While Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God are concerned with the tribal past and the effect of historical change on the old world community of the Ibos, No Longer at Ease (1960) and Man of the People (1966) examine the present in a contemporary perspective. They dramatise the dilemmas of social and personal accommodation in a community which has come to live with change, whose process of modernisation has become a settled fact of life. The latter novels present cultural and social forces in conflict through their protagonists who experience alienation in contexts and situations different from those faced by Okonkwo and Ezeulu. The chief characters in these novels are not victims of change; they are products of change faced with the obstinate residuum of an obsolete tradition. In No Longer at Ease, Achebe explores the social and psychological symptoms of the division and alienation in Ibo character by dramatising
the unresolved conflicts undergone by the protagonist, Obi Okonkwo, the son of Nwoye and the grandson of Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart*. Whereas the elder Okonkwo was the victim of the colonial encounter between tribal Africa and Christian Europe, Obi Okonkwo falls a prey to the devitalising processes at work in a society which is far removed from its tribal past and exposed to the centrifugalism of a westernised society, but still motivated by vestigial tribal instincts and attitudes. He confronts three instead of two cultures in mutual conflict; those of Umuofia, his tribal village, of Europe where he has received his education, and Lagos the capital of modern Nigeria, representing the new urban society in which he has to seek his fulfilment as an individual. He is a hybrid hero in a hybrid society, a black European burdened with the responsibilities of playing a bureaucratic role in shaping the new life of his people in consonance with the ideals and morality he has imbibed from his western education abroad. In pursuing his professional career, as well as sorting out his personal life, Obi is caught between divided loyalties and contradictory views of public morality and individual responsibility. Owing loyalty to both Europe and Africa, to his
inheritance as well as his newly acquired values, Obi undergoes various trials of the self and eventually regresses from a bright-eyed idealist into a compulsive cynic. Achebe traces this pattern of the hero's devolution with clinical detachment mingled with a disturbing sense of unease, diagnosing the various forces in the human situation which deprive the hero of his ability either to return to his origins or to forge ahead towards new possibilities. Obi remains a twilight character in a middling world of change which appears as an endless transition without the assurance of a stable, definable and consecutive reality.

Achebe introduces a number of narrative shifts and presents a variety of points of view to dramatise the hero's uneasy predicament. African society is no longer the pastoral, tribal community as found in Things Fall Apart. The European Christian presence has become a settled fact, with all the resulting institutional and attitudinal dislocations of the old tribal ethos. There has been a shift from religion to education as a way of the younger generation's style of life, all the hopes and aspirations of the parents and the community now centering on their children's prosperity.
and success inextricably connected with western education. There has also been a shift from a belief in the divine and the occult to an acceptance of secular values such that the standards of public and private morality have come to be the affairs of the world here and now. Further, Nigeria is in the throes of progressive urbanisation, and the centre of modern cultural activity has accordingly shifted from the village to the city, with Lagos as the Afro-European city where opportunity and temptation await the young professional seeking a rise in status and power. Also, more subtly, the dialectic of human behaviour is no longer based in the tribal logic of ancestral experience and communal wisdom, but in the consecutive reasoning and the empirical attitudes of the west. European individualism has come to replace the African communal solidarity. The individual, brought up in one culture and exposed to another, is faced with the problem of reconciling the opposing loyalties and polarised values, and is confronted with the prospect of alienation and exclusion from both. *No Longer at Ease* analyses the predicament of its central character by enlarging upon these issues, as he returns to Nigeria after having been too long physically and mentally in the west. As David
Carroll observes:

At each stage of his return Obi awakens into life the latent antagonisms, the unresolved antinomies upon which his outward progress had apparently been securely built. Each synthesis turns out to have been merely a temporary truce between different values and cultures. 1

The novel opens dramatically with the trial scene of Obi Okonkwo who is charged with corruption; and, in a sense, more than Obi is under trial. Opening with the puzzled interrogation of the western judge as well as the Umuofian community as to what has brought about the decline and fall of the hero, the narrative progress relentlessly towards an examination of all the factors that have led to the question. As a matter of fact, *No Longer at Ease* is a sentence in progress drawn backwards from the verdict and Achebe points an admonitive finger at a miscellany of cultural elements which determine the protagonist's decline and fall, which are symptomatic of the devitalisation and

Corruption of the society he represents. Obi's tragedy is a product of his many-sided alienation and his uneasy status as an individual cut off from a sense of identity and from the old certitudes of a self-sufficient and harmonious world-view. Two opposing but equally convincing points of view are presented, which shape the dialectic of the narrative. On one hand is the collective perception, whether of the African tribal culture or that of a post-colonial elitist ethos; on the other hand is the victim-hero's regressive and self-denigratory view of the individual's role in a society corrupt beyond redemption. In bringing the protagonist to judgment, the system calls itself to judgment. The judge of the High Court of Lagos expresses the puzzlement of the Europeans when he says:

I cannot comprehend how a young man of your education and brilliant promise could have done this. 2

Green, Obi's boss, attributes the decline to the

concept of generic corruption of all Africans and draws a sarcastically ethnic conclusion about the blackman's depravity. On the other hand, Obi's fellow Nigerians believe that Obi's fault was not one of corruption but of indiscretion and lack of appropriate form; they consider this failure as the result of wrong strategy.

He should not have accepted money himself. What others do is tell you to go and hand it to their houseboy. Obi tried to do what everyone does without finding out how it was done. 3

Between these two points of view, driven by different motivations and assumptions of value, Achebe interposes the Odyssey of the hero in retrospect. The novel comes full circle with the authorial observation:

Everybody wondered Why. The learned judge, as we have seen, could not comprehend how an educated young man and so on and so forth. The British Council man, even the men of Umoufia, did not know. And we must presume that, in spite of his certitude, Mr. Green did not know either. 4

4. Ibid., p.170.
The answer to the puzzlement of all concerned about the hero's down-fall is elaborated in the structural pattern of the novel which traces in retrospect the various journeys and encounters of Obi. Like Hamlet, Obi returns home full of heroic expectations and nostalgic anticipations of his home country from which he had been separated by his stay in England. He comes, in the first instance, not to his native village but to the city of Lagos which stands midway between Europe and Umofia and is replete with the dangers of assimilation. He had thought, as a dreamy versifier in his student days, that Lagos was a Utopian patria, the embodiment of the pride and the dignity of Africa. The fervour of his nostalgia, interlaced with intimations of negritude, fades away as his imaginary city turns out to be the unreal city of Lagos which is now more like a wasteland, a place of sterility, confusion and corruption. His encounter with Lagos turns out to be the first experience of his progressive disillusionment and the first revelation of his alienation. In this city of two-cities-in-one, Obi is also disturbed by the discovery that his identity with the clan no longer provides a credible focus
for reality. He is welcomed by the members of the Umuofia Progressive Union as a son of the soil who must use his training and status and power to fulfil the interests and ambitions of his own community, irrespective of the right or wrong of public office. He finds this attitude repugnant to his conscience and finds the world turned upside down. In the next part of his tour of disorientation, Obi makes a journey to his native village where the tribal life is apparently stable but fraught with internal tensions and disorder. Everybody in the village claims credit for Obi's triumphant return as an educated person holding an important position in the administration, and this gives rise to endless bickerings, arguments and dissensions. This is further aggravated by his own father's attitude which has ironically retained its tribal prejudices in spite of his zealous Christian piety. Obi also discovers that this uneasy dichotomy in his father's psyche is reflected in his mother's world too, which is still dominated by primitive tribal taboos and fears despite her formal allegiance to the Christian faith. Obi thus finds that change in his society has not resulted in transformation, but only in a shift in its external aspects; and he becomes conscious
of the depth of his alienation from his society, his family and his culture all at once. The oppressive sense of reality has a destructive impact on his own individuality, as he suffers a continuous dismemberment of the self.

Obi's shift back to Lagos and his assumption of office in the Civil Service force the contrary awareness of his environment to an immediately personal level. Obi, with his western training, has come to view objectivity and impersonality as a logical necessity in performing his official duty, an ideal of duty inculcated in him by the European ethic. He is irritated by the polemics of the U.P.U. which seeks to subvert his sense of duty by laying claims to his loyalty to the community as the son of the soil, which it believes should transcend all other considerations. He antagonises his fellow Umuofians by upholding a different kind of morality, contrary to the concept of tribal solidarity. The tribe reacts adversely to his assumed impersonal rectitude and brings his personal affairs into open discussion. Believing in the inviolable independence of the individual and the sanctity of his privacy, Obi resents the clan's intrusion into his personal
life; and his insistence on marrying an outcast wife further antagonises his clan and his family.

The elitism of the educated African keeps him apart from his people towards whom he now turns with the cynical disdain of the White European rulers. While the issue of marriage becomes a matter of public controversy, Obi's economic crisis endangers his position, because, as an officer of the State, he has to maintain the dignity and display needed to maintain his status in public life, while his family responsibilities pose a threat and a temptation to his sense of strict morality. The relationship with his fiancée, Clara, is subjected to these economic pressures and emotional vissicitudes and comes under severe strain.

Matters come to a head when Obi is recalled to his village where he has to confront his father who now represents a recrudescence of the tribal prejudices against mixed marriages outside the community and the clan. His mother's illness and death further unnerve him and the engagement to Clara is broken off. When Obi returns to Lagos to resume his professional responsibilities, his disillusion-
ment is total and his situation becomes a congenial ground for temptation. The man who stood immaculately firm in integrity and morality must now perforce yield to the exigencies of a situational ethic which forces him into corruption. Innocence undermined by experience, and turning to an amoral attitude to values, he easily becomes a prey to temptation, and Obi finally falls into the trap. The series of compromises he is forced to make, shatters his idealistic view of life. His own perception of himself as one whose actions must find validity in terms of his personal growth is clouded. The education of Obi thus culminates in a catastrophic ignorance of the ways of the world and an insufficient mastery of its strategies of success. In a sense, he is as bewildered as everybody else at his public discomfiture following the court's verdict. He has arrived at a point where morality, refinement and grace have no practical value in life and he finally becomes a seedy cynic. In tracing Obi's decline and fall, Achebe leaves his narrative at the end dramatically ambivalent, with his protagonist not entirely freed from greed and despair but suspended like a dangling man. Obi himself feels that he has died unto himself and beyond his death there are no
ideals and no noble causes to fight for, but only reality to confront and live with. The debacle of Obi's career is typical of the impatient idealist who by the circumstances of his complex fate breaks away from his true self and fails to comprehend his ideal constructions of reality. The hero experiences the tragedy of the unheroic and, instead of a genuine tragic epiphany, he achieves only an anti-Climactic view of his place under the sun. It is as though, in dismantling the character of Obi, Achebe has portrayed the regressive trend in a society which has moved away from its authenticity and has thus alienated itself from the genuine possibilities of a creative destiny for itself and its members. In *No Longer at Ease*, Achebe offers a tearless but indignant indictment of human societies in transition which can neither look back in pride nor forward in hope.

II

*No Longer at Ease* projects a tragedy of cultural contingency wherein the hero cannot know his motives until he has seen his actions and cannot formulate for himself
a pattern of meaningful choices until he has attained an adequate comprehension of the various forces against which his educated sensibility is pitted. The strain and stress brought on by these pressures leaves him a drifter, denied his own values as an intellectual and visionary, and repudiated by the peculiar drives for power in which his social contexts are defined. Obi Okonkwo, in the result, combines in himself the roles of Hamlet, Coriolanus and Angelo, as it were. In him Achebe translates the symptoms of cultural unease into the experiential and existential traumas of a society going through the difficulties of an incommodious transition. Obi is implicated in complex human situation in which the individual is unable to impose daring and original levies on tradition. He remains suspended in a haze of unaccommodated change and succumbs to the uncertainties and anxieties of cultural crisis by taking a leap back from freedom into the world of necessity. In presenting such a character, Achebe Chronicles the tragic failure of innocence as well as the unredemptive catastrophe of experience in the context of African values. In a sense, the narrative of No Longer at Ease serves a parabolic function in projecting the African dilemma.
Thanks to his western training and education, Obi Okonkwo, as an individualist, no longer believes in the traditional view that loyalty to the tribe and fidelity to kinship ties are greater than the pursuit of personal fulfillment. In his attempt to achieve professional success, he is caught in the conflict between the traditional attitudes of group loyalty and the modern values of individual integrity. Under the pressure of circumstances, he becomes estranged from both, and finally faces the ignominious plight of being charged with corruption. *No Longer at Ease* explores the pathetic distortion of Obi's personality in the world of divided loyalties, under the weight of a financial crisis which threatens his self-acquired status in the new social order. The hero's tragedy is a product not only of the circumstances of his situation, but also of the lack, or ambivalence, of awareness towards the forces at work in a transitional society. His professional, social and existential choices run counter to the expectations of the tribe which, in the form of the U.P.U. intends his education abroad to serve its own needs and demands rather than his individual goals. The Union hopes that he would become a lawyer, pleading for its causes,
but Obi pursues English literary studies in England and returns to Lagos with the background of literary education. He gets employed in Civil Service instead, where he takes upon himself not a tribal role, but a public role in which personal power and status are far more important than tribal loyalty. However, in the Civil Service, he has to assume new responsibilities as well as maintain an affluent life-style. In either case, he is exposed to the eventuality of alienation from his community and to the temptations of a career prone to corruption. He drifts in both worlds, incapable of achieving any viable synthesis between the two. He is, instead, discredited in both worlds, and is disowned by his tribe as well as his profession.

The narrative opens, as a matter of fact, on the note of surprise and dismay he causes all around by the seemingly inexplicable fact of his fall from grace. The Umuofia Progressive Union members and the British administration are equally at a loss to understand why so promising a young man like Obi should have failed in his loyalty and integrity. Achebe seeks to sort out Obi's double dis-possession and explore its causes and consequences by
analysing his predicament and tracing it back to the crisis in the Obi society in its confrontation with western values.

The prayer conducted at Obi’s house at the time of his departure for England reveals the hopes which his family and tribe repose in him on his return home as a western educated person on the assumption that the young man would promote the continuity of his native traditions. His mother’s friend, Mary, prays:

"Oh God of Abraham, God of Issac and God of Jacob" she burst forth, the Beginning and the End. Without you we can do nothing. The great river is not being enough for you to wash your hands in. You have the yam and you have the knife; we cannot eat unless you cut us a piece. We are like ants in your sight. We are like little children who only wash their stomach when they bath, leaving their back dry. 5

The Ibo clansmen are sure of Obi’s potential as a benefactor of the community upholding its time-sanctioned values and maintaining its traditions of solidarity and reciprocity.

I know that we have no fear where you are concerned. 6

But, despite these collective hopes, Obi, turns out to be self-centred, preoccupied with his own profession and status. His education, sponsored and subsidised by his society, ironically weans him away from its fold. Achebe traces this reversal in the role expected of his protagonist to Obi's growth away from the orbital pull of the traditional world-view. On going to England, sponsored and assisted by the Umuofia Progressive Union, Obi realises that Nigeria is more than a name. His passage to England makes him adore his motherland from a distance. But this impression does not last long. The Nigeria of his imagination becomes a shattered picture when he lands on the Nigerian soil after a four-year stay in England.

But the Nigeria he returned to was in many ways different from the picture he had carried in his mind during those four years. There were many things he could no longer recognise, and others like the slums of Lagos - which he was seeing for the first time. 7

Since his childhood days, Obi has cherished splendid memories of Lagos and its surroundings but the Utopian conceptualisation flounders on the rock of observed actuality grasped from an adult point of view.

Likewise, the Umuofia Progressive Union anticipates Obi's services to them as an efficient advocate, but the members are soon disillusioned by the detribalising effect which western education and western culture have had on their protege whose western individualism and professional ethics have turned against the ancestral concepts of collective morality and tribal loyalty. Obi is caught on the horns of a dilemma. If he were to obey the promptings of his own fresh-made self, he has to disobey his tribe. If he were to yield to the promptings of the collective will and tie of allegiance to his tribe, he has to forego loyalty to his own self. In consequence, he is exposed, and rendered vulnerable, to the tragic option of necessity over freedom, of contingency over integrity.

Obi's is not an isolated case, but is largely representative and symptomatic of the experience of all Nigerian
youth, who are no longer at ease. Education instead of providing a desired synthesis of the old and the new, only widens the gulf between them and causes mutual disillusionment. Instead of maintaining a harmonious relationship, self and society get entangled in a mutually adverse relationship. The crisis is personalised in terms of Obi violating the traditional social and familial norms when he seeks matrimony outside the tribal imperatives of custom and caste and kinship affiliations.

Obi, while returning from England comes into contact with Clara, a nurse. His affair with her becomes a matter of serious concern for the tribe, for, Clara belongs to 'Osu', a caste within the Ibo community, who cannot have social and marital ties with others according to tradition. Obi's education in England seems to have made him decide to marry an Osu. But here the tension between the 'traditional' and the 'modern' takes shape leading to bitter consequences, bringing to the fore, in the process, the inner contradictions within the traditional society. Obi's father, though a converted Christian, whose received religion is supposed to transcend the traditional prejudices,
does not commend his son's affair with Clara. The rebel of yesterday becomes the conformist ancestor of today, when it comes to a sensitive personal issue. He rationalises his disapproval of his son's marriage outside the caste, in an attitude and language analogous to those of his own father whom he had once defied and deserted.

'My son' said Okonkwo, I understand what you say. But this thing is deeper than you think.

'What is this thing? Our fathers in their darkness and ignorance called an innocent man 'Osu', a thing given to idols, and thereafter he became an outcast, and his children's children for ever. But have we not seen the light of the Gospel? Obi used the very words that his father might have used in talking to his heathen kinsmen.

There was a long silence. The lamp was now burning too brightly. Obi's father turned down the wick a little and then resumed his silence. After what seemed ages he said; 'I know Josiah Okeke very well.' He was looking steadily in front of him. His voice sounded tired. 'I know him and I know his wife. He is a good man and a great Christian. But he is 'Osu'. Naaman, captain of the host of Syria, was a great man and honourable, he was also a mighty man of valour, but he was a leper. He paused so that this great and felicitous analogy might sink in with all its heavy and dreadful weight.

Osu is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg of you, my son, not to bring
the mark of shame and of leprosy into your family. If you do, your children and your children's children unto the third and fourth generations will curse your memory. It is not for myself I speak; my days are few. You will bring sorrow on your head and on the heads of your children who will marry your daughters? Whose daughters will your sons marry? Think of that, my son. We are Christians, but we cannot marry our own daughters. 8

Obi's mother also opposes the alliance and holds out the threat of committing suicide if her son should marry an outcaste girl. Obi's parents, who represent a departure from tradition in the father's conversion to Christianity, resent their son's corresponding act of unconventionality and revolt. This resistance to the recurrence of family fate constitutes one of the central ironies in the narrative. Caught in the stranglehold of a traditional ethos which preempts any creative response to change; the older generation thwarts the younger generation's attempts to grow and find fulfilment in a new way of life. Obi's assumptive fallacy in identifying himself with western liberal values creates a semantic gap between his inherited and acquired

cultures. He fails to comprehend, much less master, the rooted anarchies in the traditional culture, while his family fail to comprehend the nature and scope of the aspiration underlying the shift from tradition to modernity affecting the young. There is thus hardly any room for the dynamic of synthesis as a mediating factor in the conflict of cultures.

Clara, his fiancée too becomes the victim of the romantic agony, as it were. Unable to fully understand Obi's predicament, she blames it all on his double standards and misinterprets his tardiness in deciding on the marriage as a sign of personal betrayal. Her sensitivity is hurt to a point of suspecting Obi's motives. Obi seeks economic security before settling down to married life, and the conflict between status-seeking and personal fulfilment results in his alienation from both his public and private worlds. He wavers at the critical moments of decision and plunges into wrong choices all the time. As G.D. Killam observes:

The core of the novel is the moral dilemma
in which Obi finds himself and the conflict in the novel is produced by the clash between the strength of his moral awareness on the one hand and his almost total lack of moral courage in sustaining it. He vacillates at critical moments. 9

When Clara becomes pregnant, Obi is faced with one such major crisis, and is completely lost in indecision.

As he sat in the driver's seat, paralysed by his thoughts, the doctor and Clara came out and entered a car that was parked by the side of the road. The doctor must have said something about him because Clara looked in his direction once and immediately took her eyes away. Obi wanted to rush out of his car and shout: 'Stop. Let's go and get married now', but he couldn't and didn't. The doctor's car drove away. 10

Clara herself has to take the initiative, and is determined to get herself out of the crisis and submits to an abortion. She gets herself admitted in a hospital and refuses to see Obi again. Obi feels guilty for having failed Clara in the hour of crisis. He is compelled to

yield to the temptations of corruption as his financial position has taken a critical turn. Driven to the brink, he borrows money, and in order to pay his debts, he is forced to accept bribes and his decline takes a precipitous course towards material as well as moral corruption. Clara leaves him; ironically enough, his mother, who has been laid in bed with sickness for quite a long time, leaves him and the world. Obi is thus cut off from the two personal loyalties which, though in conflict, represent the finer elements in his character supporting his ideal constructions of a durable personal universe.

Released from these loyalties, his drive for status and power becomes absolute, with the result that his sense of moral responsibility is excluded from the scope of his actions. Virtue, once lost, like virginity, is lost forever; and the first step gone astray, all measures of the finer moral discrimination are lost. The degeneration of his heroic promise in a world of amoral contingency is finally climaxed by his arrest, trial and punishment. The negative inversions in Obi's personality are thus related to the inner contradictions in his social and cultural environment. This
world is characterised by its inability to cope with change and respond to the various challenges posed by time and circumstance enabling its members to utilise social opportunities for moral self-assertion. Obi's loss of his creative will results in a radical failure to transcend the limitations of the situational ethic and achieve an orderly synthesis amid the contending choices he is confronted with. However, while presenting the protagonist as a victim of his circumstances, Achebe does not underplay his personal inadequacies which contribute to his unheroic predicament. At the same time, Achebe does project Obi as a typical product of his times and of the malaise of contemporary human alienation, which is particularly acute in transitional societies. For, in these, the past survives in its decreative context holding the present to ransom and instigating an adverse relation to the future. Caught between the archiasm of tradition and the anarchism of change, the protagonist succumbs to the anguish of ambivalence and becomes a drifter, a foiled circuitous wanderer, carried away by the rush of events, and isolated from self as well as society. In a sense, Obi is a latter day version of his
grandfather Okonkwo. Both give themselves away to tumult rather than action, acting in panic rather than structured response. Bewildered by a world altered by change beyond their comprehension, they cannot bring to bear on it the old predictable human values and responses at their disposal. To a certain extent, the dismay and the discomfiture of the various witnesses to the tragedy of Obi at the beginning of the narrative continue to prevail till the end of the novel, emphasising an element of existential indeterminacy at work in reality. It is in throwing open this line of enquiry and speculation that Achebe provides a Conradian dimension to his analysis of Obi's predicament, making it an existential rather than a merely social or psychological study of human nature. The unease that takes such a heavy toll of the protagonist's nobler impulses and possibilities is symptomatic of our times. In dealing with it, by means of his detached and civilised vision, Achebe lends to it an artistic design, transforming Ibo history and experience into a larger human transcript. No Longer at Ease, more compellingly than Things Fall Apart, or even Arrow of God, projects man in society in all the tragic immediacy of his quest and crisis as an individual as well as an archetype.
Achebe presents Obi as the main dramatic centre of *No Longer at Ease* as he lands in the temporal chaos of No-man's-land projecting the story of his decline and fall as a tragedy of the many-sided alienation of the individual who is at a loss to comprehend his situation fully. The novel also shows the predicament of a whole society, whose inability to cope with the forces of tradition and change and achieve a stable synthesis between them is in the final analysis responsible for the failure of the protagonist. The overlapping allegiances to conflicting cultures and their divergent values and norms produce confusions and uncertainties in individual human response. Although society has moved away from the situation prevailing at the time of *Things Fall Apart* and the forces of Christianity have superseded the old tribal ethic, a homogeneous tradition has not yet emerged out of the cultural confrontation. The barriers to understanding and communication continue to hinder any smooth social action, while the hold of tradition still exercises a debilitating influence on the individual will to act. The Umuofian ethic of tribal loyalty becomes
grafted on the life-style of the city dwellers who invoke the old tribal customs in order to gain political power and economic advancement. The community places a premium on western education because their tribesmen in a position of status and influence in the new structures of power may work for the tribe's cause. When Obi returns to Umuofia after his western sojourn, this expectation is emphasised by the leaders who celebrate his homecoming by reminding him of his duty to the community by handling all their land cases and public issues for them. The reception that the U.P.U. gives him in Lagos implies the assumption that what the community values is not his radical transformation but a return to the old communal interest. In other words, Obi's western education is considered an investment and a possession to be turned to advantage in favour of tribal solidarity and self-interest. When his individual ethic poses a threat to these interests, he is subjected to financial and economic pressures as well as social and tribal blackmail. When the hero falls, what is questioned is not his taking of bribes but his doing so in an unwise and inappropriate form. Thus Obi's western derived concepts of civic morality and individual integrity are subjected to a severe
pressure from the target group in his own society which views his elitist status as a means for collective gain rather than individual opportunity. Consequently the tribal bond becomes a social bondage for him.

Obi's alienation from his own society makes him an outsider, while at the same time he is also depersonalised in his familial situation. His father, a fanatically pious Christian, is bitterly aware of his own alienation in the past from the tribal bond of kinship, which now forces him to adopt a hostile and almost belligerent attitude to his son's marriage to an 'Osu' girl. The notion of family honour makes him speak in the language of Okonkwo the elder and even his derisive laughter resenting his son's unconventional marriage proposal has the minatory ring of an ancestral taboo. Thus Achebe demonstrates how external change has not affected significantly the values of the older order and how the basic antinomies between the western and tribal world-views continue to hold sway on people. The indestructible and unrelenting solidarity of the tribe defies all innovation and modification in the external structures of society. In the result,
the tribal culture ceases to be a powerful creative agent in the harmonisation of contending elements in its own structure. The absence of a dynamic balance between tradition and individuality becomes the main source of the protagonist's personality crisis. His homecoming dramatises the agony of disaffiliation. His life as a public servant becomes separated from the footholds of genuine selfhood. His double alienation from self and society may be seen as stemming from the community's incapacity to integrate it fully into the new contexts of the temporal process. In such a society, the individual is agonisingly excluded both from the cyclic time of the old tribe and the linear time of the westernised society. By losing Clara, Obi loses his future as well. In consequence, he dwells in an uneasy and unresolved present. The loss of civic virtue naturally becomes a psychological and spiritual loss which society is unable to compensate by any meaningful regenerative sources, because it is itself ridden by the tyranny of an infructuous past.

The clashes and contradictions in the collective psyche which make the community decreative are further compounded by the persistence of antithetical images of each
other entertained by the African and western cultures. The African view of the west and its institutions is based on the capacity of western education to support meaningfully the African aspiration for power, status and self-interest in the process of modernisation. The western view of Africa, the one maintained by Mr. Green, is not so much rooted in the liberal individualistic ethic in the cynically patronising myth of African innocence invented as a means to exaggerate the Whiteman's sense of superiority wearing the public masks of duty and glory. Obi at times gives the impression of being a black Sahib in resenting African self-interest and idealising the European conception of duty and service. He consequently becomes a misplaced individual, an African in the European world and a European in the African world, and out of place in both the worlds because of the unstable synthesis of the two elements in his personality. He feels that he is

"but a human being wearing a mask". 11

He lacks the proverbial aplomb of Odogwu, the ambidexterous pastor, as well as the calvinistic sternness of Mr. Green, the British executive, and helplessly succumbs to the feeling of unease and discomfiture.

Thus Achebe traces the moral and psychological decline of the hero to the inner contradictions within the society itself and presents the basic dichotomies in culture as the main causative factors. The divided society, with its fatal recurrences and reversals adding to the ambiguous nature of historical experience, is hardly conducive to the emergence of a sufficiently accommodated individual who can in turn add to the creativity of his society his own leadership qualities. The new realism with which Obi views his predicament has no room either for idealism or moral passion, but only reveals a reproachful empiricism from which the feeling of guilt is excluded. A weary comprehension of the existential debacle is recognised as the only logical beginning and end of the ongoing process of life. In this sense, Obi stands out as an absurdist hero. As David Carroll points out:
Since all other possibilities have been systematically destroyed by the events of the novel, he has turned his guilt and despair into a philosophy, a new realism. This is all that Obi can salvage from the rich double heritage of his upbringing and education, but for a moment it seems that he may be able to accommodate himself to life in Lagos. He is not allowed the final comfort of his cynical realism. To the bitter end his conscience demands that the bribes he accepts must not overrule the regulations too blatantly, and so his last compromise proves to be neither profitable nor honest. His apprehension by the police at the end is a release from a dilemma which has no end.

Achebe records, with sympathy and understanding, the unhappy truths of self and society from the standpoint of a traumatically disillusioned individual. Yet he maintains a narrative distance from the protagonist, who is an impatient idealist finally succumbing to the force of circumstances, and whose corruption is viewed as symptomatic of the African dilemma at large. In No Longer at Ease, Achebe's sociological discriminations move him towards an embittered satire which goes beyond psychological stocktaking of human

failure, and castigates the generic political evils of individuals and systems in the new cultural order. The title of the novel indicates the unease of society in reexamining and transforming its values, attitudes and interests to allow for greater social mobility and equity, on one hand, and the failure of the individual's emotive idealism to forge creative responses to the challenges of continuous transition, on the other hand. *No Longer at Ease* thus presents the double crisis of self and society in the African setting from a synchronic rather than a historical perspective and dramatises the uneasiness of men and systems that find themselves incapable of going with time at its pace.