

ASPECTS OF REALISM IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *A MAN OF THE PEOPLE*

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ABSTRACT Chinua Achebe has proven his worth among English-speaking African novelists by representing the African social and political environment in a thoroughly realistic way. His novels depict life within a particular historical background, and convey a sense of growing disgust and unrest within Nigerian society, a society that has started to emerge from the 'colonial complex' caused by years of denigration and self-abasement. *A Man of the People* (1967) is Achebe's fourth novel. It describes Nigeria in its post-independence phase, during which time the country became a 'cesspool of corruption and misrule' in the context of colonial-style social and economic development, a situation that resulted in conflict between the emergent, elitist middle class and the general population. Achebe's reputation as a novelist rests on his impartial understanding of, and ability to represent, the Nigerian environment. His realistic characterization, and diagnosis, of his country's malaise has the power to inspire a revolution informed by African ideologies.

Key Words: Colonial consciousness; Identity; Realism; Marginality; Subservience.

INTRODUCTION

My negritude is no tower and no cathedral
It dives into the red flesh of the soil
It dives into the flowing flesh of the sky
Piercing the weight of patience with its erect picture.
(quoted in Moore, 1962: viii)

Chinua Achebe (born Nov. 16, 1930) is a Nigerian novelist, critic and poet; he is one of the most-read African authors. His works have primarily focused on "African politics, the depiction of Africa and Africans in the West, and the intricacies of pre-colonial African culture and civilization, as well as the effects of colonization of African societies" (Achebe, 1988b). His well-known literary critique *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"* (Achebe, 1988a) is considered by many to be the most assertive, debated, and seminal treatise of its type. Achebe rejected Joseph Conrad as "a thorough going racist" who projected Africa as "a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril" (*Ibid*: 38). This said, the present paper investigates various aspects of realism that appear in Achebe's novel *A Man of the People*, and describes various political and social changes that have taken place in Nigeria since its publication in 1967. It also evaluates *A Man of the People* as a work of fiction among other realistic novels.

Generally, English-language fiction falls into the categories of romance or realism. Romances tend to represent life as one might think it to be, and create a relatively heroic, adventurous, or picturesque world. In contrast, works of realism portray the world as it really appears. Books by realists such as Defoe tend to use a reportorial manner, presenting material in a circumstantial, matter-of-fact kind of way, and create for the reader an illusion of actual experience. Abrams (1971: 141) noted that the term 'realistic novel' "is more usefully applied to works which are realistic both in subject and manner ... throughout the whole rather in parts" Additionally, Gray (1992: 241) has noted that realism "is best used for writers who show explicit concern to convey an authentic impression of actuality, either in their narrative style, or by their serious approach to their subject matter". Among English-speaking African novelists, Chinua Achebe has been particularly successful in creating a realistic representation of an African environment. He is one of the major writers from the African subcontinent who have given a new direction to English-language African literature by representing, realistically, an African environment and giving expression to a sense of increasing disgust and unrest within its population. Carroll wrote that Achebe appears to be continually haunted by nostalgia for the "rediscovery of Africa's past" (Carroll, 1975: 11). His novels appear to be an attempt to come to terms with a struggle, or, "as it were, to sensitively register his encounter with history, his people's history" Ngugi (1975: 39) as well as to help his "society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement" (Achebe, 1975: 43). Such realism is explicit in Achebe's novels; he has written about the subjugated, exploited majority of the African population, and their vision of the future after gaining independence from colonial rule and emerging from the "colonial complex" (Duerden & Pieterse, 1972: 8). Explaining that this history dominates their lives, Achebe says, "I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past with all its imperfection was not one long night of savagery from which the first European acting on God's behalf delivered them" (Achebe, 1975: 44). Novels such as *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *Arrow of God* (1964), *No Longer At Ease* (1960), *A Man of the People* (1967), and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) exemplify his goal of social realism and his attempts to restore the lost dignity of his people by allowing his readers to examine their past and to resolve what he terms a 'crisis in the soul.' *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) portrays modern, independent, post-colonial (in this case, neo-colonial) urban Africa. It details the general, societal and individual turbulence within a fictional late 20th century African country named Kanga, which clearly represents Nigeria. The novel dramatizes political struggles between Africans, illustrates the continuing influence of Britain and other Western countries on African economics and culture, and ends with a government being overthrown by a coup. In an interview with Donatus Nwoga, Achebe explained his goal as an author:

I think we might be neglecting our proper function if we take anything for granted instead of thinking what exactly is our society, what are its needs,

what can I do, what can I contribute; that is what I was trying to get at, and I think we have a very important function ... this is only one of the roles of the writer, as a teacher (Duerden & Pieterse, 1972: 7).

THE NOVEL

A Man of the People (1967) is Achebe's fourth novel. He referred to it as "a rather serious indictment of post independent Africa" (*Ibid*: 13), in particular Nigeria, which turned into "a cesspool of corruption and misrule" (Heywood, 1975: 82) after independence. Achebe's sincerity in writing about the African social and political landscape is evident to the reader. Along with his other novels, *A Man of the People* can be classified as realistic. The characters are constructed within a particular environment and in a particular historical phase; they recreate their own history, whether living in a traditional community or resisting European colonialism. To achieve a realistic effect, Achebe created the protagonist, Odili Samalu, as an ordinary, sensitive young man who teaches at Anata Grammar School. Most of the other characters are middle-class and tend to have a rather dull and frequently unhappy existence with only occasional glimpses of beauty and joy. The novel is set in a post-independence environment, after a period of colonial-style social and economic development has resulted in a conflicted situation between the emergent elitist middle class and the general population. The Europeans had been replaced by a ruling class of politicians, most of whom were corrupt and controlled everything. According to Ngugi (1975: 47), "the disillusionment with the ruling elite is to be found in the recent works of most African writers". Achebe's *A Man of the People* reflects his distaste for post-independence Nigeria as a place where leaders who had fought for independence became traitors after attaining power, and sacrificed their country in exchange for middle-class comfort. Odili Samalu, the protagonist, mediates Achebe's vision that individuals must not "give up because ... this is a necessary stage in our growth" (Duerden & Pieterse, 1972: 13).

In contrast to Achebe's earlier novels *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *A Man of the People* delineates the conflict between morality and corruption by contrasting the protagonist Odili Samalu with his opposite, the Minister of Culture, Chief Nanga. These characters are worlds apart, with radically different ideologies. Odili is an idealist who has experienced the pain and suffering of his fellow citizens and has observed how the entire system supports corrupt politicians and the wealthy. Despite the fact that his country is now free from colonial rule, he has witnessed the continued exploitation of the general population in a new form. The imperialists have been replaced by new rulers, and the general population has no choice but to suffer and wait for a new government. Throughout the novel, Odili condemns this state of affairs; his disillusionment comes through by means of a detached first person perspective.

Nanga, the villain, acts as a foil to Odili. Nanga is a politician who is a realist with an instinctive grasp of what the electorate wants; he has a genu-

ine rapport with the people whom he represents. Not only does he claim their 'primitive loyalties', he also exploits them to a great extent. During the election campaign, Odili realizes that, ironically, in some ways, Nanga represents government 'of the people, by the people, for the people.' The relationship between Odili and Nanga mediates the ethos of public and private morality in a society that has forgotten its past and seeks only material rewards in its future.

The story begins in 1964 when Nanga makes an official visit to Anata Grammar School, where he taught during his early career. Odili, a teacher at the school, views the ensuing celebration by the illiterate masses and the arrival of Nanga skeptically:

As I stood in one corner of that vast tumult waiting for the arrival of the Minister I felt intense bitterness welling up in my mouth. Here were silly, ignorant villagers dancing themselves lame and waiting to blow off their gun powder in honor of one of those who had started the country off down the slopes of inflation. I wished for a miracle, for a voice of thunder, to hush this ridiculous festival and tell the poor contemptible people one or two truths. But of course it would be quite useless. They were not only ignorant but cynical (Achebe, 1967: 2).

The local song played on the old "Grammar-phone" (p. 1), women dancing to celebrate the occasion, and the gunfire by Nanga's hooligans all realistically portray this kind of situation and reflect how Nigerians can sacrifice national interest for personal interests. In the novel, Odili remembers his childhood when he praised Nanga as a model, honest politician. This image of Nanga was shattered during Odili's last visit to Parliament, when he watched the political assassination of the Minister of Finance, who was "a first rate economist with a PhD" (p. 3) in Public Finance. The Minister of Finance presented a complete plan to avert the financial crisis to Cabinet, but the government rejected it because it would result in its defeat during the upcoming election. Any politicians supporting the Minister of Finance were fired and the corrupt politicians accused the honest Minister of being a traitor, being un-African, and of "aping the white man's mannerisms and way of speaking" (p. 4). Odili was shocked to see these lies being used as political propaganda in local newspapers, one of which printed the following:

We are proud to be Africans. Our true leaders are not those intoxicated with their Oxford, Cambridge or Harvard degrees but those who speak the language of the people. Away with the damnable and expensive university education that only alienates an African from his rich and ancient culture and puts him above his people ... (p. 4).

In his book, Achebe incorporates not only national issues but also the clan and village loyalties that are an integral part of Africa; the incident of Josiah and the blind man's stick is a good example. Nanga frequently exploits these

minor loyalties, while Odili examines them in relation to a national consciousness. He concludes that, under current conditions, European political concepts may be meaningless to the national structure, which is divided into numerous tribes and clans. He also fears being labeled as one of the snobbish intellectuals, with ambition, and a desire for post-graduate diploma from London. However, Odili never submits to 'lick any big man's boots,' explaining:

In fact one reason why I took this teaching job in a bush, private school instead of a smart civil service job in the city with car, free housing, etc., was to give myself a certain amount of autonomy (p. 16).

Odili's political views are inseparable from his character. His opinion of his girlfriend Elsie is also significant in revealing his character; he thinks that he has been unlucky in love, but Elsie is different:

Elsie was, and for that matter still is, the only girl I met and slept with the same day – in fact within an hour ... I can't pretend that I ever thought of marriage ... Elsie was such a beautiful, happy girl and she made no demands whatever (p. 22).

Achebe presents his foil Nanga as a political opportunist. Nanga has no concept of political morality; he has become rich through bribery, corruption, and intimidation, and knows how to work these things to his advantage. In the story, as in reality, Nanga and many others pursue self-interest with false promises of sharing with everyone. Odili is totally disillusioned at seeing such a debased form of politics in his country. Nanga begins his speech at Anata Grammar School in Pidgin English; by expressing local values and hopes, he appears to be a man from the grass roots and, ironically, a man of the people. He denounces the 'western – educated' Africans, claiming that "a university education alienates an African from his rich and ancient culture" (p. 4). As Minister of Culture, Nanga uses his privilege to attack the educated class in Africa, obviously vital to any country's development, but the villagers are far from understanding this fact. Along with his cunning manipulation, his friendly demeanor has an infectious effect on the villagers. Odili is taken aback when Nanga recognizes him from among the crowd as an ex-student and invites him to visit his house in Bori; he even promises help in getting Odili a scholarship to England. Odili is drawn to Nanga's irresistible charm and observes:

The man was still as handsome and youthful-looking as ever – there was no doubt about that ... The Minister had a jovial word for every one. You could never think – looking at him now – that his smile was anything but genuine. It seemed bloody minded to be skeptical (p. 34).

In spite of his early admiration for Nanga, Odili's brief stay at his house is an eye-opener; Odili has the opportunity to watch Nanga closely. Life at Nanga's house during the first few days undermines Odili's clear cut views, which are

somewhat eroded by the opulence:

All I can say is that on the first night there was no room for ... criticism. I was simply hypnotized by the luxury of the great suite assigned to me ... I had to confess that if I were at that moment made a minister I would be most anxious to remain one for ever (p. 34).

Moreover, Odili even begins to feel sympathetic about the temptations faced by men in power:

A man who has just come in from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes, is more reluctant to go out again than another who has been indoors all the time. The trouble with our new nation – as I saw it then lying on the bed – was that none of us had been indoors long enough to be able to say “to hell with it”. We had all been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us – the smart and the lucky and hardly ever the best – had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in (p. 34).

At this point in the story, it is clear that Odili’s disapproval of the country’s politicians is mixed with his new understanding of how a common man could be tempted by power. Still, politicians like Nanga are the villains of the story; however attractive they may be, they are seen as immoral. In the story, as in reality, men like Nanga take bribes and use the money to build apartment blocks, which they rent to earn profit. They also make false promises to the population about future rewards if they are re-elected.

When Odili meets Jean and her husband at Nanga’s house, differences arise between African and European codes of conduct. Odili attends a party at Jean’s house while her husband is away on business, “advising ... government on how to improve its public image in America” (p. 42). Odili finds this situation particularly ironic as he learns about the corruption in Nigerian government through her. Jean takes him on a tour of the city as she takes him home, and Odili senses a hidden purpose, as he notes that “she certainly knew the city well, from the fresh smelling modern waterfront to the stinking, maggoty interior” (p. 51). Odili laughs uneasily at the signs of corruption and inequality in Bori but is simultaneously suspicious of Jean’s motivation, wondering if the tour was simply out of curiosity or for “some secret reason, like wanting me to feel ashamed about my country’s capital city ... Who the hell did she think she was to laugh so self-righteously? Wasn’t there enough in her own country to keep her laughing all her days or crying if she preferred it?” (pp. 51–52).

Achebe makes it clear that there are difficulties involved in an individual’s interpretation or judgment of a culture, especially one that he or she has not experienced directly or intimately, and that no-one has the right to remark on an alien culture without serious analysis.

Odili's sense of affinity with Nanga is badly shaken when he takes Elsie, his girlfriend, to stay at Nanga's house. Odili refers to Elsie as "just a good-time girl" (p. 55). Before Odili can gather the courage to enter her room at night, Nanga enters her room and rapes her while Odili listens in a crisis of inertia to her apparent screams and calls for help:

I trudged up the stairs in the incredible delusion that Elsie was calling on me to come and save her from her ravisher. But when I got to the door a strong revulsion and hatred swept over me and I turned sharply away and went down the stairs for the last time. Recollection and panic followed soon enough and then the humiliating wound came alive again and began to burn fresher than first inflicted ... My eyes misted ... (p. 66).

Elsie's rape by Nanga exemplifies the poor status of women in Africa; African society portrays women in general as foolish, weak, dependent, frivolous, and seductive. It tends to cultivate "men's prerogatives to the allegiance and subservience of women, and legitimize men to exercise their power over women to sustain the latter's subordination and marginality" (Hussein, 2005: 60). Thus, the African novelist "often finds himself describing situations or modes of thought which have no direct equivalent in the English way of life" (Killiam, 1973: 12). Odili's inaction is also an example that has no parallel in other literature. Characters such as Edna, Elsie, and Mrs. Nanga indicate the marginalized status of women in African society. Out of anger and humiliation Odili leaves Nanga's home at midnight but returns later to take revenge: "What a country! I said, 'You call yourself Minister of Culture? God help us.' And I spat; not a full spit but a token, albeit unmistakable one." (p. 69). Nanga offers him other girls in exchange for Elsie, but Odili's estrangement is final and continues throughout the novel. Nanga is no longer simply a politician whom Odili dislikes for his degradation and corruption; he is a ravisher who has taken Elsie, his beloved, by force. As a form of personal revenge, Odili decides to seduce Nanga's fiancée Edna; as a form of political revenge, Odili works with his friend Max, who is about to form a new political party, the Common People's Convention, which aims to save the country from the grip of corrupt politicians. Odili discovers that this new party is backed by a junior minister in the current government and wonders why the minister does not resign if he is so discontented. He insists that Max not take any assistance from such politicians, "I would have thought it was better to start our new party clean, with a different kind of philosophy" (p. 79), but he gradually begins to realize that idealism does not work when a whole "country is on the verge of chaos" (p. 79).

Next, Odili decides to campaign against Nanga in his own constituency. At the inaugural campaign meeting, Nanga's men laugh at Odili in front of a crowd and Edna's father threatens him with a machete with the suggestion that he withdraw his nomination:

My in law is like a bull ... and your challenge is like a challenge of a tick to a bull. The tick fills its belly with blood from the back of the bull and the bull does not even know it is there. He carries it wherever he goes – to eat, drink or pass ordure. Then one day the cattle egret comes, perches on the bull's back and picks out the tick ... (p. 101).

Odili's focus on revenge keeps him steadfast despite humiliations brought on him by his headmaster, Mrs. Nanga, and Nanga's supporters; his focus on revenge changes into a genuine desire to destroy Nanga and the corruption he represents, as is clear in his statement, "although I had little hope of winning Chief Nanga's seat, it was necessary nonetheless to fight him and expose him as much as possible" (p. 103). At this point, Odili's character has two clear aspects. Publicly, he wants to expose Nanga for his misdeeds in the hope that there "may be someone who would get up and say, No, Nanga has taken more than the owner could ignore!" (p. 104); privately, he wants to marry Edna out of love, as revenge on Nanga.

When Odili began his political campaign, he recalled that when he was at university, his sole ambition was to become "a full member of the privileged class whose symbol was the car" (p. 104), and that "many of us vowed then never to be corrupted by bourgeois privileges of which the car was the most visible symbol in our country" (p. 104). By this point, however, Odili has undergone a great change; he has acquired a new car through party funds. He assesses his present position: "and now here was I in this marvellous little affair eating the hills like yam – as Edna would have said. I hoped I was safe, for a man who avoids danger for years and then gets killed in the end has wasted his care" (p. 104). Odili is being pulled in two directions: he could become part of the corrupt political system in which no idealism can survive (similar to Nanga), or he could remain in a state of idealism and disillusionment about Nigeria's political situation.

At the novel's climax, Nanga is having his inaugural campaign meeting. In an attempt to expose Nanga to the people, Odili sneaks in wearing a disguise:

What would happen, if I were to push my way to the front and up the palm-leaf-festooned dais, wrench the microphone from the greasy hands of that blabbing buffoon and tell the whole people – this vast contemptible crowd – that the great man they had come to hear with their drums and dancing was an Honorable Thief. But of course they knew that already. No single man and human there that afternoon was stranger to that news – not even the innocent looking convent girl on the dais (p. 131).

While Odili considers his next step, he is spotted by Josiah, now an ally of Nanga. Nanga calls Odili a thief, forcing him to pause in order to respond. Nanga calls him to the dais and publicly ridicules him, beginning with his own interpretation of the past:

This is the boy ... He came to my house in Bori, ate my food, drank my water and my wine and instead of saying thank you to me he set out plotting how to drive me out and take over my house ... He was once my pupil. I taught him A B C and I called him to my house to arrange for him to go to England (p. 132).

Nanga offers him the microphone. At this point, Odili thinks he has a chance to expose Nanga's corruption: "I come to tell your people that you are a liar and ..." (pp. 132-33). As he speaks, Nanga slaps him on the face. To Odili's shock, the crowd joins in the beating:

He pulled the microphone away smartly, set it down, walked up to me and slapped my face ... immediately hands seized my arms, but I am happy that he got one fairly good kick from me. He slapped me again and again. Edna rushed forward crying and tried to get between us but he pushed her ... By this time blows were falling as fast as rain on my head and body until something heavier than the rest seemed to split my skull. The last thing I remembered was seeing all the policemen turn round and walk quietly away (p. 133).

By creating this climax, Achebe was able to project the fate of educated individuals who want to bring about societal change but fail because they are easily outnumbered by villains. Odili finds satisfaction in his selfless public act, even though he ends up in a hospital, defeated. His friends, Max and Eunice, then go on to play important roles. Max is killed by an election jeep belonging to Koko, a ministerial colleague of Nanga, and Eunice kills Koko out of anger after Max's death. Private armies begin to rampage, and in this state of anarchy, the Prime Minister reappoints the old cabinet to office. The army cannot accept this decision and stages a coup, putting the ministers behind bars. The political turmoil serves to help Odili; after Nanga is arrested, Edna reveals that she never wanted to marry him: "Marry him? To be frank with you I did not want to marry him ... All the girls in the college were laughing at me ... It was only my father ..." (p. 137). Still, despite the military coup Odili knows that nothing has changed and refuses to accept the simple consolation that the will of the people has been served:

No the people had nothing to do with the fall of our Government. What happened was simply that unruly mobs and private armies having tasted blood and power during the election had got out of hand and ruined their masters and employers. And they had no public reason whatever for doing it. Let's make no mistake about that (p. 136).

Overnight, Max becomes a hero of the revolution, and the people who had previously idolized Nanga and Koko now denounce them. Odili comes to

understand the entire ethic of social acceptance and rejection within Nigerian society:

Max was avenged not by the people's collective will but by one solitary woman who loved him. Had his spirit waited for the people to demand redress it would have been waiting still, in the rain and out in the sun? But he was lucky (p. 140).

As Odili seeks to understand why private loyalty seems to be more important than public morality, he remembers the story of Josiah. Rejected by the whole village at the beginning of the novel for stealing a blind man's stick, Josiah ends up as Nanga's most trusted man. As Odili observes, it is "a regime in which a ... fellow cursed in the morning for stealing ... and later in the evening saw him again mounting the altar of the new shrine in the presence of all the people to whisper into the ear of the chief celebrant" (p. 141). This exemplifies how priorities can change suddenly, when individual self-interest comes into play. In this way, Josiah's story foreshadows events later in the novel. In this context, Eunice has done a noble deed, as Odili summarizes:

... I do honestly believe that in the fat-dripping, gummy, eat-and-let-eat regime just ended – a regime which inspired the common saying that a man could only be sure of what he had put away safely in his gut ... in such a regime, I say, you died a good death if your life had inspired someone to come forward and shoot your murderer in the chest – without asking to be paid (p. 141).

By the punishment of Nanga, Achebe has suggested that if a nation is to progress, it must take proper care when selecting leaders, otherwise corrupt politicians will always get their way and citizens will simply be a means by which they can fulfill their corrupt goals. An electorate needs to be strong enough to withstand the opposing pulls of private and public pressures; as Achebe has noted, "for a society to function smoothly and effectively its members must share certain basic tenets of belief and norms of behavior" (Achebe, 1988b: 100). National interest must be given supreme importance as opposed to self-interest, which has the power to corrupt leaders. Achebe successfully projected his own ideals through Odili Samalu, the protagonist of *A Man of the People*. This has been the goal of many African writers writing about their own pasts and their nation. According to Ngugi, it is a means to assert African identity:

I believe that the African intellectuals must align themselves with the struggle of the African masses for a meaningful national ideal. For we must strive for a form of social organization that will free the manacled spirit and energy of our people so we can build a new country and sing a new song (Ngugi, 1975: 50).

CONCLUSION

The realism of Achebe's 1967 novel *A Man of the People* is demonstrated by the fact that events portrayed in the novel actually went on to occur in Nigeria in 1967: a military coup placed the politicians behind bars. Commenting on this coincidence, Achebe claimed:

If you take the example of Nigeria, which is a place I know best, things had got to such a point politically that there was no answer – no way you could resolve this impasse politically. The political machine had been so abused that whichever way you pressed it, it produced the same results; and therefore you wanted another force, another force just had to come in (Duerden & Pieterse, 1972: 14).

Achebe's *A Man of the People* successfully recreated the dynamic spirit of Nigerian society in a thoroughly realistic way. In this respect, Alumona has noted that, "Achebe achieves it by building argument and persuasive rhetoric around the lives of some dominant individuals, and the operations or failures of societal institutions ... the family, government, morality, law and order, diplomacy, etc" (Alumona, 2003: 62). Achebe rejected the idea that "art should be accountable to no one and needs to justify itself to nobody" (Achebe, 1975: 36). Instead, he has claimed that "art is, and always was, at the service of man. Our ancestors created their myths and told their stories for a human purpose" (Culross, 2007: 1) and "any good story, any good novel, should have a message, should have a purpose" (Culross, 2007: 1). He insisted that "we should see it as a life actually lived by plausible men and women before we dismiss it, with the usual shrug, as nothing but ignorance, darkness and death" (Moore, 1962: 59). The delineation of Nanga as a practical politician, and of Odili as an alienated young man, is realistic to the core; these characters emerge powerfully in the novel. Nanga represents "the opportunist, the rogue of the cities" while Odili is a nostalgic young man and "the romantic hero with his heightened sensitivity and divided consciousness pulling him into ... tragedy" (Gleason, 1965: xvi). Other characters such as Edna, Mrs. Nanga, and Josiah are credible, and the reader never gets the impression that they are far-fetched. This kind of authentic characterization constitutes a basic quality of Achebe's novels, and is one of the reasons they are so widely read and accepted not only by Africans but by readers from all continents. Bruce King (Culross, 2007: 1) was correct when he pointed out that "Achebe was the first Nigerian writer to successfully transmute the conventions of the novel, a European art form, into African literature" in such a way that the "European character study is subordinated to the portrayal of communal life; European economy of form is replaced by an aesthetic appropriate to the rhythms of traditional tribal life". Achebe's reputation rests on his unbiased interpretation of the post-independence Nigerian environment and his ability to elaborate this through his novels. In this way, his works have the ability to inspire a revolution, "a revolution that aims towards true independence, that moves towards the creation of modern states in place

of new colonial enclaves ... a revolution that is informed with African ideologies” (Lindfors, 1970: 18). The Nigerian Civil War was the culmination of this movement. *A Man of the People* proved to be a prologue to this event and, as Ngugi has noted, “Chinua Achebe’s characters, shaped by a different social climate, do not have to assert their humanity ... they have a vital relationship with their social and economic landscape. We can see, and feel, how his characters, their world view, their very aspirations, have been shaped by a particular environment in a particular historical phase” (Ngugi, 1975: 44). This kind of comment attests to the realism that is such a feature of *A Man of the People*, a work that proves Achebe’s worth as a writer, one who is not only involved in the diagnosis of his own country’s malaise but also in the cultural analysis of Africa’s relationship with Europe.

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