)

Whereas Ocol's idea of beauty means the transformation of the self, hers is based on certain well-defined existential realities. Thus when she tells Ocol that "ostrich plumes differ/From chicken feathers", she is initiating a series of proverbial metaphors that underscore her conception of real and unreal beauty. Real beauty is built on the solid foundation of ontology which is the prime source of individual being. She can thus trace her existence back to the fact that she is a "true Acholi" and not "a half-caste". In other words, this essential genetic autonomy is not only linked to a purist conception of being. As is characteristic of her rhetorical strategy, Lawino extends this conception of being to her society's ideas about 'the way things have always been'.


What is at stake is not whether or not by imitation one can become transformed into a member of a different ethnic group. Everyone knows that the hair of the Acholi will always be "different from that of the Arabs", or that the Indians' hair, seen from Lawino's eyes, "resembles the tail of the horse". The critical issue is her contention that the mode of being of anything is ontological and existential rather than contingent. Beauty is thus as inseparable from being as it is from the form of being. Hence, her carefully presented conclusion is that ugliness is not only the disruption of ontological order but also any deviation from 'received' and well-defined forms of being:

No-one, except wizards
And women who poison others
Leaves her hair untrimmed!
And the men
Do not leave their chins
To grow bushy
Like the lion's neck,
Like the chin
Of a billy goat,
So they look
Like wild beasts.  

Once we accept the connection between beauty and the form of being, we become so trapped we have to also accept the implications of that formula. As part of Lawino's audience, we are asked to consider the image of herself as the epitome of that mode of being that sets the triumph of human will as its goal. And yet we are also asked to reject all instances of individual triumph over the well-trodden paths of 'received' traditional norms. It is this apparent contradiction that Lawino attempts to juggle in her bag of rhetorical tricks. Her way out here, as elsewhere, is to divert the audience's attention from the objective reality of her contradictory situation, while at the same time directing it, through heightening of intensity, to the purely sub-
jective substance of her experience: hence the significance of the passage quoted immediately above. In other words, Lawino's task is to convince us that beauty is defined by the form of being, and that the latter takes its colour out of the substance of the particular individual's will. This is the conclusion to the first major theme of her song.

That theme is simply the definition of the nature of the self. Her task was to place the individual self and its particular characteristics of emotional autonomy, free imagination and unfettered will at the centre of her 'quarrel' with her husband. This she achieves by deftly manipulating a series of rhetorical tricks, with the result that Ocol is presented as the moral equivalent of T. S. Eliot's hollow men. On the other hand, she makes herself a vital image which we should, for our own good, pull ashore. Thus, what makes a person is his vital ego - his individualism.

In the second theme, Lawino sings about the self in normally objective and mundane situations - cooking, food, time, and so on. Here the issue is that of incompatibility - of persons and cultures - and, more importantly, of the autonomous reality of objective phenomenon. Her strategy throughout is to blindfold her audience by deliberately denying the objective manner of being. This is of course an extension of her earlier strategy of arousing emotion through intensification and emphasis. But now she is prepared to turn the rules upside down to her own advantage. Yet there is nothing extraordinary or even immoral about this, because we should remember that one of the key aspects of the subject-oriented consciousness is its capacity to subject every phenomenon to the demands of the will. The ego makes it own rules,
chooses its own moments, and its own manner of being. Even elementary acts of the mind like description and presentation are not objectively real, but come under the shadow of the will.

What Lawino's audience is thus presented with is not an objective description of the contrast between 'European' and Acholi culinary cultures. Rather, by a simple rhetorical sleight of hand, she makes her listeners see everything through her single, biased eye. She employs particularly a linguistic mannerism to subvert the very notions of the order, objectivity, and communicativeness of language. By saying that when Ocol was

\[
\text{in the white men's country} \\
\text{They ate frogs and shells} \\
\text{And tortoise and snakes,} \\
\]

(p.66)

she wants the audience to understand her statement simply as, 'White men's foods consist of nothing but frogs, shells, tortoise, and snakes'. Again, when she describes a charcoal stove, she presents it as something hateful, which so blackens one's hands that they resemble "those of the poison woman", besides being as unreliable as the wind. If one touches an electric stove, the fire

\[
\text{runs through you} \\
\text{And cuts the heart string} \\
\text{As they cut the umbilical cord,} \\
\text{And you stand there, dead,} \\
\text{A standing corpse!} \\
\]

(p.68)

Even then she is no more objective when she describes Acholi cooking habits, except that here is more mannered and graceful, and her appeal is more complex. Notice that when she describes 'white men's food' her negative feelings are everywhere evident, and she simply tells her listeners to adopt similar feelings. Also notice that the verb to be dominates this section as she attempts to place aspects of her bias
in apposition to 'European' culinary culture. When, however, she begins to describe the food culture of her people, the listener is effectively conducted on a guided tour of her mother's house. Her aim is not so much to make a simple contrast between European and Acholi ways as to project her most cherished values: order and propriety, and particularly, the sheer presence and vitality of the human spirit. Thus, every single item we are shown in the kitchen has a qualifying (in fact, defining) human quality: the "beautiful long-necked jar", the twin grinding stones - the "mother stone" and "her daughter" - "the destroyers of millet/Mixed with cassava". The mother stone has "a hollow stomach". When both are put to use,

You hear the song of the stones
You hear the song of the grains
And the seeds
And above all these
The beautiful duet
By Lawino and her sister! (p.73-74)

The cooking place itself consists of three mounds of clay "shaped like youthful breasts full of milk".

To Lawino, then, the subjective mode is more important than any other manner in which reality is apprehended: the imagination being quite superior, vis-a-vis objective knowledge. When she says,

I do not enjoy
White men's foods
And how they eat -
How could I know? (p. 78)

she means much more than is apparent. She is talking about two approaches to understanding and knowledge. What one knows is what one is intrinsically in tune with. In other words all reality is self-oriented.

Having affirmed this, she is ready to move to the seventh theme of the song - time, the importance of which is that it is a reality as
extreme and objective as Lawino's consciousness of reality is extreme and subject-centred. She is aware that the issue at this point of the quarrel is the conflict between two ideas on the question of order in nature. From Ocol's point of view, this order is built on principles of impersonality and objectivity. In fact, it is a form more real than the individual person. The symbol of this reality is of course the clock which Ocol has "brought home", and Lawino's attitude to it is delightfully complex. To begin with, she alters the terms of the quarrel by imposing a personal haze and tonality in order to ensure her eventual triumph. Notice how the supreme symbol of objectivity is so animated that it seems to be real only in so far as Lawino perceives it:

A large clock
It goes tock-tock-tock-tock
And it rings a bell.   (p.86)

She is "afraid of winding it" because she does not know "what makes it go".

What she thus presents to her audience is an image of an object real enough but which has no serious effect on human life, something one can safely do without. At best, it can only be a comic object:

On the face of the clock
There are writings
And its large single testicle
Dangles below.
It goes this way and that way
Like a sausage-fruit
In a windy storm.   (p.86)

The effect of this reductionist technique is that Lawino succeeds in absorbing all reality into her own perspective, so that whatever exists is so only as she perceives it. Characteristically, her case is put in such a manner as to win the sympathy and approval of her listeners. In the general discussion of time as an ordering principle of life, the
issue is made to be the contrast between the intelligent understanding of her listeners and Ocol's meaningless babble:

Ocol has strange ways
Of saying what the time is.
In the morning
When the sun is sweet to bask in
He says
'It is eight o'clock!'  (p.81)

What she and they know about the passage of time is associated with a value and experience deeper and more natural, if only because they are part of a familiar and natural order of things. In contrast, Ocol's "eight o'clock!", "Five!", and "It is eleven!" are as artificial as they are unco-ordinated with any of the ordering processes projected here as vital and deeply meaningful.

Time is not chronology but vital experience. This is the only sense in which it is objective, real, and apprehensible. Hence objectivity is associated only with natural phenomena affecting individual persons – evil, love, hunger (and food), thirst, and so on. These have a natural internal logic of their own. Thus, someone going on a long journey, hunters, and people undertaking communal work, all have to "wake up early". Midnight means either

Wizards covered with ashes
Dancing stark naked
Armed with disembowelled frogs, (p.88)

or the young love hunters who "split the darkness/with their bare chests", and "smell out their loves/Through the thick dew!" Through the promptings of his innermost self the individual imposes a meaning on experience. The result is that one may not speak of experience apart from the individual apprehension of it. The difference between pain and pleasure, between conflicting opposites, disappears as the demands of the
ego sweeps everything in sight. The herdsman's task of tending his cattle ultimately becomes an exercise in pleasurable self-adulation:

A man listens
To the roar of his own bull
And shouts praises to it
But no one praises another's bull,
Not even the bull of his brother. (p.90)

Just as the praise of one's bull is really a praise of oneself, the moral reputation of a daughter is significantly linked to the very survival (in the existence) of her mother's ego. But more than a public moral image is involved here. The "fortunate mother/Of a good daughter" is, more importantly, celebrating the triumph of the individual over contingency, or any hint of it. Thus the encomium that follows the passage quoted above is an appropriate thematic climax.

Time, contingency - these are of course what militate against the security and triumph of the individual ego. Lawino is highly aware of this, but she insists that the individual must demonstrate nerve, vigour and will. And her husband's manner of using his time

Sitting in his sofa,
His face covered up
Completely with the big newspaper
So that he looks
Like a corpse (p.92)

is linked to the issue central to this theme. For the image here is of someone for whom time is essentially a distraction from the self and the realities which are part of selfhood. Some of these realities are the cries and "brotherly accusations" of children in a homestead and the dirt and debris that follow in their wake as they play. These are the 'joyful troubles' which the confident ego sees as the marks of the natural vigour and zest that define the nature of the self. And since the will is the criterion of being, any attempt to control or smother
it is a life-denying act. Further, to give free rein to children's will is not only to recognise the fact of their existence but also to focus attention on the biological cause of their being as the higher repository of human will and zest.

The woman who struts
And dances proudly,
That is the mother of many
That is the fortunate one's
And she dances
And looks at her own shadow. (p.94-95)

The audience is asked to accept this narcissistic self-praise in a positive light. What is to be condemned is the loss of self, which is tantamount to enslavement - as Lawino dramatises with triumph:

Time has become
My husband's master
It is my husband's husband.
My husband runs from place to place
Like a small boy,
He rushes without dignity. (p. 95)

The coup de grace here lies in the way Ocol's figure is progressively diminished from the position of husband to that of unco-ordinated infant. He is a comic figure because of his dogged insistence on pursuing abstractions such as "white man's time". But the way to cope with the phenomenon of process in nature is to recognise and accept the natural logic of their reality: the child will sleep or eat when there is a natural necessity for him to do so; every human society has ways of coping with such natural forces as misfortune and drought; a woman's awareness of the monthly cycle is closely tied to the biological alterations in her own self - the names of months having no particular significance for her; and the natural cycle of seasons is the only yardstick to measure time on a meaningful scale:

[When] hunger begins
To bite people's tummies,
This period
Is called Odunge,
Because fierce hunger burns
People's insides,
Wet season means
Hard work in the fields
Dry season means pleasures,
It means dancing,
It means hunting

Lawino's utterance here is instinct with materialism. She believes that the supreme law of nature is the law of interiority. Hence, a thing can be apprehended only through its internal characteristics, external influences having no significant effect whatever on its nature and behaviour. The primary cause of anything is thus its spirit (or will), which is the essence of being:

A person's age
Is shown by what he or she does
It depends on what he or she is
And on what kind of person
He or she is

The next two themes - concerned with religion and names - are essentially a dramatisation of this view. In the preceding theme, Lawino carefully separated the demands of the individual as subject from any external causes which may affect them, and concluded that the relationship between a person and the object he apprehends is a function of causes that lie deep within his nature. Here, Christian religion and names are presented as part of that external, objective reality that has no basis in the self. For being is, first and last, full consciousness of the self as the basis of all reality. Hence, all those who identify themselves with Christianity and its ritual - Ocol, the girls who serve teachers' wives, the drunken and "bemused" cathesist - are guilty of abandoning the most vital principle of being. Whether it be Protestant or Catholic, Christian ritual fails to draw people into meaningful communion because it is divorced from natural instincts:
The teacher was an Acholi
But he spoke the same language
As the white priests.
His nose was blocked (p.117)

Throughout this theme Lawino relies for effect on an elaborate system of contrasts. Her rhetorical burden here is to demonstrate that the internal demands of the self not only supersede the external but are at the very core of being. What we have therefore is an extended counter pointing of two women (herself and the Virgin Mary) who are objects of worship; two teachers (one Protestant, the other Catholic) united in the fact of their loss of the sense of self; two groups of ritual participants - the one engaged in meaningless shouting like parrots, the other in evoking images instinct with personal feeling and individualist reality; and two groups of images depicting the ugly and the beautiful. The personal, internal order has to do with feelings which are as vital to being as they are subversive of external and institutionalized reality:

The milk
In our ripe breasts boiled,
And little drop of sweat
Appeared on our foreheads,
You think of the pleasures
Of the girls
Dancing before their lovers

Then you look at the teacher
Barking meaninglessly
Like the yellow monkey (p.118)

Even ordinary names are a function of the internal reality of the individual's life. They reflect his deeds, his fears and triumphs, moral values, and ontological status. In this context, Christian names mean nothing.

From the idea of religion as ritual, she goes on to consider religion
as faith. Faith entails, of course, the acceptance of the reality of some mythical Being. It also rests on a symbolic system whose defining characteristic is its non-resemblance (on a one-to-one basis) to physical reality. Now, if Lawino's task is to show that there is no reality which does not originate from the self, the situation here should therefore be considered climactic and significant. For she has come face-to-face with her exact opposite, and for the first time in her song, she shows signs of losing her well-nurtured confidence. For the first time, there is a need (indeed a desperate one) for her to know about something outside herself. The questions that pervade this section of the poem indicate that she no longer provides all the answers:

I swallow the questions,
They burn inside me
Like a bee
That has gone into the ear;
And my eyes redden
With frustration
And I tremble
With anger

Moreover, she traps herself when she dabbles into the question of the origin of creation:

When Skyland was not yet moulded
And there was no Earth,
No Stars
No Moon
When Chief Hunchback was not yet there
Before he had moulded himself
Where did he get the clay
For moulding things?

However, we should remember that her interest is not in intellectual argument. Rather her tactic here is to employ humour to subvert the seriousness of the issue she has just raised. In so far as the Biblical myth of creation has propositional value, it is real. This is rejected by Lawino because she recognises the reality only of her own world, the
world of here and now, of personal volition and insight. Thus, her subversive humour is two-pronged: in the first place, she capitalizes on the linguistic and semantic dissonance that occurs when two differing languages are merely set alongside each other. For, although Christian religion is expressed as a linguistically communicable structure of meaning, it is radically different from any meaning embodied in the Acholi way of life. And Lawino's point is that any relationship between the two cannot but be literal, shallow, and ridiculous. Thus in the language of Acholi conception of meaning, the Christian God is seen as "the Hunchback", heaven as "Skyland"; and there are Christian prayers "for saying Yes", "for Trust"; and "Greetings of the beautiful men/With birds' wings".

In the second place, Lawino resorts to one of her favourite instruments of attack - abuse and mockery, the purpose of which is to present a less than serious or complimentary image of her adversaries. The audience is already familiar with the catechist Bicenycio Lagucu, who is sloth personified. Here the purpose of her attack is still the same, but the method is more light-hearted:

The teacher shouted
As if half-mad
And we shouted back:
'I accept the Hunchback
The Padre who is very strong,
Moulder of Skyland and Earth...' (p.137-138)

You take the road
And go to the Hun,
The young woman
Is fierce like
A wounded buffalo girl,
She screams
As if some one has
Stabbed her at the death spot. (p.135-136)
The Padre and the Nun are the same,
They only quarrel
They are angry with me
As if it was I
Who prevented them marrying. 

In presenting her enemies, Lawino is aware of the discrepancy between, on the one hand, their formal role as representatives and advocates of a rival philosophy of life and, on the other, their situation as mere human beings with the same emotions and wishes as members of her audience. By pitching role against situation, she effectively diminishes their stature, thus holding them up as objects of ridicule.

For the same purpose she continually harps on the cleavage between the propositional and theoretical reality of Christianity and the more realistic, earth-based apprehension of reality by her audience. Thus her argument seems to be that if all reality is physically-based, it is absurd to talk about anyone actually or symbolically creating the world. Neither is the story of Christ's birth any less ridiculous when compared with a similar situation in Acholi society:

Among our people
When a girl has
Accepted a man's proposal
She gives a token,
And then she visits him
In his bachelor's hut
To try his manhood. 

What we may be absolute about is what concerns our physical existence, since it includes, above all, the very significant elements of emotion and will. All other reality is purely imaginary or speculative; hence, one cannot be absolute about it without being overly arrogant.

This is the particular emphasis of thought in the tenth section of the poem. In it, Lawino returns with a degree of heightened intensity, to the theme of Ocol's ego which sticks out like a sore thumb in the
otherwise well-ordered universe of the Acholi. And she feels justified in constantly placing this image of Ocol before the eyes of her audience: her husband has derided almost every aspect of her way of life. Now she is accused of being superstitious because she is a follower of 'Jok'. Yet, the same kind of superstition is evident in the relationship between Ocol and his Christian God:

My husband wears
A small crucifix
On his neck,
And all his daughters
Wear rosaries.

But he prohibits me
From wearing the elephant tail necklace (p.155)

The issue, then, is not the war between God and Jok, but Ucol's rudderless and drifting sense of himself. He has lost all link with all those things which bind the individual to the community of men: he avoids visitors, cannot tolerate "old relatives", has no longer any sense of piety, and has become totally insensitive:

My husband says these things
In broad daylight.
He speaks aloud,
He does not care
Whether my relatives
Hear him or not. (p.151)

Insensitivity to the public image of an individual is a cardinal sin in the self-centred world of Lawino's. This key element in her quarrel with Ocol is tactfully reiterated at this point in her song. By equating a private wrong done to her with the broader 'sin' against society, she makes her audience accept the two as the same.

She accomplishes this with the presentation of contrasting images. Ocol is not only insensitive and inhospitable, he has knocked down the very corner stone of Acholi order: his "old relatives smell horribly".
He cares little about relatives, and has little or no patience with his mother's habits or the way she brings up her children. His utter lack of confidence in the "wisdom of the Acholi" is dramatized when he

"took an axe
And threatened to cut the Okango
That grew on his father's shrine" (p.158)

The significance of this is obvious enough to the audience. Equally obvious at this point in her song is the main thrust of her argument, which is, that of the two she is the more autonomous and authentic individual. First, and in so far as she is able to accept at once the physical and metaphysical bases of all reality, she is the more real, in the sense of being more integrated. She confidently straddles two worlds, as she rather exuberantly admits:

If my child is ill
I try the various medicines
That my mother showed me,
If all these fail
I go to the medicine woman,
And when the child has improved
I take a chicken to the herbalist,
Or a goat or a ram. (p.161)

Second, and this point is new in the quarrel, she is prepared to concede that there are non-physical phenomena which rule and regulate human life. Even the most authentic and integrated individual is subject to their laws and operations which include fate, misfortune, and of course, death. What is important, however, is not the fact of their reality but one's attitude to them. The exemplary individual, like Lawino, not only accepts their existence at a superior level of reality. She sees them as part of a well-ordered world in which high and low necessarily exist in a causational chain of being. Accepting one's position and life along that chain is preferable to an enfeebled and soulless attempt to
alter the terms of the well-oiled order.

However, this is not to suggest that the image of Lawino as the efflorescent ego is by any means dimmed here. It should be remembered that to her, to live is to live strongly, to assert the individual's will. All along in her song, the will is a key weapon in the quarrel with Ocol. Now, however, the edge of her attack is less keen, not because the issues are less important but because the audience has presumably been worked solidly to her side. One notices how her tone has shifted from intense, agonized hostility of the earlier themes and scenes to a cool, almost objective and disinterested presentation of her side of the quarrel. The will to win and triumph gives way to the desire to entertain. This is why there is an immense concentration and interweaving of rhetorical devices throughout this section of the poem.

There is an attempt to secure her audience's attention and sympathy by means of various presentational techniques. Now she evokes the effects of dramatic confrontation

Ten beautiful girls
Are walking in single file,
Along the pathway,
They carry axes
They are going to the bush
To split firewood,
In the grass lurks
The black mamba
Its threat burning with venom,

The first three girls walk past,
Then the fourth and fifth,
And all nine girls go by
And your daughter
Who is at the tail of the line
Is struck!

She stands there,
The reptile refuses to unhook its fangs,
She drinks a whole cup of death,
She gives a brief shriek
And mumbles some farewell
To her loving mother!
Then she drops
Dead!  (p.163)

Then she maintains a barrage of rhetorical questions:

Which white man's medicine
Can stop the hand of Death in the bundle?
Which one can blunt
The sharp edges of Death's sword?  (p.169)

Sometimes we are dazzled by the sheer confidence and exuberance with which a sentence is suspended in mid air (reminiscent of epic rhetoric) as the scene shifts from the fierce chase of a hunt, to the multi-headed domestic problems of a homestead, to the tediousness and uncertainties in farming, until the tension is resolved by the introduction of the main clause, which supports the meaning Lawino is communicating. At other times, the sense of movement associated with the dramatic situation or the periodic sentence is counterpointed by such 'static' verbal values as personification and pictorial representation. Thus,

When Mother Death comes
She whispers
Come,...
And you start walking
Without brushing the dust
On your buttocks.  (p.173)

and

When all the diseases
Have fallen in love with him,
And all youthful diseases
Run after him
As if he was a beautiful girl,
So that he has coughs and dysentery
And throat trouble and eye sickness,
And his ears have pus
And his legs have ulcers
And he is bony, skinny,
And his loin-string is loose,
I know that this is not for nothing! (p.161-162)
Finally, there is an emotionally refreshing mixture of voices: sometimes one hears the simple, plain voice recounting illnesses and their remedies. At other times, it is the stern voice of admonition, or the melody of a song within her own song.

The emphasis on the aesthetic designed to appeal to the audience's 'softer' emotions has structural significance, in that it prepares Lawino's listeners for the last major themes of the song. The picture before them is of one who is self-assured, and confident of her rhetorical skill. And because Lawino is aware that the audience knows about this aspect of her personality, there is a mutual understanding which directs the song towards a comic resolution. The manner in which she treats the political theme illustrates the easy confidence and light-hearted humour of one who is sure that the battle is won and that the audience is safely hers:

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With the coming
Of the new political parties,
My husband roams the countryside
Like a wild goat
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(p.179)

Notice how the potential seriousness of the first two lines is deflated by the burlesque of the following lines. There is a further irony as logic is turned on its head, the point being of course that there is indeed no connection between the high seriousness of political activity and the perambulations of a wild goat. And yet Lawino has to pretend otherwise in order to sustain her comic ironic tone.

Indeed, this kind of ironic humour characterises the technique of presentation throughout this section of the poem. Whether she is describing an instance of 'political action'

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My husband
Reads his speech from a book,
He shakes his fly whisk
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(p.193)
or the communal foolery which goes by the name of political assembly,

They shout and raise their hands
Not because they understand,
But because they do not understand
The many foreign words.
Uhuru! Congress! Freedom!
Democratic! Independence!
Minister! (p. 193)

the aim is to ridicule the new political order and its representatives. However, the audience is supposed to view all the comic gesturing as part of an elaborate self-deceit wrought on themselves by the representatives of the political parties. This point is made quite succinctly:

I do not understand
The new political parties
They dress differently,
They dress in robes
Like Christian diviner - priests. (p. 181)

Thus, under this theme Lawino examines the war between the personal and political orders. To assert the principles of the latter is merely to indulge in vague and meaningless gestures. Ucol and his fellow politicians fight for freedom, attempt to abolish poverty, ignorance and disease, seeks to unite all the disparate ethnic groups in Uganda, and are highly nationalistic. Although Lawino is skeptical about the possibility that these goals may be achieved, she does not see them as intrinsically worthless. She is rather more interested here, as elsewhere in the song, in a higher order of reality, that is the personal as opposed to the public (political) order.

The public order is, to begin with, as far removed from reality as the soul is from what it desires most. What with its characteristic external superficial trappings it cannot but constitute a scenario for exhibitionism and deceit. Whether it is the green-and-white robe of the Democratic Party or the symbol of the open hand of the Congress,
both are as interchangeable as the alleged principles on which their internecine war takes place. Moreover, the political order violates the individual's most treasured possession – his emotions. Thus the struggle between the political parties culls out the most primitive emotions and irrational fears, so that the political organization seems to exist solely to foster division and disintegration:

Independence falls like a bull buffalo
And the hunters
Rush to it with drawn knives,
Sharp shining knives
For carrying the carcass.

The division into parties and the rivalry inherent in this kind of political reality only lead to the dissipation of the larger self, that is, the traditional form of social organization:

The new political have split the homestead
As the battle axe splits the skull

But this not all. The self-delusion of the representatives of the new political order is clearly illustrated by their relentless pursuit of such abstractions as "the Peace of Uhuru", and "the Unity of Independence". In a series of questions and answers Lawino attempts to demonstrate that the value of an abstraction is judged solely on its effects as a force in the emotional life of man. Thus, to the human community for whom she speaks, 'uhuru' seems to mean "bitterness", "cruelty", "cowardice" and

The deadly fear that
Eats the hearts
Of the political leaders!

The audience is supposed to agree with Lawino that there is a deeper cause to all this outpouring of primitive emotion. Money, the struggle for position, the concern with material well-being, all are part of
the fratricidal war that is party politics. But the main reason is that "the insides of the people are bad". The power of this cryptic conclusion is not fully felt until we realize how its meaning and significance have been worked into the emotional texture of the poem. Indeed, its meaning controls the manner in which the 'political' theme is handled; for the fratricidal relationship between Ocol and his brother brought on by party politics, the warped sense of purpose that drives the actors in the charade that is political activity, the false belief that human aspirations (and problems) can be attained (and solved) through 'party' (i.e. non-personal) action - all are linked to one cause, that is, the loss of the sense of personal autonomy.

The authentic personality, the view of reality from the perspective of the individual, the argument that a strong will is man's best equipment for living - all these her listeners are by now familiar with. However, there is a shift of tone and emphasis. Lawino now identifies the disintegration of the self as the main threat to any organized human society. This disintegration arises out of the disregard of those key qualities by which a person is traditionally defined: the strict observance of the bonds of relationship, especially the ontological links between persons, and the cultivation of psychic strength, which ensures not only the autonomy and authenticity of the individual's being but also the unity and purposefulness of his actions. But Ocol is a 'new' man, and the disintegration of society brought on by the new political order is simply an objective correlative of the serious internal dissolution of his being. This is dramatized in this theme by the way in which the attention is shifted from a more general description of the consequences of the new political order to a closer examination of the
new man characterized by rapacious greed, disloyalty to family and friends, instability, political sychophantism, and even femininity

He is all over the place
He is quick to win a good name,
And when he talks,
He explodes like the dry pole of 'cooro'!
He is like a woman
Who has just buried
The other woman
With whom she shares a husband. (p.191)

A closer look at the new man is continued in the next theme of the song. The image of the scholar buried in the forest of books is not only amusing in itself; it looks forward to the comic conclusion. The section opens rather dramatically:

Listen, my clansmen,
I cry over my husband
Whose head is lost.
Ocol has lost his head
In the forest of books. (p.199)

Lawino's approach here is double-edged: by letting her listeners actually see Ocol in the midst of his book jungle, she succeeds in exploiting the comic potential in the literal level of action. Here is no hero in search of higher knowledge. Rather, they see a Cibber at home in his elements. They are entertained to the image of a timid and shrinking old fool, groping his way, eyes buldging, in a "dark forest of books", and leading a circus-like march past of animated books that are the trees, beasts, and mist and swamp of this jungle. Furthermore, Ocol's tragic story, like Troilus', is that of a man who has subverted the moral structure on which society is built. He has put the whole order of things "upside down". This is what Lawino means when she cries that he "has lost his head/In the forest of books". For, the centre and pillar of any human society is a man, a free born person informed with vitality
and fully alert to his duties as man, father, and leader. But the human community for which Lawino speaks cannot rest on a person who is lacking in vitality, piety, and heroism. These are qualities essential to the definition of being. Ocol's loss of the will to live strongly and to assume his rightful position in society has the effect of reducing him to a non-person. "The son of the Bull/The son of Agik" has become "the woman from Oko", a "stump". Comedy and pathos merge as Lawino asks in derision

"Why do you wear a shirt?
Why do you not tie
A sheet round your waist
As other women do?  (p.207)

This is essentially the end of the poem. Lawino has succeeded in associating Ocol's physical state at the end of the poem with his moral degeneration and spiritual decay. As we are well aware, physical and spiritual decay are attributable to the disappearance of the vital self. In a poem that is about being, survival is highly significant, and Lawino is the survivor in the quarrel that gives the poem form. From this point of view, there is a resolution. The emotions have been purged; the quarrel is over. With "O, my clansmen,/Let us all cry together!" she begins the larger resolution, ritualistic and comic. With this invocation she moves her song from adversity to prosperity. Society must survive by revitalizing and rejuvenating dead stumps like Ocol. The last section of the poem, them, is a formal ritual act led and managed by that individual whose sole qualification for such a role is that she is certain of herself.
CHAPTER 3

The Song of Ocol is on the surface an attempt to provide an adequate reply to the charges made in Song of Lawino. There Lawino's full-throated expression of concern about her husband's abandoning the old ways for the new ends up as an elaborate panegyric on the virtues of personal autonomy and individual apprehension of reality. There also she was able to resolve the tension generated by the conflicting demands of the ethic of the old ways (particularly, group solidarity) and the person-oriented individual ethic by maintaining chiefly through her various rhetorical tricks - that the two are not necessarily opposites. In his song, Ocol not only upholds the opposite point of view, but through his verbal gestures he points out the ambiguity and tension which are probably evidence of the author's attitude to the subject matter. One feels that the statement of meaning in the earlier song was easy to organize, in this respect - through Lawino as mouthpiece and centre of consciousness. The bearer of consciousness in Ocol is, however, not the self-confident ego presented in the Song of Lawino. Indeed, the form of the Song of Ocol is controlled by Ocol's axious wish to discover and define the meaning of selfhood in the context of social reality.

In other words, it is not simply an answer to Lawino's song. As in her case, the song is the dramatic expression of the protagonist's life's meaning. The quarrel is merely the occasion to pour out the burden of the soul and his apprehension of life's meaning. The problem facing Ocol is the past, particularly its accumulated traditions of behaviour and thought, and he makes this intensely and dramatically relevant when he opens his song with the oracular command
Woman! 
Shut up! 
Pack your things 
Go! (p.23)

We detect a note of anguished cry, as if by this means he hopes to exorcise Lawino away, along with her clothes, beads, necklaces, and kitchen utensils. These little personal effects are carefully placed in these opening stanzas to suggest the method of multiple layering of meaning and symbolism that characterises the poem as whole. Thus these words begin to accumulate far more meaning than is immediately apparent. By the time we come to the very emphatic "I need no second-hand things" it is clear that the clothes, beads, necklaces, and utensils are not only reminders (for Ocol) of a personal relationship he wishes to forget but symbols of a past which cloys his very soul. The tense situation is further reinforced by the verbal anachronism in the stanza that follows:

There is a large sack 
In the boot 
Of the car (p.9)

When we recall that the milieu evoked in the Song of Lawino is almost archaic, then the idea of a modern automobile has a jarring effect. The war between the past and the present is thus suggested, and Ocol's weapon is quite subtly bared.

It is in keeping with Lawino's character to consider the quarrel with Ocol as a typical confrontation which usually separates people into victors and vanquished. As the battle of life includes the struggle to preserve and promote the identity and autonomy of the individual, her chief aim is to make direct, well-aimed thrusts at her opponent. With Ocol, the essence of life is not found in the moral resplendence of an unscathed, victorious self, but rather in the tension of unresolved
ambiguities and unsorted congeries of meaning. Being is thus a battle to come to terms with this realization.

What Okot p'Bitek does in the next group of stanzas is to intimate the intense psychological pressure Ocol is undergoing. The quick succession of at least nine metaphors, one stark image piled on top of another, points up a wracked soul attempting to smother an unpleasantness out of existence. And yet, it would seem that when Ocol calls Lawino's song "the confused noise/Made by the ram" just being slaughtered, "A sole fragment/With no chorus", "women's wailing/At yesterday's funeral", the "song of the dead/Out of an old tomb", "the mad bragging/Of a defeated General", and so on, he is merely employing the tactic of the rhetorical abuse with which we are now familiar. But the cumulative effect of these deprecatory images is that the audience's attention is drawn to the tension the singer of the song is under. Indeed, Ocol is attempting to smother an internal fire; and the entire section up to the last metaphor "Song of the woman/Is sour sweet..." is a masterly stroke by Okot p'Bitek in suggestiveness and oblique presentation.

The ease and control with which this is achieved is clearly evidenced in the section that describes the plight of the "monarch in exile". Structurally, it is an amplification of the verbal thrust Ocol is apparently making at his wife. However, by shifting his mode of presentation from telling (the metaphors) to showing (the vignette) he succeeds in distancing this particular image from the other metaphors with which it contributes to the total meaning expressed here. Yet, ironically, this indirectness is part of the poet's design. On the one hand, Lawino is compared to a decaying and almost embarrassingly
anachronistic institution - the monarchy, with its decadent opulence and system of injustice. This image is balanced, on the other hand, by a more sympathetic one. There is genuine pathos evoked by the description of the loneliness of exile, of deprivation and degradation. Above all, there is the shame (we recall that this is extremely significant in the world of the protagonists) of the individual's fall from one position,

Yesterday ah!
The hot bath
The thick purple carpet,
The red slippers... (p.12)

to its opposite

Under the arm-pit
It is sticky,
The remains of a shirt
Sticks to his back. (p.11-12)

The king is of course meant to be symbolic of the past and, in Ocol's opinion, the irrelevance of its meaning. Ocol is therefore torn between his feeling of impatience with the past and the inexorable human bonds he has with it. His psychological problem in the song is thus clearly defined.

To grapple with it, he attempts to describe the past in a manner reminiscent of Lawino's verbal strategy. One of her chief contentions is that all reality is a function of individual perception. Here Ocol turns the argument against her: the Homestead he sees is an "old" one, and

In the valley below
Huts, granaries are
All in ruins.

The Pumpkin which she had invested with religious sanctity and awe he sees as a mere vegetable among other rotting ones, all of which should be buried during his clean-up campaign. But when he goes on in the next
two stanzas to read his 'edicts' against family holdings, the autonomy of clans, tribal boundaries, and native tongues, he is back again in an area of ambiguity, and we feel the tension in his soul rising to a climax. For, it is one thing to yearn for a future made up of individuals who have broken through the confinement of traditionalism and the self-oriented perspective. It is quite another to hope that human society can be constructed without inherited symbols of moral order and authentic behaviour. After the house has been cleaned, the floor washed, and the painter has done his job, what is left is the echo of emptiness. This is the direction of thought in the first part of the poem.

In the second part, Ocol enters the quarrel proper. Clearly his is not the song and dance of the self-confident ego; hence, he does not, like his wife, offer a mosaic of Acholi culture, with individual consciousness at the centre of it all. (This in itself is part of the author's suggested meaning, as we shall see in subsequent parts of the poem). As has been suggested, in this kind of poetry the very fabric and texture of verbal behaviour is usually the stuff individual soul is made of, since the meaning of any utterance is the same as the very life of the utterer. In other words, it is important to note that as Ocol engages in the quarrel, he has no overall conception of either a necessary action or the strategy with which to accomplish it. This is so because his is a tortured, disjointed soul - in a situation in which articulateness has a more than verbal significance.

What dictates his strategy throughout is therefore not the inner compulsion of healthful energy and articulate will but the nervousness and inferiority of a soul caught between what it has but does not want and what it wants but cannot have. The question and answer with which
he starts his plea

What is Africa
To me?

Blackness,
Deep, deep fathomless
Darkness (p.10)

is indeed part of the perspective of indirection that provides the tension in this poem. For, what is common in the supposedly objective representations of 'Africa' is Ucol's inability to understand the very object he describes. In the first place, the generalized term 'Africa' is as meaningless as the clichés he employs to describe it. Thus it is an 'idle giant' suffering from poverty, ignorance, and disease. It is also a 'Child/Lover of toys', 'Unadventurous/Scared of the unbeaten track',

Unweaned,
Clinging to mother's milkless breasts
Clinging to brother,
To uncle, to clan,
To tribe. (p.21)

The irony here is an obvious one. By looking at 'Africa' from a remove, that is, through familiar and lustreless images (or indeed through the eyes of its 'enemies'), Ucol is guilty of the same unadventurousness and other related sins. In the second place, what he fails to understand is that all human societies have within them all the sins of which 'Africa' is accused. This lack of understanding is emphasized, rather poignantly, in the climactic cry,

Mother, mother,
Why,
Why was I born
Black? (p.22)

Central to Ucol's personal agony - particularly heightened by the author's ironic strokes here - is his inability to separate the two essential worlds of the individual person and the reality around, especially in terms of
their causational relationship. In Lawino's song, it is the individual who, as it were, creates reality. Hence whatever is, is a function of individual consciousness. For Ocol to blame history or his racial inheritance (things 'external' to the individual), is an indication of a serious psychological weakness. If we recall that in Lawino is to live strongly, the point Okot p'Bitek is making here becomes particularly significant: Ocol lacks the all-too important discerning and discriminating consciousness which is the very basis of the inner reality of being. Thus the ambiguity that seems to characterise his world is self-induced.

Significantly, the third section of the song is a presentation of a man who has taken up arms against himself. There is a mixture in his threats of childish exhibitionism and hysteria. In the first part of the poem he employed the rhetorical abuse to influence his listeners and make them sympathetic to his case. The result had been that he succeeded in striking up emotion both in himself and in his audience with his characteristic ambiguous gesturing. The strategy in the second section was built on an apparent 'realistic' and 'objective' description of his adversary - 'Africa'. But by a skillful manipulation of irony and meaning, the poet has suggested that while realism and the objective presentation of phenomena are functions of consciousness, they are meaningless where the latter does not exist. The third section continues the inner drama of Ocol's soul with a magnificent presentation of the classic case of the individual who has no deep sense of himself:
To hell  
With your Pumpkins  
And your Old Homesteads  

We will smash  
The taboos...  
Explode the basis  
Of every superstition (p.23)

These exhibitionist tirades are an attempt to overcompensate for something he deeply lacks.

There is more to this, however. A motif hinted at all along is here fully taken up, expanded and woven into the meaning fabric of the poem. Starting from Lawino's song, there is a presentation of Ocol not only as a man and husband but as the representative of a kind. Because he seeks to align himself with the breed of men who dedicate themselves to the good of society at large, an important issue that runs through his song is the question whether or not he is of the stuff heroes are made. It is indeed in this crucial context that we must view the subtle relationship between the form the song takes and its cluster of images. Consider, for example, Ocol's self-assured utterance:

Do you think  
We plan merely  
To bring light  
Into the hut?  

We will set it ablaze  
Let fire consume it all  
This liar of backwardness (p.24)

What is remarkable is the poet's ability to compress meaning and significance into a little space. There is the irony in the differing meanings as uttered by Ocol and our understanding of them. What concerns him as the man to conjure a new society into existence is the destruction of the old one. But, as the poet subtly suggests, the clean-up campaign may become a wanton destruction of all that symbolize the past. With
"We'll grind/The grinding stones", it is clear that Ocol's desire has nothing to do with the goodness of human society. What he is seeking to obliterate is the realization of his personal inadequacy and failure. In fact, this section of the poem is a minuet which is part of a larger dance of death. Also, the ironic implication of the word 'light' is that Ocol, true to his psychological state here, is incapable of distinguishing between the use of light (as authentic moral heroes are expected to do) as an instrument of purification and of destruction.

This constant juxtaposition of the singer's life's meaning and other related modes of meaning is a technique that is to be exploited in the rest of the poem. For, immediately after the direct address aimed at Lawino, the attention shifts to the audience, as Ocol's verbal strategy becomes that of showing. The witch is described in all her bizarre details, and it is significant that Ocol concentrates on the mere externals of her reality: her hair is like a burnt-out forest; her eyes are "A pair of rockets/Shooting out from the head"; those around her during the occasion are terror stricken. The implication of this is that his audience should also be frightened. But the inner situation is indeed a ritual healing ceremony. It is a dramatization of the cohesive power of a collective reality. The ritual gestures of spitting on the palms and spilling animal blood are no more effective than the witch's plea to 'dread malaria': "I give you blood,/Let this child live". The value of the situation resides in its capacity to embody what defines the inner reality of human life - the communal grief over threatened life, the child's mother's love for him, and also her faith in the gestures of the witch who herself is acutely aware of her position as a moral and psychological centrifugal force.
This point is underscored by a variation in the juxtaposing technique. No sooner does the witch end her lyrical plea than Ocol cuts in with his mock ritual language, so that on the one hand the ritual situation immediately preceding is parodied, while on the other Ocol intends that his chant should be part of a different kind of ritual:

We will round up
All these priests
And priestesses of darkness,
All the rain-makers
And herbalists
The men and women
Who sacrifice at chiefdom
Or clan shrines

The rest of the section continues the list of all those who will be eliminated or excluded from the new society of which he is going to be leader. Again, what is illustrated is his total inability to bring a discriminating consciousness to bear on reality. He fails to realize that evil - whatever one defines it as - can only be located in one person (or place) not in some generalized entity. Thus all who have links with the past come under his inquisitorial gaze. The sharpest point of the author's ironic thrust is reserved for the man who will ban the "stupid village anthem" of "'Backwards ever/Forwards never'".

The progress of the protagonist is clearly downwards as he moves from one kind of destructive activity to another. We saw his search for a basis of inner being - which is really what the 'future' society must symbolize - become the journey of a tortured soul, for the paradoxical reason that he lacks an inner (spiritual) anchor. What is outside must be prefigured by what is inside - as Lawino would argue. We have also seen his gestures dominated by the drive to eliminate the necessary factor that helps mould one's sense of being - the past. Pro-
tagonists engaged in similar inner (sometimes futile) battles are often vindicated by their creators with the stress on the strength and dedication with which they fight. Thus, for example, Lawino may be a conservative old lady, considering her obscurantist clinging traditional Acholi manner of living. But the sheer zest with which she affirms her view of reality is what makes her a heroine. Indeed her song is about living strongly. Ucol, however, can only make empty gestures throughout his song, as he does in the fourth section dominated by another destructive attitude — mockery and cynicism.

As in the preceding section, the person he is compared with is presented as the repository of the values that bind society together. Notice how the point just mentioned is picked up, quite unobtrusively and by careful dramatization, and blended into this section. As the section opens we are in media res, for we are introduced to the "Noises coming/From within a dark hut", the "foul smell" of "crude waragi", the chickens "fighting/Over fresh dung of child". In the midst of this squalor and degradation sits Adok Too

The blind poet from Lamogi
Playing the nanga
And singing praises
To a newly wed bride; (p.33)

Then there are the feet of men and women "stamping the earth" in dance and merriment. The episode is a magnificent illustration of Okot p'Bitek's ironic technique. For, although the description is meant by Ucol to be a blow against the blind poet and his followers, ultimately it works against him. For the image of the poet is that of an individual strong and dedicated to values that bind society together, and this order which is set in relief against Ocol's.
The patterning and orchestration of the two is sustained through the rest of the section. We follow Ocol's gaze as it focuses on the stacks of split firewood and grass for "thatching a new hut, / The hut of the newly-wed", and then on the young woman "Returning from the well, / Balancing a large pot" on her head. The fire for cooking, the grass for roofing, and water - these, he points out, are advantages obtained at the cost of human misery and degradation. But society is saved from these two evils by such ease - enhancing machines like the tractor and the cart. The voice of the blind poet is, however, introduced dramatically to annul that suggestion. He interrupts Ocol's song with his own song which pierces the thatch, and like an arrow "strikes the woman / Like lightning". His song is about love and living vigorously, and illustrates, again, what has always eluded Ocol. In the midst of human suffering and misery the poet is able to raise his voice into an invitation to celebrate the values of living and dreaming (the imagination, that is). This call to humanity to rise above circumstance and contingency is carefully balanced against Ocol's call to African women to accept circumstance as the final reality. He rises to a climax in the cynically - conceived mock panegyric:

Woman of Africa
Sweeper
Smearing floors and walls
With cow dung and black soil,
Cook, ayah, the baby tied on your back,
Vomiting,
Washer of dishes,
Planting, weeding, harvesting,
Store-keeper, builder,
Runner of errands,
Cart, lorry,
Donkey...  
(p.41)

But cynicism is an admission of failure; and the hero here is the blind
yet Ocol insists on addressing himself to the question in yet another form. It is already apparent to his listeners that any leader of men must be a recognisable person in the important sense that he is, as it were, the objective correlative of their life's meaning when they are viewed as a collective entity. Ocol does not possess the stuff this type of hero is made of, and every section of the poem provides the occasion for affirming this. In the fifth section of his song, Ocol considers the traditional qualities of the hero: power, vitality, and bravery in action. The Karamojong elder "Etched with the scars/Of spear", the Masai warrior honing his spear and "polishing it with ghee", and all the hunting and cattle-tending groups who have to be brave in coping with circumstance and uncertainty, these are part of the world of the man of action. But action can only have a disastrous effect on society:

A large arc
Of semi desert land
Strewn with human skeleton
Barely covered by the
Hostile thorn bushes
And the flowering cactus,
A monument to five hundred years
Of cattle theft! (p.48)

To avoid this, Ocol again falls back on his clean up campaign: he will ban all fertility rites, destroy the traditional institutions of village government, forbid the blowing of war horns, and jail all spear-makers and blacksmiths. The new man created, after society has been emasculated, is not characterised by any deep values. Rather, he is defined by his physical looks, and has moved away from his traditional roots to the artificially - constructed city. "Here you do not have/To kill a man or a lion first" before being acclaimed a hero because the man of action, the hero society looks up to, has given way to the man of sentiment. The
soft has replaced the strong breed, and the warrior is now a flatterer:

My woman
Here's a rose bud,
Keep it,
Guard it (p.53)

This dramatic emergence of the new man marks a major structural division in the poem; for, the key question so far is whether or not Ocol is a hero, especially one to whom society can entrust its destiny. The answer to that is provided partly by Ocol, whose song is an attempt to create in words a prototype of himself, and partly by Okot p'Bitek who, by manipulating meaning and nuance is able to convert Ocol's slow ascent to his model to a gradual degeneration. The result is that when Ocol seems to triumph most, as evidenced in the last part of the section discussed above, his listeners feel he is least capable of being society's authentic model. And we note that the interplay of irony and structure here is quite Chaucerian. The Pardoner's Prologue, like Ocol's song, is a solo, egotistical performance, the dance of the man so drunk with the sense of himself that he becomes oblivious of the necessary link between his action and its moral implications. More importantly, it is the song of the mind in sin, if looked at from an Augustinian point of view. The fall from grace, according to this typical medieval tenet, is always the result of man's egotistical turning away from God. The wages for this sin is of course punishment apparently from God, but it is in fact self-inflicted. This punishment takes the form of the progressive mental deformity and suffering which sin itself inflicts upon its perpetrator. Thus, the man who defies God is no exalted being, but the pain-racked, mentally deformed captive of an earthly Hell.

"The struggles of the captive to escape this hell are like those of a fish with the hook in his jaws. He seeks to plunge to depths where the
pain and inescapable attraction he feels will somehow be lost - to find in love of the creature and created thing man compensation for his lack of internal happiness. He likewise seeks cunningly to fight back, to gain relief from his pain by venting the hatred his embittered mind bears toward the sense of God he feels to be bound up with that pain". 25

We are less concerned here with whether or not Okot p'Bitek read the Pardoner's Prologue or Tale, or indeed any Chaucer at all, than with the similarity in the poet's presentation of the structure of sin and punishment. In both cases the sin involved is the classic one of man's attempt to replace the idea of an ultimate reality with a personal one. The consequence of this action in both cases is a judgement which takes the form of an internal commotion resulting from the conflict between the demiurgical drive and the feeling of wrongness and futility. The opening lines of the sixth section of the Song of Ocol suggest this conflict and marks the tone of the rest of the poem:

Do I hear you whisper
Who is that man?
What is his name?
Do you not know me
And my brother's-in-power? (p.55)

The whisper could be anybody's: that of the old blind poet, the witch attempting to exorcise disease away, the martial heroes from the various African tribes - all those images against whom Ocol is set in relief. They form a collective, accusatory voice challenging his seemingly well-wrought personal order. Although Ocol characteristically boasts about his source of collective strength, "brothers-in-power", it is obvious that he is already on the defensive.

His attempt is hardly a defence, for the more he pleads his cause
the more he condemns himself - the same kind of discrepant awareness which is the 'locus classicus' of the Chaucerian irony in the Pardoner's Prologue. The *raison d'être* of the new man - his university education and his part in the struggle for independence - is of course an ironic reference to the classic hero's period of tests. What follows this period is the final fulfilment of his quest which is indeed the fulfilment of society's desires. Ultimately, then, the quest is a gesture of identification. But Ocol's is the opposite: those who have undergone the educational process and have "suffered without bitterness" in detention, destroy the quality of their gestures by expecting material reward:

    Comrade,
    Do you not agree
    That without your present leaders
    Uhuru could never have come?

    And surely,
    You are not so mean
    As to grudge them
    Some token reward,
    Are you? (p.56-57)

From here on to the end of the section Ocol, like Chaucer's Pardoner, leads us through his personal world of material gains: he has a nice house in town, and

    My spacious garden
    Explodes with jacaranda and roses,
    I have lilies, bougainvillea, canna...(p.57)

His other properties in the town include a Mercedes-Benz which he readily shows off; and the only tractor which has turned "Africa's wildest bush" into a "garden green/With wheat, barley, coffee..." is his. Although he is aware of the leaking thatches of houses around him, the sickly children who
of unemployment and landlessness, of prostitution, and of widespread ignorance, he is obviously too carried away by the sense of himself not to focus on his self-exhibitionism and indulgence. What started as a defence is edging slowly toward a confession. We see signs of this as Ocol is made to gradually separate himself from society. To him alone belongs the magic formula for altering the material shape of the world around him. In the same breath, he holds out no hope for the rest of society:

Did you dream
That the leaves
Would become banknotes
And be scattered by the wind
Among the villagers? (p.63)

In the last lines he defiantly confesses the final separation between his world and theirs.

Have lions
Begun to eat grass,
To lie down with lambs
And to play games with antelopes?
Can a leopardess
Suckle a piglet? (p.63)

The answer is negative, as his listeners realise.

It is therefore not surprising that the seventh section portrays the self-confident ego totally abandoning his last pretense to self-defence and yielding to cynicism, and even callousness. But cynicism is a mark of deep failure, and nowhere in the poem is the Augustinian theory of the plight of the over-wrought soul (caused by sin against the idea of final reality) as evidenced as it is here. Ocol's confidence in the preceding section is immediately challenged again by the collective
voice of society: "What do you mutter there/Idiot?" The blind poet has started his song, and, like the chorus in a Greek play, clarifies the issues at stake, admonishes the protagonist, and pleads the cause of society against the single-minded fury of the protagonist. But it goes beyond verbal meaning for its total effect. What is telescoped both for Ocol and his listeners is the province of the protagonist's soul, as visually effective as it is clinical. Note the predominance of geographical images, employed for their thematic significance. Indeed, the blind poet's song is a masterly device for control and distancing. For, it is a simple folk tale of the type: a king conquered a territory which he loved so much that he decided to make it a home for himself and his followers. But everything was strange about that land. To make their food grow, the inhabitants employed human corpses as manure and tears as water. But the land yielded Frustrations instead of Good. Fruits were as "green as gall". On the hillsides there grew thorny and prickly Fear, and in the valleys lamb seemed to graze, although they were all dead and lifeless. When the herdsboy in his ignorance attempted to revive them, his attempt was greeted by the deafening laughter of the king and his courtiers. During harvest, the inhabitants reaped Frustration, Fear, Anger, and Cynicism. Only a hunter knew that something was deeply wrong with the King's land. On him dwelt their only hope.

This is the landscape of Ocol's mind, and although the description is put in the blind poet's mouth, the audience is meant to understand it as an outpouring from a soul who has abandoned all connection with authentic human life and action. The song is thus a reformulation (albeit a bizarre one) of the meaning of Ocol's life, the substance of his own song. Here we see the man who proposes to fashion out a future
for society not only lose that society but even the sense of himself. His actions now are those of the drowning man as he clutches at anything in sight to drag it down with him. In his last moments, as it were, he has only abuses and curses for humanity. The world he perceives is a mere picture of his tortured, unheroic soul: here he sees the blind poet who should "Creep back and hide/In your mother's womb", there the Pigmy men swinging

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{From branch to branch} \\
\text{Like naked hairless} \\
\text{Black apes; } \\
(p.71)
\end{align*}
\]

the mukopi are mere slaves who carry water for their landlord's wife, while the "Indian dukawallah" coughs spittle on the floor, his "citizenship card/Nailed on the wall". He sees these and other groups in society as unheroic as he is, and, characteristically, he condemns them and everything to destruction:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{We will uproot} \\
\text{Each tree} \\
\text{From the Ituri forest} \\
\text{And blow up} \\
\text{Mount Killimanjaro,} \\
\text{The rubble from Ruwenzori} \\
\text{Will fill the valleys} \\
\text{Of the Rift } \\
(p.73)
\end{align*}
\]

This is the culmination of the desperate man's attempt to escape the consequence of the self-inflicted punishment; and it is necessary to see him as symbolically dead. Like Samson, Ocol dies in the ruins he himself caused. But he is neither a hero like Samson, since his mission is not to attest to the superiority of final reality over sin and contingency.

It is exactly on this note that the song ends. The eighth section is an overkill characteristic of the non-heroic, non-magnanimous man.
Indeed, what we witness is a mock ritual, as Ocol intones the chant celebrating the death of the past and its symbolic representatives: let heroes die, let the drums of war and dance cease, let the Old Homestead pass away, let the ancestral spirits flee, and let Lawino hang herself on a rope. The important thing is that

people will disperse
Each following his or her own route:
Pilgrims to the New City,
And once they depart
They will never meet again! (p.78)

The new city is not only a celebration of the personal, individualist order, it is also a place for those who survive by not living. Like their creator (Ocol), they fail to live strongly because neither do they have any authentic link with tradition nor the spiritual strength to engage in the critical issue of living. Since survival is their goal, they are content to remain as mere shadows of reality, and their language is not an equipment for living but mere banal incantation:

   Your Excellency
   Bwana President
   I salute you,
   And you Honourable Ministers
   Discussing the White Paper (p.81)

The new order, then, is dominated by men who seem to be mere effigies: "worshipful Mayors", "Aldermen", "Councillors", "Town Clerks in wigs", the "black capitalist/In the dark suit". They contrast sharply with the heroic Karamojong elder "Etched with the scars/Of spear" and the Masai warrior "honing his spear". Because they aim at survival, they worship power and those who wield it. Hence the new heroes are those who have survived by exercising it - Ocol himself
We shall build
A new city on the hill
Overlooking the Lake,
Concrete, steel, stone...
The termite queen-mother
Will starve to death... (p.84)

and the "founders of modern Africa", Leopold II of Belgium, Bismarck,
Livingstone, Henry Stanley, Speke, and Karl Peters. After all,

What proud poem
Can we write
For the vanquished? (p.86)

Although the song ends on an apparent note of triumph, it is clear
to his listeners that Ocol is merely passing through a phase in the
attempt of the tortured mind to escape the judgement it has brought on
itself. He is escaping, like Augustine's fish, into greater depths (the
new society) "where the pain and attraction he feels will somehow be
lost - to find in love of the creature and created thing [the new man
and the new society] compensation for his lack of internal happiness".
CHAPTER 4

It seems that by the time Okot p'Bitek came to write the last two songs, Prisoner and Malaya, he had decided on a new way to present the central conflict in Lawino and Ocol. In these, it was evident, authorial detachment notwithstanding, that the poet was caught, like Lawino and Ocol in the clash between the reality and meaning of individual experience and the demands of the collective ethic which has furnished the materials for the polemic in these two songs. In the latter songs, however, the poet alters the nature of the conflict by changing some of its terms, and moves towards a possible resolution by introducing a new kind of protagonist. The situation is no longer one in which there is clash between right and right, but one in which there is a feeling that one side could be wrong. Thus, when the prisoner or the malaya is presented to the audience, their sympathy is already engaged. But sympathy is not enough, as physical survival is not as important as it is in Lawino and Ocol. The individual has to earn a spiritual self, and it is to himself alone that this process is important.

In other words, the form of the Song of Prisoner and the Song of Malaya is a meaningful and significant extension of that of Lawino and Ocol. The poet is altering the terms of the individual's search for meaning to include the process in which the protagonist must seek to eliminate realities which are persuasive and meaningful in their own right but which also function, importantly, as causes in a progression toward that final, individual-based reality.

The idea of a final goal helps to shape the details of the form of these two poems. First, there is a definite move away from the dis-
cursive to the representative mode of presentation. That is, the aim of the rhetoric in the first two songs is to woo and convince an audience of the view or sentiment espoused by each protagonist in the quarrel between Lawino and Ocol. As a result, the individual, by choosing particular words and images, and by manipulating the reaction of the audience with carefully-calculated verbal tricks and posturings, worked out an elaborately strung-out argument. In the latter songs, however, argumentation and verbal battle give way to a mode of presentation motivated solely by the protagonist's desire to express himself. What he expresses is primarily important to himself, and if the world outside his consciousness exists at all, it does so only as it impels the individual to pour out his soul.

Consequently, and this is the second important feature of the latter songs, the audience is no longer an important element in the rhetoric. There are no issues at stake, and therefore the protagonists are neither defending a point of view nor are they seeking to ingratiate themselves with any listeners. An audience exists in a world of ready-made conventions, and to affect it, Lawino and Ocol easily relied on stock symbols and scenarios to dramatise their individual apprehension of life. Thus, when Lawino admonishes Ocol in the following manner

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you are the son of a Chief,
Leave foolish behaviour to little children,
It is not right that you should be laughed at in a song!
Songs about you should be songs of praise!27
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she puts their quarrel in a moral context and trusts that her listeners will not miss the ontological significance of her point of view. If there are listeners to the latter songs, they barely share the same world as the singers of the songs. It is significant that they are a
prisoner and a harlot - people who for one reason or another exist in a world of their own.

There is a further feature of the songs of the Prisoner and the Malaya. The character and personal integrity of the singer becomes less important in them than in the preceding songs. In Lawino and Ocol, the protagonists rely heavily for the effect of their utterance, on conventionalised values and the moral advantages which their personalities accrete. But the speakers in the Prisoner and the Malaya do not rely on such emotion- or value-laden props. Theirs is essentially a rhetoric of personal value; for, to them the world of human affairs abolishes itself by virtue of its capacity to generate evil, in the one case suffering and injustice, and in the other hypocrisy. Life thus becomes an attempt to establish a new ethical order important only to the individual, since the world outside this reality offers no hope of meaningful existence. The individual, rather than society, is his own prop, and his activity (song or dance) is the dramatization of the search for a new person-centred order. However, the two songs differ, as one would expect, in the manner in which both protagonists dramatize themselves.

The Song of Prisoner is essentially a rhetoric of feeling. That is, whatever happens in the poem is apprehended by way of the protagonist's rather than the listeners' feeling about it. Feeling does not in the context of the poem perform the usual rhetorical function of affecting listeners or spectators but is conceived simply as a means by which reality is organized. In other words, the speaker is saying, 'I find myself in a situation in which my senses are my only equipment for living'. And his burden in the poem is to investigate the meaning and implication of this.
The drama of the poem begins, quite provocatively, in the solid reality of the prisoner's cell. All the harsh conditions of imprisonment are there: physical pain and injury, frustration, and mental deprivation. We see, feel, and smell according to his shifting sensitivity. But, as has been suggested above, the prisoner's situation is not meant to elicit sympathy. What the author indicates quite early is the actuality - and significance - of existence through the senses only. The poem thus begins with the highly poignant image of the cell receiving the prisoner in its bosom in the manner of a love-lorn lover. The reality of this private, sensuous, albeit bitterly ironical, relationship is immediately counter-balanced by the legal, formal, emotionless, and accusatory voice,

Do you plead
Guilty
Or
Not guilty? 28

To which the prisoner replies,

I plead drunkenness
I am intoxicated
With anger... (p.12-13)

The drama of the poem is thus set: the wholeness of the prisoner's life has shrunk to a mere congerie of sensations. His is a finely-tuned agony, as he is meticulously and exquisitely aware of parts of his body yeilding one after the other, to pain. The stone floor of the prison room

Kisses
My bosom
My neck
My belly button
My back
My buttock (p.12)

The question above is set up as a discordant note, not only to provide a causal link with the prisoner's past in order to explain why he is in the present situation. It is, more importantly, the voice of 'reason', the
element of thought rather than sensation, which draws attention to the reality outside the prisoner's physical situation. Further, it demands that the prisoner use not the occasion of his agony to indulge in mere self-pity and sentimentality. The issue of guilt thus becomes the focus of dramatic tension as the prisoner pits the reality of his agony against the equally real brutality of his tormentors.

Also, the prisoner must grapple with this issue in order to establish for himself a rational basis for his song which is the meaning of his life. Hence, he contends (p. 13) that the issue of justice cannot be a matter of physical strength. If it were, he would not be in his present situation. Neither could it be understood in terms of historical chance, that is, that he is a mere victim of the "fierce wild fire/Of Uhuru". He contends, therefore, that all actions, all eventuality, can only be understood in terms of their origin - the individual being. There is the well-spring of all logical relationships, and he has not violated this rationally real aspect of justice:

I am not a witch,  
I was not caught  
Dancing stark naked  
Around your house.  
Did you find me  
In bed with your wife...? (p.15)

Crime and guilt are as real as the individual involved in them, and it is obvious by the barrage of questions he puts (p. 16) that the prisoner does not conceive whatever crime he is accused of as rationally real. Instead, he sees the inarticulate brutality against him (and indirectly his loved ones) as morally reprehensible, particularly so because its perpetrators seem to regard that kind of suffering as part of the human condition.
The dark silence
Urinates fire
Into my wounds,
The hollow laughs
Of my uniformed Brothers
Fan the fire (p.16)

Are they right? Is suffering the only thing we know in life? This is the problem posed by the section entitled "Wounded Crocodile", which is one of the most brilliantly executed pieces Okot p'Bitek has written. The prisoner is compelled to face suffering and injustice that seem to envelop the world: he sees his unsanitary prison room as only a version of a larger cavity filled with the smell that "Rises like cumulus clouds/
And clings on the bare walls" - the world, that is. This awareness in turn sharpens his senses to the echo of the barking of the Chief's dog:

How many pounds
Of meat
Does this dog eat
In a day?
How much milk? (p.22)

The sense of reality within space suggests the pervasiveness of suffering and injustice. This is reinforced in the prisoner's mind by the cumulative effect of the catalogue of images depicting hunger, disease, the deprivation that worsens because it originates from false hope, and above all, the cry of his children, the sobs of his wife which haunt him "like a vengeful ghost", the "fiery lips" of his sister's song raise in him a feeling of guilt towards them and uncertainty regarding the reality of the values he is in search of. The result is that one feels that a breach is already made in the protective wall of moral rectitude the prisoner was beginning to construct around himself. The question of whether or not he is guilty surfaces with more cogency.

The next section of the song takes up this problem, but from a different point of view. We saw how at the beginning of the song the pro-
agonist's moral indignation led him to present his situation in terms of punishers and sufferers. Here, however, he begins to suggest that any opposing elements are usually separated by an inner discord which dramatizes itself when the two come into conflict. When the "ten uniformed Stones" break into his "tiny hell" screaming for blood and battering him into submission, they articulate the values characteristic of the moral order of the world they inhabit. At this point the voice of the judge "Do you plead/Guilty...?" is directed away from the prisoner to his captors. And if a red wall stands between him and them (p.33), it also imposes itself between him and those of his clan who plan to redress the evils of force with force. For, one force is simply cancelled by a superior force. He pleads smallness, and admits he is

a mere
Pygmy
Before your
Uniformed Power (p.33)

because power and size have little to do with moral strength.

This admission of physical weakness is an important element in the conception of value in this poem. We notice that the poet is creating a new kind of man, different from Lawino and Ocol. Theirs is a world of the inflated, egotistical hero to whom the world is merely an adjunct. By making the world all too real (the prison is thus a symbol), the poet suggests a hero who must earn every bit of his being. He must start from the most humble stages to climb the arduous ladder of self-discovery:

I am an insect
Trapped between the toes
Of a bull elephant,
I am an earth worm
I gravel in the mud,
I am the wet dung
Of a chicken
On the floor! (p.34)
The result of 'smallness' being presented as a basic aspect of moral personality is that the ontological basis of reality is seriously challenged. The section that follows is thus the prisoner's mocking dramatization of a world order that is based on ontological relationships: thus, if his father had married the right woman from the right clan, he (the prisoner) would not have found himself in his present situation, and guilt and suffering would not have a place in his life. This world of clan and "uniformed stones" in which all reality is already determined, is also the world of the blind, non-perceiving ego that seeks to destroy anything which does not conform to its image. The prisoner not only sees himself as the victim of this blind, inarticulate, and fateful fury; he is also aware that if there is going to be justice in his case it will arise out of an entirely different structure of reality. It will have to be a world in which every man must create himself without having to rely on ontological virtualities.

However, it is important to make a distinction between the prisoner's action here and a similar one in the Song of Ocol. Although his frenzied threat to destroy the graves of his progenitors has echoes in the earlier song, it is conceived essentially as a metaphorical gesture, part of a sequence of thought. One has to go beyond the literal meaning of

I will make a big
Bon fire
And burn your bones
To ashes
(p.38)

to understand its real importance. In a poem concerned among other things with the consequence of blind, emotional action, any gesture that originates from thought and perception is positive and is associated with the new order of moral reality the prisoner is seeking. In this context, the progenitors are not presented in historical and psychological terms
as is the case in Ocol, but rather, they are symbolic of a mode of being that is part of the metaphysical problem the prisoner finds himself up against.

The quest for an alternative mode of being continues in "Sacred Rock". At the end of the preceding section, it is evident that the prisoner has managed to move away from feeling to perception. This is a conscious choice that is the product of a vigorous and articulate mind. And although the reality of the prison is taking a new meaning, thanks to his nimble mind, its physical dimension must continue to pose fresh problems. Thus if the preceding section was meant to emphasize the prisoner's slowly accumulated mental and moral strength, the present one stresses the opposite. For it meticulously presents all those aspects of his enemies' world he is morally in revolt against: as the intensity of his physical agony increases, in the same manner his resolution to transcend suffering with articulate and purposeful thought is reduced to mockery:

The sweating walls
Shoot needles
Into my back
And throw cold insults
At me. (p.39)

His problem is thus clear: should he accept his enemies' point that any struggle against evil in nature is futile? Earlier in the poem this same issue had been presented in the image of a vast smell that rises like a cloud to cover the world. Here the threat is so intensely depicted it is almost tangible.

The heavy smell
Of Death
Fills the room
Like darkness
The alcohol
Of the black silence
Intoxicates me (p.42)
What was conceived as merely characteristic of the human condition is here seen as part of inexorable fate. In other words, the prisoner is being asked to consider his situation as a reality as inevitable as death, and also that thought and acuteness of moral perception exist at the mercy of a greater force which distorts the vision of the mind.

To complicate his problems even further, the prisoner's acutely sensitive nature which launched him in search of new mores is here presented negatively: he is aware of his head only as a carpenter's nail board, his feet are "heavy like grinding stones", his penis "is an elephant's trunk" and his wife is

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the barusus palm
That has fallen
On a dung heap
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(p.42)

In terms of the drama of the poem, the entire section is subversive of the key aspects of his moral viewpoint. For his sensitivity and mental alertness, around which he hopes to build his world, are mockingly put in images suggestive of immobility and inertia. This tone of mockery informs the deliberate play, in the pattern of imagery, on the contrast between big and small, stasis and motion, suffering and comfort. Finally, his desire to associate himself with the softer, human emotions is also mocked. Although his wife's breasts "Heave/And whisper a welcome",

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she is cold
She sobs
Her body rocks
With grief and regrets.
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(p.43)

Wife, children, home, all pass through the prisoner's tortured mind as part of his enemies' world. The "big chief" violates his wife, having been conveyed to her by what appears to be a symbol of oppression and inequality - a "black Benz".
All this is meant to have a cumulative effect, and in terms of the drama of the poem, to shake the foundations of the prisoner's embryonic moral world. Not one aspect of his thought structure is left unassailed: his trust in his own ability to perceive where moral health lies, his belief that justice is not achieved through armed conflict but rather through a carefully expressed (or dramatized) inner quality of being, and his faith in the natural, human affection and solidarity as a denial of loneliness, imprisonment and disintegration. And yet, the prisoner must see his course of action quite clearly if he is to sustain the moral perspective of his song. Hence, when the question of guilt occurs again, he has no doubt whose world is the more evil, his or tormentors':

   Cut off this rope
   Free my hands and feet,
   I want to chase
   The thief,
   I will smell him out... (p.45)

The thief is of course the man who has taken advantage of his wife. The prisoner is indignant not just about this single moral transgression but against a world entirely covered by the "foul smell" of moral corruption of which that in his prison is merely symbolic. It is a world which eschews the vitality and clarity of the most integrated individual vision because it is by its own nature morally inept and muddled.

There are seven other 'wrongs' the prisoner mentions as having been perpetrated on him. Nevertheless, one feels that his tone in this passage and the rest of the section is that of one who is confidently moving toward a moral victory over the world outside his prison walls. In a tellingly climactic conclusion, he almost flamboyantly employs a rhetorical exaggeration that combines irony and sarcasm, mockery, and triumphant gesture.
I want to drink
Human blood
To cool my heart,
I want to eat
Human liver
To quench my boiling thirst,
I want to smear
Human fat on my belly
And on my forehead.  (p.46)

One must consider his gesture here as meaning more than the apparent
verbal and psychological exaggeration. It is indeed a highly metaphorical
expression of the prisoner's intense desire to identify himself with
humanity. However, for reason of emotional necessity and the demands of
his metaphysical quest in the poem, the prisoner must go beyond identifi-
cation (in the sense of losing oneself in the general body of mankind).
Like most great sufferers, he seeks to incorporate mankind into his own
world. This is an indication of the supreme confidence he has in himself
and his cause, and marks the first major structural division in the poem.

This division is marked in two ways: first, the prisoner has worked
out for himself a new mode of being, with the result that he is able to
transform adversity into triumph. That is, whereas his life within and
through sensations in the earlier sections of the poem is an indication
of his physical and mental imprisonment, the opposite is true in the rest
of the song. Sensation is no longer disadvantageous and negative. It
becomes a symbol of individual consciousness, an instrument for building
a healthy, positive mental life. All this is achieved through the
prisoner's sheer power of incorporation. The world has no meaning if it
is not an individual's world. The result of this new consciousness is
that the manner of presentation is radically altered. For, so far, the
prisoner has been involved in extricating himself from the myriad sensa-
tions imposed on him by his situation. But now he begins to employ the
same sensations to rhetorical advantage. Thus, secondly, the realities of the world outside his prison which were presented as the cause of his agony are no longer seen in the same light. They are now part of the expression of a higher reality, one that originates from the soul of the sufferer.

The structure of the next section ("This Stupid Bitch") is therefore typical of most of the others that follow. It begins with an imagistic presentation of sensation, is followed by a rhetorically worked-out substance of his 'quarrel' with the world of his adversaries, and ends with a conclusion which points inevitably toward the prisoner's goal of creating a new world out of the ruins of the old one symbolized by his prison.

A bird's song
Breaks through the high ceiling.
It is the ladybird
Collecting nectar
From the banana blossom
And flying back
To her nest

The chicks
Chip their thanks
In unison...

The prisoner is still alive to all physical sensations, but we notice that the harshness and sting, suggestive of their negative nature, have given way to a softer and more delicate apprehension of them. The bird and prisoner are two lonely beings in the same world. The sweetness of its song catches his mood, just as its preoccupation is as positive and creative as the meaning of his search.

That this transformation is crucial in the overall structure of the poem is borne out by the prisoner's new forthrightness. He now turns
around the question of whether or not he is guilty of crime as he becomes the judge of society. For, although he is "small", he is diseased with
All the giant
Diseases of society,
Crippled by the cancer
Of Uhuru
Far worse than
The yaws of
Colonialism. (p.50)

Instead of being self-fulfilling and creative, the world outside his prison is not only diseased within itself, it afflicts humanity with a burden that only begs to be repudiated. Whoever is afflicted, as the prisoner is, has no choice but to reject it and seek a new mode of existence; for, to live in a morally corrupt world is as life-denying as suicide:

The walls of hopelessness
Surround me completely.
There are no windows
To let in the air
Of hope! (p.50)

And one aspect of the general corruption he chooses to emphasize is the large jail house society has turned itself into. Indeed, the main reason why "uhuru" is not realized in its principle (freedom, that is,) is that society is constructed on the opposite principle of clanism (that is, exclusiveness and ethnic privilege). Thus the prisoner's denunciation of his mother for marrying his father and bearing him into the 'wrong' clan (that is, one excluded from power and privilege, and hence marked for suffering) is more than just a variant on his earlier condemnation of his father. For if clanism is the mediating principle in society, then society is a vast prison house that shuts in both those who belong to it and those who do not because they cannot, having not been born into it.
This being the case, not only is existence outside society a moral necessity (in which case the prisoner's cell becomes, ironically, an island of freedom), the quest for a new moral structure becomes inseparable from the search for freedom for the individual in society.

What the prisoner achieves is therefore very significant in view of what his song is about. The poem is no longer focussed on whether or not his action in society is immoral. The focus now is on him as the standard bearer of a new and just society. He is at once the moral yardstick against which all in society will be measured, the conscience of man in society, and the concerned observer who seems to hold the only true vision of the world around him.

A further indication of the prisoner's assurance which results from his newly-acquired vision is his technique of drawing upon his opinions and attitudes introduced early on, rather tentatively, and with diffidence. For example, the idea that 'smallness' is a virtue because it is a truthful expression of man's real nature (especially when put against the evils that result from an over-inflated ego), did not go beyond a mere suggestion. But here ("The voice of the Dove") its meaning and significance are captured exquisitely:

The tiny lagut bird
Carries a leaf of grass
To the olango thorn bush
To erect a hut
For her children
Who knock loudly
At the gate
And scream
To be let out... (p.57)

By portraying the lagut as it performs a natural, 'humane' function, the prisoner means to shed a positive light on a similar situation in his own
life. The stage is thus set for a new relationship between him and his family. Memories of them no longer induce guilty feelings in him. Rather, with the cry

Wife
Wife,
Are you asleep already? (p.58)

One feels that warmth and tenderness have supplanted guilt. As a result, he brings his family under his protection by, as it were, incorporating them within his own being. The prison thus becomes an ark in which all phenomena are united in the prisoner's consciousness. Outside it is the world of the exaggerated, morally destructive ego:

A python enters
Into a dead termite mound
And swallows the edible rat
And all its young.  

However, the prisoner, as is characteristic of his new-found manner, takes the issue beyond the mere feeling of identification to a positive assertion of belief in the utmost validity of his mission. His action (the murder, that is) should be received as "great news"; hence he launches into a direct address to his wife quite reminiscent of Donne's "Valediction Forbidding Mourning". Nothing expresses the rightness of his causes better than his full-throated exhortation that when she learns of the "great news" she should

Jump with joy
Take the battle axe
From under the bed
And dance the war dance, (p.58)

and the admonition,
When you hear
I have been arrested
Do not waste
Your kindly tears
Not a sob
Not a shriek. (p. 58)

The confidence with which he articulates the valediction is not based of course on his fleeting explanation that he will not be hanged because he will be defended by our "black nationalist judges". If anything, he is aware he is physically going to pay for his crime. For it has been his contention all along not only that any quarrel with the world on the physical level was already lost, but also that the world outside his prison is immoral and therefore holds no hope for man. Besides, in what seems to be a rhetorical exaggeration, he is already looking beyond his own death:

I have bought
A farm
In the fertile valley,
A thousand acres
Of heaven
For you and me
And our children (p.60)

The structural importance of the valediction is that it points to the prisoner's success in turning the main issue around by positively asserting his moral innocence. More importantly, the prisoner's address to his wife is a celebration of idealism. The wife who takes up a battle axe to dance to her husband's arrest either hates him, or is mad, or perceives a meaning that is far beyond the mundane implications of that event. In other words, the paen to idealism, raised to a high pitch is the prisoner's demonstration of his repudiation of the realities of the world of his tormentors, the big, the powerful, and the morally corrupt.
These realities are as negative and life-denying as his are positive and humane. It is a world in which

The sharks of Uhuru
Devour their own children
The heads
Of their blood brothers
Bash with the battle axes
Of their tails! (p.65-66)

Against it the prisoner's idealism is set in relief, hence the hammer-blow effect of his admission of crime (p. 66). His voice is firm, almost solemn, and there is a suggestion that he would do it again and again. By now we realize that the prisoner does not have to offer any explanations as to why he committed the crime, because he has carefully argued the point that the problem raised by his situation is a metaphysical one: one can choose either to exist in a world in which heredity and clanism are mere projections of a destructive self-oriented consciousness, a world which encloses rather than frees the individual, and which lacks a moral point of reference. Or, one may seek to be a moral man wishing to embrace humane values of love, tenderness, and warmth, and willing to endure the agony of self-knowledge and self-discovery. Only so can one acquire the moral courage necessary to create a new reality.

Creating a new reality involves, first of all, the possession of a deep sense of moral awareness, and it is this that has led the prisoner to the insight just described. The result of this searching awareness is that he earns the honour of being a moral centre, and thus is fully conscious of the meaning of his action. When he asserts that this action has not been criminal, he is not indulging in self-defense or being merely polemical. Rather, the prisoner is involved in another important act of
creativity - that is, definition, the issue being the defining of criminality. And thus, crime is, in the first place, entailed in any situation of injustice:

The crickets whistle  
In sorrow,  
Young toads leap  
In the air  
And yell for help,  
Mama frogs blow  
Cold air  
Into their burning throats  
And croak their children  
To bury their heads  
Into the cold mud... (p.66-67)

This means that if a person is prevented from fulfilling himself, a crime is committed against him. There is even more criminality if the hope of fulfilment is held out but is deliberately and callously withdrawn. The prisoner elevates the issue even higher: not to be aware of the serious moral implications of the relationship between hope and the fulfilment of it is an unpardonable crime. As a result, there is a similarity between the individual and the society, for both are organisms that need to be fulfilled physically and spiritually. If 'Uhuru' is essentially the structure of hope, then those who have turned it into a life-denying monster have violated a moral obligation, and have therefore become criminals.

A criminal is also one who is seen as collectively and ritually guilty. That is, he is identifiably the carrier of society's ills. Often society keeps itself morally pure by periodically indulging in some form of ritual cleansing act. The individual carrier is considered infected with all the real or potential diseases of society. Hence, the prisoner is merely performing the highest duty in not only identifying
the diseased criminal but ridding society of him. His victim is the symbol of everything wrong in society: he is a traitor, dictator, murderer, racist, tribalist, clannist, "brotherist", and so on, and is the epitome of evil, as the witch who dances "stark naked" in public. By a sudden turn in his argument, the prisoner moves the accusing finger from his victim to the "uniformed Brothers" whose representative he (the victim) is. Their criminality is worse because of their sheer lack of awareness. They do not "salute" him because they are unthinking tools of a blind, life-denying force.

Finally, a criminal is someone who is not master of his own destiny, in the important sense of not being the cause of freedom and fulfilment. The prisoner's victim is

A puppet dancing
To the songs of
Imperialist masters,
His stony cruelty
Covered the Land
Like the black darkness
Of the night,
Men choked in silence
Their chests breaking
With unspoken opinions
And unexpressed feelings (p.68-69)

Notice that the prisoner is not interested in the rather banal 'political' accusation in the first three lines. But by carefully attaching this description of the victim to the charge he has just made against the "uniformed Brothers", he succeeds in tracing the criminality of the two sides to one source - the lack of awareness of the moral purpose which should define any mode of existence. If to be is to be morally aware of the purpose of being, and to govern (the victim seems to be a politician) is to embrace the highest moral duty, then to exist, as a puppet, at a remove from the reality of being, is criminality at its worst.
Notice also that the more the drama of the poem unfolds, the more one feels that the necessities of the prisoner's personal quest, rather than the realities of the world around him, shape the nature and pattern of meaning. Now he is the one asking all the essential questions and providing the answers. The only world that exists now is the new one created by moral man:

Your husband was
An obstacle blocking
The path of our progress,
He had to be removed (p.72)

But can man, even the most consciously moral, exist alone? Is not a moral vision which recognises its own mode of being as the only valid one as egocentric and devoid of humanity as the one that is responsible for the prisoner's situation? This is the problem taken up from the ninth section of the song ("Jubilant throng").

A long convoy
Of black ants
Winds its way
Through the wilderness
Bearing their boots,
They return home
To feast...
The queen mother
Of the hillock
Weeps alone! (p.71)

The ambiguity of the prisoner's position is captured in this passage. He has succeeded in gathering ashore the scattered fragments of the ruined world outside his soul, thanks to his imprisonment. But he must cope with all the moral implications of his action. For, his quest has led him to a woman who is the victim of injustice resulting, ironically, from his own action. And if family love and solidarity are parts of the fragments he has rescued, he has a compelling moral duty to the family of his victim. The second major stage of the poem is thus set,
and the transition is so unobtrusively handled that it does point to the superb craftsmanship of the poet.

Having concentrated a great deal on discovering and expressing a personal moral code, the prisoner can only confront his present problem in terms of the newly-found principles. First, he recognises the value and necessity of human relationships. By handling the description of his victim's widow with magnificent control, he is able to elevate an ordinary case of murder to something that possesses the highest meaning and significance:

You young widow
In black,
How beautiful you are
With those beads of tears
Glittering on your cheeks,
How dignified
The bearing of your
Sorrow-ridden body!
Do not blame me
Sister
Do not be angry with me,
Do not hate me
You true Daughter
Of the Land.  

We detect the same tone of tender admonition with which he had sought to soothe his wife into accepting his idealistic interpretation of events. As in the former case, he offers his moral idealism in place of any other alternative:

I had to kill him,
And I did it kindly,
He did not suffer long,
He died instantly.  

Here, there are echoes of another famous idealist - Shakespeare's Brutus, who also sees himself as a cleanser of society. Just as Brutus' call to his fellow conspirators to carve the body of Ceasar as meat "fit for the gods" is the greatest tribute paid to the victim, in the
same spirit the prisoner hopes to place his action (and the widow's view of it) on a high level of reality. Moreover, we detect the same tendency in both idealists to employ demonstrative logic to support their contention. But it falls on the deaf ears both of the Roman crowd, and, as we expect, the victim's widow. The prisoner is thus forced to abandon, at least tentatively, his high moral idealism, precisely because it is too far removed from the world of real things.

The real world is the world of flesh and blood, of emotion and anguish, of cause and effect, and so on. So he resorts to the logic of nature:

   When you embraced
   Your man
   In your soft bed,
   Other wives wept alone. (p.73)

By presenting her with the image of the wheel of fortune, he is deliberately being severe, even callous, and he is aware that it is a morally unsatisfactory manner of coping with the problem announced at the beginning of the section. The result is that the ambiguity with which the section opened is still unresolved.

   My sister
   Do not be angry with me,
   Show gratitude to me,
   I have done a great thing
   I have liberated
   The People
   And have made you
   Famous! (p.74)

For him, and us who have made the journey with him, the validity of his idealism may remain still intact, but the widow fails to see the connection between her tragedy and her fame.
This is why the following section examines the problem in a rather crucial way. The way it is handled is very important because the drama in the prisoner's soul is intensified by a major shift in the level of meaning. Although he is still in prison physically, we are aware that his present agony is essentially self-originated. As was said earlier, his problem is the realization that moral man cannot exist in the glass case of his newly-found reality. That he needs human society in order to fulfil himself and become truly human is suggested by the urgency with which he desires physical freedom - a desire which hitherto had been less urgent than his search for a moral order. That the "steel gate" stands firmly before the personal reality he has created is suggested in the urgency and meaning of the questions:

- Where's your nationalism?
- Where is your patriotism?
- Where is your home
- For the Motherland? (p.75)

One is not surprised that his anguished plea does not influence his oppressors. For, as the world is now created in his own moral image, it is only logical that such motions as "nationalism", "patriotism" and "love for the Motherland" carry only the meaning he attaches to them. For example, the definition of "love for the Motherland" would include any act (murder not excluded) which serves a high moral and political purpose.

The most agonizing turnabout occurs when the raison d'être of the prisoner's world becomes the very root of his affliction. The tone of urgency in his plea

- I want to go home,
- I want to be with my children
- I want to talk to my wife (p.76)
underlies the intense desire of a man seeking through contact with human beings the very basis of his own being. Moreover, the desire to talk to his wife indicates a profound need to explain his cause, and this is made dramatically real because for the first time in his song he is faced with the possibility of actual punishment, of his own physical demise. Thus the prisoner considers that the only way to ensure his physical and spiritual survival is to break out of the prison of his own moral world. Hence he desires to do even the ordinary, mundane, but highly human, things:

I want to plough the land
And plant the millet,
The planting season
Will soon pass... (p.76)

It is as if by indulging in the activity of human beings (notice the special significance of the verbs "plough" and "plant" which precede "Will soon pass") he wishes to ensure his own survival. He wants "to go to church/And receive holy communion"; and wants to

go to the village
To perform
The cleansing ceremony,
To deaden the sharp spear
Of the vengeful ghost,
Let the elders gather
At the clan shrine,
Let them spear
A black billy goat
On the village pathway,
I will step on the blood
And smear it on my feet
As I enter the homestead

The women will wail
Their welcome,
..............
And the Elder
Will cut the killer mark
On my back! (p.77)
The point here is that the "killer mark" does not derive its meaning from the event that led to his imprisonment. Rather, it is thematically linked with nemesis - "the sharp spear/Of the vengeful ghost". It seems therefore that neither involvement in human activity nor ritual cleansing is enough to avert the pressing reality of his nemesis. For the world outside his prison still remains unaltered, that is, cruel and morally bankrupt. It has to understand him as a moral idealist or nothing else. Hence, the section ends with the prisoner still clinging to his idealism: the crowd he will join in the City Park will receive him with a "thunderous applause"; the people should see him as "the hero of Uhuru". He hopes that parliamentarians will "rise and honour" him and award him "the highest prize/In the land".

He maintains his idealism because the alternative is either too harrowing, as he makes quite clear throughout the poem, or at best devoid of any coherent structure of meaning. This is the argument of the next section of the song. The agony and mental effort that were involved in the creation of the prisoner as moral man is in sharp contrast to the arrogant confidence in his enemy's "I am a Minister/Do you not know me?"
The prisoner is here referring back to his past self in order to put the newly-created self in relief. He seems to have been a government Minister before his imprisonment, but he has now nurtured enough moral confidence to parody his old self. His had been a world in which a lot depended on the superficial, external trappings that surround the individual:

Do you not
Recognise my voice?
Have you not heard me
Addressing meetings
Or on the radio?
Have you not seen me
On television?
Have you not seen
My pictures in newspapers
And in books? (p.82)
Notice the contrast between this kind of 'popularity' and the prisoner's latter desire to establish some basis for a meaningful bond between himself and the world of human beings. As we have witnessed, the new self is the product of an internal growth, a growth which was conceived in terms of the transformation of physical sensations into elements of thought. If the prisoner as moral man has grown from within, the suggestion here is that the prisoner as a Minister is incapable of any such transformation. For, in order to grow from within, it is necessary that the individual places his situation in a moral context. Only by so doing will he be able to ask meaningful questions (for example, questions concerning the nature of crime and guilt), resulting in the kind of relevant answers that finally take the shape of some moral purpose.

Compared with the prisoner as moral man, the Minister is but "a paltry thing, /A tattered coat upon a stick" whose soul: cannot "clap its hands and sing". The strategy for coping with the situation is as hollow and ineffective as the prisoner's is positive and heroic. Whereas the prisoner turned his agony into a structure of purpose, the minister can only dwell on platitudes:

I am responsible
For Law and Order,
I am responsible
For Peace and Goodwill
In the Land
I am your minister
You are my officers,
I command you... (p.83)

If the prisoner painfully constructed a world of new moral values by confronting the inner reality of his soul, the minister is content to hang his hopes on all kinds of illusions: first, he will deceive his wife, who should be told that he is
on safari
And will not come home
Tonight.  

Second, he will look for support from his clansmen who are in the armed forces. Finally, in sharp contrast to the prisoner's view of the meaning of his action, he will deceive his children:

I will not tell them
I am here,
I do not want them
To know that I am
A prisoner.  

By splitting himself into two, as it were, the prisoner is able to dramatize the conflicting demands arising from his new-found world of moral values. He seems to be saying that if moral man needs human kind to survive, then he is tragically caught in a dilemma: he rejects the world because of its moral aridity, and even though this is heroic and humane, the suggestion so far is that there is no life even within the morally pure inner circle.

How he handles this dilemma is the theme of the last part of the song. It is important to recall that three things control the shape of the prisoner's thought - his involvement in politics, his relationship with his family, and the reality of the world outside his prison. From this section ("Youthful Air") to the end of the song he goes back to them, deliberately, and in turn, in order to resolve this crucial issue. He begins, characteristically, with an imagistic 'overture'.

Big chiefs are gathered
At the Embassy,
They click glasses
And exchange winks
With glittering wives
And false smiles
With husbands...
This is his apprehension of the world of politics, the immoral world of his tormentors which he is seeking to eradicate. There is an air of conspiratorial secrecy, and the implied moral decadence links up with the earlier description of the "big chief" whose dog eats better food than the prisoner's children, and who takes advantage of the prisoner's situation to seduce his wife. These are the guardians of "uhuru".

To the prisoner, however, political freedom is inseparable from personal freedom. This belief he wants to share with humanity:

Wake up
You pressmen of the world,
I want to speak to you.
For the candle
Of Uhuru
Has been blown out....
What is Uhuru
When all my thoughts
Are deep and silent drivers
Blocked up by concrete walls
Of fear and black suspicions? (p.90-91)

Freedom is thus a pristine, and natural, desire for self-expression. It is, further, a total extrication of the self from the inhibiting mundanities of the ordinary world, so that the individual may become larger than himself. Hence, the prisoner wants to wake up early before the morning birds begin to sing so that he can swim "in the naked air/Of the dying night"; to walk on "the soft grass/Of the olet grazing ground" and "share the sleepy air/With the cows and goats"; to sleep

With the sand
At the sea shore
And expose my belly
To the spears of the sun
And swallow the boiling air. (p.91)

This neo-Romantic sympathetic identification with nature is indeed the beginning of the solution of his dilemma. For here is a process of self-expansion that starts with the primitive and ends, later, with the highly principled. Already, it is evident what structure the resolution
will assume. Having vigorously asserted the validity of his moral outlook, the prisoner now sees the world external to himself as being immanent with the new moral order. This is accomplished by a deliberate sharing of himself with all human groups. He divides himself between his friends, "experienced prostitutes", the old women in his constituency, old men sucking at their common wine tube, the sexy French waitress, the Munyoro girl bringing "her sickly amarwa", South Africans (including their "apartheid wine"), the Chinese and Russians, and so on. He wants

\[
\text{to drink} \\
\text{And get drunk} \\
\text{I do not want to know} \\
\text{That I am powerless} \\
\text{And helpless} \\
\text{I do not want to remember anything} \quad (p.94)
\]

It should be emphasized, however, that intoxication through drink is employed here metaphorically. By losing consciousness, the prisoner means to withhold his more important self (that is, the one that is morally superior to, and separate from, society) in an attempt to attain a higher order of reality. This is reason in madness; for he says,

\[
\text{I want to forget} \\
\text{That I am a lightless star,} \\
\text{A proud Eagle} \\
\text{Shot down} \\
\text{By the arrow} \\
\text{Of Uhuru!} \quad (p.94)
\]

The implication is that his consciousness of the opposite would lead to an awareness of human society as evil and unjust. If he looked at his family's situation from his vantage point as moral man, he would of course see the physical poverty and mental deprivation that characterizes their life in society. He would consequently be forced to retreat more and more into the world of his own making. But it has been suggested that
to exist in a glass case of moral purity is impossible to someone who has raised man's ability to alter the moral structure of society to the level of belief. It is that belief that led him to commit murder in order to restore to man his freedom of action. And that freedom he takes up again in a process of 'personal expansion'.

The metaphor expressive of this expansion is the dance. Even though his children are poor and deprived, he will "clap" his hands and "sing" for them. He wants to watch his wife "shake her soft waist" before him; to "join the youths/At the 'get-stuck dance'" to "wrestle/With my wife-in-law" and "crush the young grass/Beyond the arena". His dance here is the dance of participation - in actions that are instinct with vigour and renewal of spirit. He will also be part of the ritual that asserts and perpetuates the bond between generations of human beings, between clansman, between young and old, and between age mates. There is no greater expression of the theme of solidarity than his climactic utterance:

I want to join
The funeral dancers,
I want to tread the earth
With a vengeance
And shake the bones
Of my father in his grave! (p.104)

But there is also the dance of reconciliation which further deepens the process of expansion. We saw that the dance of participation is informed by the principle of identification - a desire to exist on the basis of sympathy. In the present dance, the prisoner goes beyond sympathy to something higher. That is, he seeks to be the principle by which opposites in human affairs are reconciled. Thus, he wants
to hold hands 
With the Arabs 
And dance together 
With the Israelis,... (p. 105)

He will dance with "colonialists and communists", and engage in the dances of our friends and/The dances of our enemies". This is the most positive affirmation of the meaning of his situation as moral man; for, the opposites which give rise to social and moral disease are finally united in a third element - his idealist vision. Not only that, the prisoner seems to view the third element as a principle that permeates and activates all of life. Thus, he wants to dance the "white dances/ Of the west", "the sword dance/Of the Russians", the "beer songs/Of Germany", the "bamboo/Dance of the Chinese" and the "whaley rhythm" of the Eskimo song. The various dances are as different as the peoples who engage in them. But the prisoner stirs all of them to a performance, so that humanity seems to express itself at the behest of one man.

One expects that loss of self will be the culmination of this process of self-expansion. But before the prisoner embarks on the dance of ecstasy, he glances back at a non-idealist world:

Listen to the orphans 
Wailing in the Nigerian High-life tune, 
Listen to the bombs 
Bursting in the market place 
Scattering the neat heaps of yams 
And pieces of human bones (p.114)

It is still the same world of cruelty and chance in which there is neither love nor any underlying principle of unity, and in which there is no tendency toward that idealism that finally binds everything together. Thus the finality of his command:
Free my hands and feet
You uniformed stone,
Open the steel gate,
I want to shake my madness
Off my head. (p.117)

This is reminiscent of Yeats' firm appeal to the sages "standing in God's holy fire":

Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity

In both Yeats' poem and the Song of Prisoner, the central theme at its highest level of meaning is the journey of the soul out of the body, the loss of one self by the bearer of consciousness in order to gain another, morally and spiritually superior, self. In both cases, there is a deliberate rejection of those realities of the natural world which cloy the soul, thus preventing it from attaining a spiritually significant level of being. Whereas in Yeats the struggle of the soul for release into immortality is conceived lyrically, in Okot p'Bitek it is put in dramatic terms. The prisoner is a man engaged in a moral battle in the real world of political activity, and his response to the yearnings of his soul for moral purity begins with his commitment of murder. From then on, the burden of the soul becomes one of discovering a new way to be; for it is one thing to make moral declarations and construct a myth of idealism but quite another to place them in a recognisable and sharable world. His solution is to reject firmly the validity of a world without moral idealism, and then to envision a world permeated rather with the substance of his newly-discovered moral values. The last dance of ecstasy is thus an elaborate rhetorical celebration of his personal triumph.
CHAPTER 5

The Song of Malaya, unlike the earlier three, is unprovoked. In them, the feeling of moral outrage and indignation gives rise to the confrontation between Lawino and Ocol and the outbursts of the prisoner. In them also, there is a clearly defined event or occasion, a moral scenario within which the protagonist sings about the meaning of his or her life. In Lawino, the situation is Ocol's abandonment of the Acholi traditional ethic; in Ocol the protagonist's song is a response to Lawino's reaction to the initial situation; and in the Prisoner the song arises out of a single event - the protagonist's assassination of a prominent politician. But in the Song of Malaya there is neither a point of inception (in the sense of an activating circumstance) nor a recognisable scenario. The song is rather a gratuitous utterance made in the best tradition of the dramatic monologue. The protagonist is merely involved in herself, and self-consciously acts out a role which she has deliberately chosen. It does not matter what the role is. She might as well be a virgin, a witch, or the wicked stepmother. The important thing is the acting, for through it her attitude (in terms of histrionics) is elaborately displayed.

It is in this sense that Malaya is the most mimetic of the four songs. In it, the author makes the mimetic instinct (as opposed to the didactic) particularly prominent; for, what we are presented with is the dramatisation of an attitude, of the protagonist acting in a certain manner. However, this is not done in relation to some discernible 'situation', because there is none. The acting out of the role of a
harlot is rather an expression of self-consciousness. This manner of expression may be neurotic, but we should look at the harlot's histrionics as part of the individual's search for a mode of being in a world which by its very nature compels the individual always to engage in this kind of fundamental choice. The problem for the protagonists in the first two songs was how to choose the better way to be: 'traditional' or 'modern'. The choice was not so much between the two social constructs as between the manner individuals live in them. The final word in the third song was the affirmation of the personalized ethic the prisoner painfully worked out for himself. But what gives emotional power to the present song is the irony inherent in a situation in which the self is entangled with itself. Thus, what we have is an intertwining of self-knowledge with the added dimension of an attitude towards the fact of self-knowledge, an interweaving of irony and comedy.

The 'malaya' is a harlot, and a brazen one indeed. Her world, like that of the characters who dominate the earlier songs, is an ego-dominated one. Sometimes her acting is a self-conscious imitation of herself. At other times it is a genuine expression and projection of a self-made, illusion-ridden world. Herein lies the irony that permeates the song: there is a contrast between what she utters and what we (and the author) understand it to mean. Her self-display is usually ambiguous because she reveals more than she is aware of. Often, what eludes her is the ability to perceive the world in terms less circumspect than those with which she defines her existence; for it is the nature of words and the situations they evoke to enclose more meaning and implication in their orbit of reference than is apparent to any particular user of them. Thus
the deepest source of the irony in her song is the fundamental clash between the world as it is and the malaya's determination to construct it in her own image.

If irony is the primary intuition of the poem, then we must maintain a crucial distance between ourselves and the malaya, for we should be able to sustain throughout a clear image of the complex interweaving of all the characters of which she is a composite realization. The vigour with which the poem begins suggests a strategy that the malaya will employ again and again: she welcomes into her domain the young sailor "in search of dry land", the soldier leaving camp on holiday, the "reprieved murderer" and "prisoner and detainee/About to be released", the drunken Sikh" for whom the night club is a "battle ground", the "sweating engineer... heading for the City", the "shy school boy" and his teacher, and all the other representatives of the male species. This gesture is of course not unexpected from a person who sees the world as a vast brothel in which she is not only gate keeper but the moving instinct as well. The word "Karibu" is thus no mere polite salutation but a gesture suggestive of power and supreme self-confidence. All roads peopled by males lead to her, and, like the Wife of Bath, she genuinely believes that only when males are completely dependent on females is there going to be paradise on earth. And the men she presents are indeed outside her idea of paradisial bliss: the sexually-deprived sailor with the "time bomb pulsating" in his loin, the soldier who must have female company in order to sustain his human instincts, the prisoner or detainee whose sexual desires are as vital as his desire for freedom, the Sikh whose infidelity provides him with the only opportunity to assert his individuality and personal freedom from the constricting moral codes of his
society, and the

Thick-skinned hairy white miner
At Kilembe, at Kitwe

whose periodic drive to the city (that is, to the malaya) is almost a pilgrimage of identification with humanity.

But there is more to the manner in which the malaya begins her song. By stressing her individuality and self-confidence at this early stage, she underlines what is the essence of this mode of expression. As the world is a person-oriented one, not only are all ethical codes personal but to live is essentially to play the many roles a person may choose. Thus, in the first part of her song the malaya is deliberately choosing to play the part of the condemned-turned-saint. She is very much aware of her situation as a harlot and free spirit in a traditional and orthodox society, and by unashamedly converting this reputation into a role, she attempts to brow-beat and intimidate her audience into a favourable consideration of her character. Against their apparent bias against her, she thrusts the image of herself which she creates through role playing. Thus, instead of the moral turpitude that is associated with her position in society, she wants to be seen in exactly opposite terms, as the symbol of moral order. She sees herself as the very hub around which society turns. The key element in her present strategy is the word "karibu", and around it are fitted the characters in the first scenario of the poem - the young sailor, the soldier leaving camp for holiday, the "reprieved murderer", the prisoner, the Sikh, the white miner, the "school boy lover", and the rest of the male species she enumerates.

These people are presented as dependent on, in fact appended to, her. They are realized one-dimensionally and are therefore no more than lifeless
puppets manipulated by her. Most importantly, they are burdened by the sheer weight of their weakness of character: the sailor who must look for pleasure at his ship's port of call; the soldier, the sikh, and the "sweating engineer" who behave like beasts released from the pen; the pubescent youth fatefully on his way to adulthood; the factory worker and the politician whose occupations seem to be an unhappy distraction from the essence of life, which is as lived by the malaya. When we put the vigorous and self-assured image of the malaya against that of the half-realized, dim visitors to her "cave", what emerges is a curious form of syllogism: the malaya is recognisably and undeniably a human being (albeit an imperfect one). Her visitors are hardly human (driven as they are by one simple passion). Therefore the malaya is morally superior to them. In other words, she is the one who deserves the sympathy of her audience.

There is, however, a further conclusion which she hopes her listeners will draw from these contrasting images: that is, that character is all. The manner in which one chooses to conduct one's life, as opposed to any ideas about it, is the very essence of being. The manner of living is intricately linked with the role chosen by the individual, and as the role becomes more important than the individual player, any ethical significance he possesses as a person in society is totally irrelevant as a term with which he may be judged. Thus, ideas of right and wrong give way to judgments regarding strength of character, personal exuberance, and poise. How the individual lives is all that matters. In this connection one notices the particular significance of the way in which characters against whom the malaya is pitted are described: the sailor is "ship wrecked", and must look for dry land in her bosom. The dry humour in
I hear your heat drumming
Tum-tum-tu-tu-tum  (p.127)
gives way immediately to the mocking, almost patronizing tone of

That time bomb
Pulsating in your loin
Surely weighs you down! (p.127-128)

The prisoner and the detainee, despite the genuineness of their sexual desires, still make awkward figures with their "granaries full/To overflow...". The Sikhs are unruly, and the Indian vegetarian is rebuked because his wife is "breeding/Like a rat". What is wrong with these and other men described in this section is that they lack, above everything else, dignity and poise. Even the "school boy lover" who precipitates himself into adulthood by visiting the malaya is reminded of his dimunitive status as a adolescent with, "I charge you/No fee..."

The malaya's listeners are supposed to see these men as they are caught in a moment of time. She presents them, through a variation of the abuse, as people who are awkward and lacking in poise and dignity because they are physically handicapped. To someone who contends that life is a display of the unsullied self, they make perfect comic figures and are therefore incapable of playing the full-blooded role that defines the true nature and character of the player.

However, some in her audience will realise that character is not all; for the individual is inevitably part of the ethical construct which is human society - a fact the malaya is trying so hard to deny. She is a harlot, a symbol of disorder and misrule; and although one may sympathize with the sheer strength of her will and her enthusiasm for life (as one may do with a Falstaff or a Wife of Bath), one does find her discounting of the moral element in life to be the force that threatens her house of
cards. Human society attempts always to be clear-eyed enough to maintain the division between the person and the role he may choose to play in order to protect the ethical structure against its potential violators. But by ignoring the gap between the role and its player, the malaya is basically attempting to set up different terms for societal order - one which centres on the individual. In this sense, her song is reminiscent of Ocol's and the prisoner's. They are all as egotistical in their view of themselves as they are about existence outside the magic circle of traditional ethic.

The profound irony in the songs of Ocol and the malaya is that the protagonists succeed in breaking out of one circle only to find themselves in another. For the suffocating hold of tradition they substitute narcissistic egocentricism. This is suggested quite early in the malaya's song. First, she deliberately placed herself at the centre of the 'action' in the poem. All road leadsto her, she tells us. Second, and this we deduce from her actions and words, her personal triumph leads her into revealing the dark side of herself and her profession:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Sister Harlots} \\
\text{Wherever you are,} \\
\text{Wake up} \\
\text{Wash up} \\
\text{Brighten up,} \\
\text{Go gay and clean,} \\
\text{Lay} \\
\text{Your tables} \\
\text{Bring in fresh flowers...} \quad (p.132-133)
\end{align*}
\]

The echo is that of a witches' assembly, a scenario highly suggestive, especially when seen against the background of the place of witches in traditional societies. In these societies, witches are seen as setting
up an ethical order that is outside that of established human society. As Davidson points out, "the witch within the ancestrally sanctioned charter stands for the subversive norms, the impulse to disorder: in short, for the antimoral which supposes the moral". Whether one is talking of the gnostic-Manichaean sects of sixteenth-century Europe or traditional African societies the situation is the same: that is, "the ideological ground of witchcraft and sorcery... is indeed the battlefield on which the Principle of Good meets the Principle of Evil... where God confronts the Devil". Also, the phenomenon of witchcraft and the fear of it is particularly associated, in the African historical context, with the disintegration of traditional structures and systems since the 1880's: in the passing of Africa's age of faith, and consequently in a growth of personal anxiety and alienation.

The irony in the malaya's invitation to her "sister harlots" to emerge and subvert the moral order of society is that she is totally unaware of the ambivalence of her utterance. All she seems to be aware of is that near-sighted, single situation in which the self rides triumphant on the wave of human affairs by means of its prepossessing will. But we know that anyone totally controlled by his will may be merely engaged in self-delusion. The all-powerful ego may fail to apprehend life's ambiguities, as it confuses the perceiver with the thing perceived. As a result of this closed vision, the malaya can only see the world in types and cliches, any attempt at making distinctions implying the acknowledgement of the primacy of a self other than hers. This discrepancy of awareness, between what she thinks and says and what we understand them to mean, controls the shape of meaning
in the rest of the song.

The second section is therefore particularly important: it consolidates the irony suggested in the opening section. Here the malaya is attempting the role of the indignant person who has the moral right to fight back. The basis of the irony is again the differing levels of awareness, ours and hers. Having established for herself that character, indeed the will, is the foundation of anything moral, she begins to claim the absolute right to be the arbiter in all ethical matters:

Big Chief,
Why do you look at me
As if I were a bunch
Of hornets?
Why do you hiss
Like a frightened cobra
And bark at me (p.135)

The vigour with which she asserts her moral superiority here is part of an attempt to move her position from the defensive (in the preceding section) to an attacking one. And she hopes the issue will be a moral confrontation between two equally-balanced forces, she and her sister whores on one side and the "Big Chief" and society on the other. But such a confrontation is impossible, as is demonstrated by the manner in which her utterances and verbal manoeuvres tend to work against her adopted role. Thus, her outcry against the Big Chief does not reflect her moral indignation so much as her attempt to ridicule and denigrate anything that does not support her ego.

It is clear why she resorts to comedy. In one breath the Big Chief is subjected to comic abuse by being associated with three animals. That is, we are asked to laugh at his snake-like and dog-like behaviour besides taking in the fact of his being a general nuisance - like a
"bunch of hornets". The malaya is thus struggling to shift our attention from the seriousness of the moral issues her song raises to the contemplation of what she would regard as the comic guises of a self-deluding society. Her strategy is thus to unmask and subject her enemies to public abuse and ridicule. This is why she employs all the comic devices she can muster, ranging from direct confrontation,

\begin{verbatim}
Why, Baba
Was it not you
Three nights ago?
Or was it four nights ago? (p.136)
\end{verbatim}

through mockery

\begin{verbatim}
But you were drunk,
You could not finish...
You feigned sleep,
Snoring like a pregnant hippo...

Your silly baby tortoise
Withdrew its shrunken skinny neck...
Leaving me on fire
The whole night long! (p.136)
\end{verbatim}

and the taunt

\begin{verbatim}
And why don't you
Get circumcised
You Kaffir

Do you not know
That your leather bag
Carries the insects? (p.141)
\end{verbatim}

to the abuse.

What is common to these devices is their representational nature. As we saw in the first section of the song, the malaya constantly attempts to put before her audience a picture of her enemies caught in physically uncomplimentary situations. To her, physical and moral defects are sides of the same coin. For example, the question
Do you not remember
Bursting into my house
Forcing me down
And tearing my knickers...
As if I were unwilling...? (p.136)

implies that any man who cannot woo a woman in a more delicate and less awkward manner does not have the moral authority to rebuke a harlot. Her aim is not to point a finger at a fellow sinner. If the issue at stake were morality, her song would be meaningless, since she herself recognises the enormity of her moral transgressions. But something else is more important to her - the expression of the self - whatever that self is.

However, the comic devices fall flat, especially when perceived from the audience's superior stance; for the more she resorts to the representational technique the further she moves away from the verbal aspects of the situation. By 'verbal' is meant those aspects that tend to mediate importantly between her and her listeners. For example, when she asks the Big Chief

How do you know
It was I
Who gave IT to you, anyway? (p.137)

her aim is to denigrate by jeering aloud. Everybody must know that he has venereal disease, that he is physically defective, and should therefore be an object of ridicule. However, she ignores, very importantly, the verbal imperative which requires that she elaborate on the situation, through further discussion, to include its important moral dimension. If the disease, its carriers and victims are all part of the moral corruption of modern society, it does not matter who is the carrier or the victim because both are caught in a situation which is physically and morally undesirable - a position the malaya finds untenable and fights
by all means (including self-perpetuating illusions) at her disposal.

Only at one point in this part of her song does she approach the serious moral issue of the link between an action and its consequences. She raises the question:

Tell me you Men
Who split open
The obok tree
And scoop out the honey
With your bare hands,
Fearing not the bees...

Do you take
Some of the honey
To your wives?
Do they also
Enjoy the sweet fruits
Of your adventures? (p.137)

But the sharpness of the intended meaning is dulled by the opposition between image and idea within the controlling metaphor. One feels that the malaya is satirizing the activities of these men who have neglected their family and the ancestral homestead - an extreme moral infraction, judging from the earlier songs. However, the seriousness of the charge against them seems to be lost in the consideration, for a moment, of the sweet pleasantries of their escapades. In fact, the malaya seems to be more intent on extracting praise for those like her who provide the "sweet fruits" of those happy occasions. The latter are the only ones she is concerned with, others being mere comic figures.

What we are beginning to witness, them, is the pathos that goes with self-delusion. The malaya who started her song with a light-hearted mockery of the world around her was self-conscious enough (in the first part of the song, at least) to recognise the difference between the role and its player, although she struggled hard to convince her listeners
otherwise. At the end of the second section it is evident that her light-heartedness has acquired serious overtones for her listeners, if not for her. In playing her role either as the condemned-turned-saint or as the offended who has the right to fight back, she succeeds in constructing a self who is a complex of her illusions. She is thus like Ocol whose feeble attempt to flirt with modernity is seen by his wife as mere self-delusion. We recall her famous cry that Ocol has "lost his head/In the forest of books". Nevertheless Lawino acknowledges modernity as a necessary, though evil, force of history to be contended with. But in the present song, the malaya represents unmitigated egotism, which acquires quite unhappy overtones as the drama of the self continues.

The pathos in the song arises out of the fact that as the protagonist slowly absorbs everything around her to herself, she inevitably reaches a point where she becomes morally repulsive to her observers. This is what is dramatised in the third section. In it, she wants to be perceived no longer as the hub around which mechanical men revolve but the very edifice on which society stands. She would not have put herself in this position if she were not convinced of her own moral supremacy. Her opening question aptly captures this almost Faustian arrogance.

Addressing the married woman, she asks

When will you learn
To be grateful
To me?   (p.147)

The malaya is definitely increasing the intensity of her offensive thrust and is insisting on being seen as the moral centre of society. For the first time in her song, she attempts to be discursive: thus, the reason why she clings to an image of supremacy is that she gives men solace and physical entertainment. Notice that such serious issues as adultery
and the disintegration of the family (which have a special significance in the general conception of reality throughout these songs) are never in question for her. Physical reality, character, nerve - these are her term of reference:

Is it not I  
Who nurse and soothe him  
Like my own baby?  

Does he not return to you  
Clean shaven, smiling  
Like a boy of fifteen...? (p.148)

Characteristically, what she leaves unsaid, or what she utters unaware of its full implications is the ammunition against her own subsersive ethic. As she thinks of her triumph in providing comfort for the married man, we think of how she is motivated by her hunger for power and dominance, hence the significance of the image of her as mother to affection - starved husbands. Everybody must be made to cower before her.

This reductionist strategy is part of the ego's desire to engulf everything in its way. Again, the malaya's method is to represent other human characters in very unflattering situations. Between the triumphant "ho-ho-ho-ho" and the derisive "ha-ya-ya-yaah!" she sandwiches a description of the married woman:

Your eyes are black  
With jealousy,  
The reins of your neck  
Are bursting with boiling blood.

Biting her lips,  
Who is that brute  
Her fists clenched,  
Tears streaming down her cheeks?  
She is stamping the table  
Like a mad thing... (p.148-149)
Her apparent aim is to squeeze comedy out of a situation in which an adult is reduced to childish behaviour. But more importantly, by harping on the theme of childhood, the malaya hopes to reduce her enemy into a tabula-rasa on which the letters of her own subversive, asocial ethic will be written. When she asks the married woman

What did your mother
Teach you?
To welcome your man
With lips locked by anger? (p.149)

she expects she has reduced the latter to the point she is ready to accept anything. Further,

Did your father teach you
To hate your husband's
Outside wives?
To hate his children
By his part-time wives?

You have two little daughters,
Have three sons...
Our husband is father
To, at least, five kids... (p.150)

is an attempt to convince a child that a fact and its opposite are exactly the same thing, that order is disorder, and that moral values are simply products of the individual's whims.

It is clear that by the time the malaya launches into a paean in celebration of her victory over the married woman she has become so self-absorbed that she abandons her token attempt at mediating between herself and her listeners. She is so conscious of victory that she becomes oblivious of the fact that they possess a different level of awareness in relation to her song. And one notices that it is at this point when she is most truly herself that she loses any sympathy one may have for her. Indeed, her personal vision of a new moral order is a callous attempt
to enthrone disorder, not because of its ethical superiority but merely because the very idea enhances the sense of her personal power. She is almost delirious with power as she puts forward her idea of manhood:

A busy woman
Cannot tell the archer
That has scared the bull's eye,
But is it difficult
To convince another bull
That the seed in the goerd
Is his?

What better proof
Of manhood? (p.151)

The problem in this context is not that she is an 'immoral woman' in the eyes of her audience. That was the term of reference from the beginning. The general issue in this and the other songs has to do with what the protagonist does with himself in an ethical area of reference which he shares with the audience. In these songs the audience is, as we would expect, a conversative element, the upholder of traditional values, and the symbol of order. As guardian against moral disruption, it expects to be challenged occasionally, of course, but what it cannot brook is the irreverent challenger. The latter is someone who seeks a status beyond and above the collective body of society. He is particularly dangerous because he seeks to sweep away the entire foundation of society in order to erect his. The malaya is such a challenger. In one breath she attacks three edifices on which society is built: the status of man, the ontological meaning that is part of the father-child relationship, and the centrality of the family in the stable order of traditional culture. She boasts that she is too busy to distinguish between her men visitors. Neither is it necessary for children to be part of some kinship lineage. Finally, in the most callous use of
inversion, she upholds a man's right to infidelity:

Do you think
There is something wrong
With your husband
That he need
Have only one woman
For the rest of his life? (p.151)

The malaya may put forward her outrageous morality as part of her
show of power, but what she is unaware of is that she is part of a
wasteland spurned by the same individualist ethic of which she seems to
be a bizarre representative. The modern wasteland is the world which
she describes as "drowning in flames". Its representatives are thor­
oughly mundane: the mechanic "handling metals/All day", the farmer
"carting vegetables/For tomorrow's market day", and

The middle-age Chieftain
His shrunken feet
Of his boyhood days...
Too small for the sandals. (p.153)

Neither are its heroes young men who are fired by high moral motives
into a search for such ideals as will sustain and invigorate their
societies. The heroes of the society of which the malaya is matron are,
instead, young men who deviate from the purpose of their quest:

Black students
Arriving in Rome,
In London, in New York...
Arrows ready, bows drawn
For the first white kill... (p.153)

Just as the housewife was brow-beaten into accepting the opposite of
what she has always recognised as the ethical ideals that hold society
together, so are the new heroes made victims of deceit and the moral
outlook of a world turned upside down. "Come now", the malaya invites
others of her kind, "Bear these wretches/Into your heaven!" This heaven
is her celebrated cave of deceit

The open simple smile
For the egg-headed scholars,
The hot devil smile
For the priests and their kind,
The cool confident smile
For the faint-hearted and the unsure...(p.135)

Naturally, the malaya does not share the pity we feel at the sense of moral turpitude that prevails in the world of which she is undisputed ruler. She is in fact impelled by the opposite emotion; for the decay in the wasteland means her triumph, and no part of her song captures this better than the passage just referred to. As the culmination of her egotistical tendency to draw the world into herself, the passage prepares us for the tactic employed in the rest of the song. For, from the fourth section she embarks on an elaborate confidence game, the nature of which is that she creates a senario and invites her audience to watch her exhibit her supreme self-confidence. Part of the structure of the scenario is the isolation, followed by the destruction, of an enemy. The first enemy is the bishop, and the scenario she organizes is essentially a trial in which herself, her enemy and the listeners are judge, accused, and jury, respectively. The bishop is accused of several 'crimes': firstly, he is the illegitimate son of a polygamous father. He therefore has no right to make moral pronouncements. Secondly, he is guilty of suppressing certain basic natural instincts. Finally, he has committed the unpardonable sin of being on the side of those who would impose restrictions on the human will. The malaya's verdict is unequivocal: guilty. A formidable enemy is disgraced and destroyed.

Her assumption is of course that her listeners are on her side, because she has tried courting them by using a 'popular' method. We
notice that in accusing the bishop of various crimes, her real aim was to ingratiate herself with her listeners. Thus the entire scenario had been also a game which she expected to win in order to further augment her sense of herself; hence the details of the accusations are crucial.

What is common to all of them is a 'popular' element in the manner they are presented. Indeed, they are all clichés: the Christians in the audience are expected to react favourably to the first charge against the bishop. Since he is illegitimate, he has sinned, and therefore should not cast the first stone at another sinner. (One is not surprised that she compares herself with Mary Magdalene later in this section of her song). In comparing the man of emotion and desire with the bee and the moth that visit more than one flower, she exploits the metaphoric value of images which are so common to our perception that they are assumed to be normal and natural. True enough, she drags in the popular moral dilemma of the young hero who commits a crime in order to alleviate the problems of an old woman. Finally, there is the popular desire in every man's heart to see his daughter married and bear children rather than be locked away in spinsterhood or the nunnery.

However, the perceptive ones in her audience will realize that her resort to an easy, popular strategy is only a subterfuge. Having singled out the bishop as her most formidable enemy, she is expected to meet him on some term that could mediate between both of them. Instead, the necessary moral confrontation turns out to be a popularity contest. 'Here we are', she seems to be saying, 'two sinners. But you know I am better because I am more flamboyant, and I have will'. But the real issue here is moral order in society. What the malaya is desperately attempting
to smother in her game of confidence is the fact that there is a limit to the expanse of the human will, otherwise human society will degenerate into a Hobbesian state of nature. Indeed, there is an oblique suggestion of this in the animal imagery the malaya employs. She is aware only of her aim of using these images, through the metaphors which enclôse them, to convey some thoughts. She fails, however, because the listeners realize that the very life of the metaphors depends more on the rapport between the images and their user than on the thought-value they may have for the audience. In other words, the cheap, easy moral answers the malaya expects from the audience are subsumed under the more important point, which is that they realize she is unwittingly but seriously suggesting that the instinct which characterises the behaviour of moths and bees is no different from that which motivates human life.

The malaya is unaware that she is the symbol of what is most primitive and elemental in man. Admittedly, the primitive is intricately woven in with whatever else that defines man; and unless one sees the pattern inside man as inevitably involved with the order of society outside, one runs the risk of getting entangled in the bizarre irony in which predatory beasts assemble for dinner and intrigue in the "Hilton suites" of organized human society. There is something sadly comic about the malaya, whose outlook is purely controlled (as with beasts) by instinct and emotion, summoning all her "Sister Prostitutes/In the Hilton Suites" and the "Acholi Inn" to rise and toast to their domination of the world. They also drink
To Eve
With her golden apples,
And to the Egyptian girl
Who stole Abraham
From Sarah's bed... (p.166)

and

to the
Daughters of Sodom,
And the daughters of Gomorrah:
Who set the towns ablaze
With their flaming kisses... (p.166)

The significance of these biblical references is quite clear, to us her discriminating listeners, and we cannot take comfort in this egotistical celebration of the passion that has had tragic consequences for mankind. We must assume that the malaya knows what she is doing here. That is, her exaltation of man in his fallen state is part of her act of irreverence which is, in turn, part of the confidence game she continues in the fifth section of the song. Like the preceding one, this section is a played-out celebration of her personal triumph. The approach is representational: the malaya holds her illegitimate baby high and prominent in front of her listeners as a symbol of the outlaw's contempt and indifference to established human society. But she has to pretend that she means to project the image of a tender and loving mother. Thus, the infant is her "sweet baby", whom she loves in spite of his being illegitimate. And this dramatization of the relationship between mother and child, which she hopes will have 'a priori' value for her audience, is further supplemented by her argument that "the greatest man/That ever lived" was really a woman's illegitimate son.

What detracts from her case, however, is that, as in the previous sections, the malaya is unable to mediate between herself and her listeners.
Again, her failure results from the discrepancy between image and idea, vis-a-vis the role she plays for her listeners. The image of a fourteen-year-old mother is morally repulsive enough for the sort of people who constitute her audience, and matters are not helped when she attempts to justify herself with a comparison to Christ. For the audience, the issue is chastity, or some form in which human passion and will become incorporated into ethical society. To them, therefore, the malaya's gestures constitute an open war against society, for it is part of the irony in her song that she tends to communicate the opposite of what she aims at. The image of supposed tenderness between mother and child turns out to be the beginning of the defiant gesture with which her song ends. For in the sixth section, her declared enemy is her brother whose accusatory eyes are also those of society.

You no longer speak with me,
And when our eyes meet
They are quickly averted,
It may be with hate
Or may be
With shame? (p.175)

His charges are specific and serious: she has "brought disgrace/On the family" and will "contaminate" his children, besides teaching his wife "bad ways". Family, wife, children - these are the symbols with which society orders and perpetuates itself.

However, the malaya does not answer these charges; rather she resorts to her characteristic trick of turning a debate on morality into a clash of personalities. As in the quarrel between her and the bishop, her strategy is to attempt to dramatize the humiliation of her brother. We are led to the room where he is caught with a mistress in his arms:
The soft drumming on the
Dancing mattress,
The bedstead gritting
Her teeth,
The duet... (p.177)

The purpose is to present us with two sinners, both condemnable and
neither having the moral authority to judge the other. The value of
such a presentation does not, however, lie in the balancing act of an
advocate but in the importance which the audience attaches to the issue
they see as crucial. And in this context, they are thinking of a vio­
lated institution of society - the family. More to the point, the family
is not only the way society ensures its continuity, it is also its chief
weapon against instability and chaos which the malaya and her "sister
prostitutes", have come to symbolize in this poem.

Her brother, the bishop, and the sergeant may all be sinners; but
what eludes the malaya always is some sense of a moral 'still point'
beyond and above herself. In her last defiant gesture she declares,

But who can command
The sun
Not to rise in the morning?

Or having risen
Can hold it
At noon
And stop it
From going down
In the west? (p.184)

No one indeed can, except someone whose absolute faith in the ability of
man to transcend himself to the point where he becomes the symbol of some
general good. At that point the sun can indeed be stopped in its course
so that an army on a morally just cause may triumph over its immoral
foes. In other words, the malaya's song ends where it began. It is a
record of the body's inability to rise above itself.
CONCLUSION

There are still a few extant questions even after one has attempted to offer a principled reading of the poems. The first of these concerns the nature of the song, and its function as an art form which mediates between the poet and a society with which he shares some cultural norms. Two major works on African oral literature recognise not only the great variety of the song form but also its dominant position among African modes of artistic expression. More particularly, George Heron points to the existence within the poetry of Okot p'Bitek, of such Acholi song forms as Otole and Bwala which feature during "ceremonial occasions celebrating glorious events in the history of a chiefdom"; the satirical, employed during the orak dance; the jok or "spirit-possession" song; the funeral song; and the game song. However, these song types must be seen no more than modes expressive of Acholi cultural proclivities. In the songs of Okot p'Bitek they become aspects of an entirely new conception of what the song is and its power as a means of artistic expression.

The new form of the song in Lawino, Ocol, Prisoner and Malaya attempts to shift expression and significance from culture to the individual. The poet goes beyond the formulaic nature of traditional Acholi song to create something which is truly his own. Herein lies the true nature of the four songs: they are poetry which has been created out of the less-than-dynamic forms of the traditional song. Defined in this way, they are evidence of an approach to sensibility which the poet seeks not only for himself but for the bearers of consciousness in the poems.
The individuals who control the mode of expression in the new song are thus the product of the poet's self-consciousness, just as their expressiveness in turn reflects their self-awareness. What is implied in the poet's making sensibility the central issue in his approach to form, is that the creative process always involves a movement away from the constricting demands of tradition.

Okot p'Bitek form of the song is of necessity the utterance of the individual who must express himself in order to come to grips with himself. The same circumstance involving the loss, or threatened loss, of self-autonomy motivates the utterance in each of the songs. This makes the utterance not only an important outlet for a highly charged consciousness but a crucial act which the individual must undertake in order to ensure his survival. It is in this sense that what is expressed is not as important as the fact of its expression. The individual's world thus becomes one of words and the attempt to construct meaning with words. But again, whatever is discovered in this attempt as important or meaningful is significant only to the bearer of consciousness. All through the poems, and as one goes from one dramatic situation to another, one seems to hear a single voice crying 'I am. I am.'.

Thus, the world of the self which seems as varied as the guises through which individuals express it is indeed one world in which we find Lawino, Ocol, the Prisoner, and the Malaya. The Song of Lawino, although it may seem to be an utterance in praise of tradition and the conservative outlook, is really as subversive of traditional order as the Song of Ocol. For, Lawino is almost obsessed with the sense of her physical beauty and psychic autonomy. The poem is about her - her feelings, gestures, visions, and triumphs. No doubt she is at home in traditional culture, but her view of it takes second place to her
conception of herself. She wishes to see herself as the ideal self. Ocol, on the other hand, is ill at ease with inherited cultural norms because they are by definition anti-historical. As a materialist, he is interested only in the individual who is the product of history. The past is important only in so far as it generates an individual, real and conducting his affairs in the historical present. Considered any other way, the past becomes a mere figment of the individual's imagination. Thus self-delusion is as serious a sin as the one Lawino identifies in her song - the absence of a strong sense of self. But in the Song of Prisoner the hope that an ideal self is contingent on historical forces is sharply rejected. The Prisoner's opinion is that the only true self is one which emerges from the clash between what the individual wants for himself and the realisation that he cannot have it in its ideal state. The individual can have anything he wants, argues the malaya, as long as he is strong enough to hold on to what he considers his own. Indeed, society which insists on passing judgment on the individual is least in the position to do so since it is itself as grasping and egocentric as its victim.

What Okot p'Bitek achieves through the song form is the presentation of his acute awareness of the ineluctable tension that is part of the reality in modern African cultures. That tension arises out of the contradictory demands of individualism and traditionalism. While tradition insists that human life is already so well ordered that it is heretical to question its very basis, the individual sees, rebelliousness as the most effective way of seeking and expressing life's meaning. By creating the strong characters who dominate his poems, Okot p'Bitek is
demonstrating his sympathy for the individual who by rebelling seeks to alter the nature of life by means of his creative efforts. In other words tradition (society) is already judged by him, and, if not exactly condemned, its deep-seated defects are assumed from the beginning. The poet thus seems to be rather interested in the fate of the individual; hence, the particular form of the song he works out.

If this is the case, the issue that arises out of the nature of the songs is how the individual is to be judged. Who indeed will be the judge - society, or other separate individuals? What are the criteria for making any judgment? The poet himself does not make the matter any easier by the way he succeeds in keeping the longest distance between himself and the characters he creates. It is in keeping with the nature of the song that these characters are strong, vivid, and articulate. Nevertheless, it is extremely difficult to pass judgment on a defendant who is the only witness in his own case. In other words, one feels that just as the poet is employing a new form of the song, he is also attempting to re-form one's traditional ethical proclivities; for one is used to judging on the basis of a particular ideal being attained or violated.

But the song asks us to consider the world of individual expression as the only given reality. The individual is his own judge as well as advocate. Although the ingredients of his triumph or disgrace exist in the same structure of words, the individual who has ours and the author's sympathy is one who, ironically, recognises that the only way to preserve his world is to recognise it in others. Whereas Lawino is totally engrossed in the little world of her triumphs, she never seeks to
destroy the one outside it. But Ocol and the malaya will overreach themselves and destroy the world of traditional culture. It is the prisoner who seems to have a lot of the author's sympathy. His song is about life, love, and human relationships, things without which the most exuberant ego cannot exist. In other words, Okot p'Bitek has created persons who face the choice between the creative use of individualism and the destructive overreaching after egocentric fancy.

Considered this way, the apparent conflict between tradition and the individual ceases to exist. The individual must have the right to challenge the bases of traditional culture; but life, love and relationship are what he shares with the individuals who represent tradition. While Lawino and the prisoner succeed, Ocol and the malaya in this respect, fail.
FOOTNOTES


4 Okot p'Bitek, Song of Lawino (Narobi: East African Publishing House, 1966), p. 22. Further references to this poem will be made to the pages from which quotations are taken.


8 Rev. Tempels, p. 34.

9 Technicians of the Sacred, p. xxii.


11 Technicians of the Sacred, p. xxv.

12 Technicians of the Sacred, p. xxiii.


15. Rev. Tempels, particularly Chapter 2.


The claims she makes for visual categories can also be made for linguistic categories.

17. R. G. Collingwood, particularly Chapter 4.


I follow Professor Burke in extending the conception of rhetoric to include all the methods and devices by which a human community expresses or enforces its internal cohesion.


26. This issue is dealt with in greater detail in the concluding part of this study.


29 W. B. Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium" (1928).

30 W. B. Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium".


34 Basil Davidson, p. 129-30.

35 Basil Davidson, p. 125.


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