While *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* present the crisis and conflict in African society as a product of external forces at work in the colonial situation, *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People* offer a synchronic of the African dilemma in the aftermath of independence when the traditional way of life has yielded place to the new social and political order. In *No Longer at Ease*, the African personality succumbs to the unresolved tension between two cultures in the changed historical context, and the novelist diagnoses the social conflict in terms of what happens to an individual’s character as he falls from idealism and integrity into temptation and corruption. The focus of *A Man of the People* is the disintegration of the whole fabric of society, which is demonstrated through the violent distortions in the pattern of human relationships. As a political novel *A Man of the People* is more comprehensive in
its range and unsparing in its satirical indignation. The action of the story moves around the central dramatic relationship between Odili and Nanga who represent two different value systems and mutually opposed attitudes to political morality. Odili is a political romanticist with a predeliction for the modern political theories of the West, while Nanga is a practical politician who has a realistic perception of his people's primitive loyalties from which political power is understandably derived. But in the all-pervasive corruption that has set in, both these opposing attitudes and differing values are negated until the two protagonists are reduced to failure. In fact, Odili is perilously on the brink of becoming another Nanga. Two crafts in a line meet, and in this collision, the political ethic is shipwrecked. Nangaism almost becomes the political style of the new African societies, indeed, Negritude with a vengeance.

In reducing the two sides of the narrative dialectic to zero, Achebe expresses a sense of despair and disillusionment. The novelist as teacher appears to be thwarted by the incorrigibility of his people whom he intends to
shock into taking a more responsible view of public affairs. As Ngugi Wa Thiongo observes:

Now in the new novel, the teacher talks to his pupils, directly. He has lost patience. He retains self-control in that he does not let anger drive him into incoherent rage and wild lashing. Instead he takes his satirical whip and raps his pupils - with anger, of course, sometimes with pathos verging on tears, but often with bitterness, though this is hardly discernible because below it flow compassion and a zest for life. His pupils are - or ought to be - disturbed. For in *A Man of the People* the teacher accuses them all of complicity in the corruption that has beset our society. Your indifference and cynicism has given birth to and nurtured Chief Nanga, he says. 1

In showing Odili as no better than the Chief Nanga, Achebe makes the fact clear that the whole society has become cynical and corrupt. The apathy and indifference, the greed and opportunism of the people themselves have brought about such a situation. In the mere anarchy which is let loose, the good things in society perish along with the bad. Max is murdered. Odili is defeated. Chief Koko

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is shot dead. The unruly mobs and the private armies bring about the fall of the government and the inevitable military coup that follows. As Achebe clarifies, in the words of the protagonist:

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. 2

A major aspect of the crisis in political life presented in the novel is the total alienation of the intellectuals from the people. The educated elite are out of touch with the masses among whom prevails a marked anti-intellectual feeling. Intoxicated by the academic degrees, obtained from prestigious western universities, they assume an attitude of scornful superiority towards the people and the native culture and its traditions. The people also respond similarly by cultivating a hostile sentiment towards the

educated elite and by preferring their own 'men of the people' for elected positions and leadership, show their democratic chagrin. Thus the whole process of exploitation assumes a complex pattern of competitive corruption. The people have to pay a heavy price by way of the repression that they are subjected to by their own chosen leaders, who adopt grossly Machiavellian tactics to keep themselves in power. Consequently, there is a breakdown of the entire political process leaving the military takeover as the only possible alternative. The leaders of the military regime now claim to be the real men of the people, running the democracy for the people. The novel is structured in terms of these shifting political ironies and reversals which characterise public life and the fluctuations in the private fortunes of the main contenders for power.

Intellectuals in the country discuss the need of the hour, as political power is sought to be manipulated through one pseudo-event after another. As Odili records the scene.

The country was on the verge of chaos. The
Trade Unions and the Civil Service Union made loud noises and gave no notice of nationwide strikes. The Shops closed for fear of looting. The Governor-General according to rumour called on the Prime Minister to resign which he finally got round to doing three weeks later.

Meanwhile I was summoned to Borî by Max for consultation and to be present at the launching of the C.P.C.

But their political analysis and discourse show an evident lack of political reality which is attenuated away into conceptual sophistry. Their idealism is thwarted by its own overreaching aspiration which turns it to self-regarding action in the political context of public life.

Odili, Max and other elite aspirants for leadership seem to be unaware of the prevalent anti-intellectual feeling in the country. As a matter of fact the Minister of Finance, a first-rate economist with a Ph.D. in Public Finance, is dismissed only because of his wise plan to deal with the situation of the slump in the international coffee market.

3. Chinua Achebe, A Man of the People, p.112.
that affects the coffee planters. To add insult to injury, he is abused as a traitor and punished as a conspirator. Even the newspapers stress the point that a man need not be an economist to be Chancellor of the Exchequer or a doctor to be Minister of Health. Loyalty to the party and to the nation is what is required most. The true leaders and statesmen are not, according to the people's reasoning, those intoxicated with Oxford, Cambridge or Harvard degrees but those who speak the language of the people, think with them and function in a style that appeals to them.

Away with the damnable and expensive University education which only alienates an African from his rich and ancient culture and puts him above his people. 4

Odili receives a highly humiliating treatment from the villagers in Anata, number 136 constituency. The villagers remain indifferent even when he is manhandled and ill-treated in the public. They even seem to gloat, in secret pleasure, over an intellectual's discomfiture. As Odili

I stretched my hand to take his. But instead of a handshake he smartly described an arc at my head and knocked off my red cap. The small crowd thought it was very funny and laughed boisterously. The rascal kicked me behind. I was ready for a fight then but the cowardly fellow had taken to his heels - to the applause of most of the people around, the very people I had assumed came to hear me. I decided there and then that I was in hostile territory and must recruit a bodyguard and move to my own village. 5

A comic aspect of the situation is that, while the intellectuals find themselves in an adverse relationship to the people, the uneducated rabble-rousing politicians seek respectability by acquiring the trappings of elitist culture and courting honorary degrees from their client institutions of learning. For instance, Chief Nanga seeks this kind of compensatory honour when he receives honorary degrees, a new form of the old tradition of tribal title-

5- Chimua Achebe, A Man of the People, p.114.
taking. At the same time, Odili's house-boy who has completed the sixth standard is forced to find satisfaction as a hired domestic. Another interesting comic element is the Orwellian decline of language in its ethical content through political abuse. The politicians practise the kind of hypnotising political rhetoric which aims at concealing their real motives and intentions in the heady flow of populist oratory and folksy eloquence. In the tradition of the tribe, rhetoric and oratory have been the accepted means of stating the truth and effecting a judicious balance among conflicting versions of public feeling. But now language becomes the instrument of solipsistic propaganda at which the power-seeking demagogues are adepts, whereas the alienated intellectuals lapse into abstractions which are beyond the comprehension of the people. As Arthur Ravenscroft observes:

It is chiefly through their own manipulation of language that the politicians in A Man of the People condemn themselves. Their crude anti-intellectualism finds expression in the thoughtless flow of platform rhetoric with which they attain a meretricious eloquence in English. 6

An example of the instant semantics of the politician's double-speak, richly leavened with metaphor, Achebe describes one of the scenes thus:

'Owner of the book!' cried one admirer assigning in those three brief words the ownership of the White man's language to the Honourable Minister, who turned round and beamed on the speaker. 7

The shrewd politician, by his charismatic appeal, his dangerous geniality, and his tactful handling of language and the instruments of propaganda, subverts the people's sense of reality by weaning them away from the immediate issues and turning their attention to inconsequential loyalties. The feeling of protest is transformed into one of resignation and is directed towards imaginary scape-goats. If there are no enemies, politics must invent some, and the indurated tribal leaders succeed in inventing them in the form and image of the intellectuals. Consequently while Nanga, like Antony in Julius Caesar

succeeds with the people, Odili, like Brutus, fails, and invites upon himself the disdain, ridicule and wrath of the people. Odili is laughed out of grace when he makes remarks against the corrupt politicians and of their crude, unprincipled amassing of wealth.

As he gave instance after instance of how some of our leaders who were ash-mouthed paupers five years ago had become near-millionaires under our very eyes, many of the audience laughed. But it was the laughter of resignation to misfortune. No one among them swore vengeance; no one shook with rage or showed any sign of fight. They understood what was being said, they had seen it with their own eyes. But what did anyone expect them to do? 8

A dramatic insight which Achebe reveals through his narrative irony is the moral ambivalence of populist feeling in a political crisis. People's ire is turned, not so much against the corruption and depravity of their leaders but against their lack of promptitude and resourcefulness in covering the tracks. Nothing succeeds like success in politics, and

failure becomes a political crime, as it were. On the other side, when things get out of control, people lose their political will as well as their leadership and relapse into a despairing resignation and a benumbed fatalism which result in a political vacuum which the nature of power abhors. A fertile soil is thus prepared for a military takeover of the people, for the inspired terror which, as Odili feels,

in the end was our society's only hope of salvation. 9

II

In 'A Man of the People', Achebe presents the Ibo society in the highly politicised context of post-Independent Nigeria in which the drive for power has made corruption almost a way of life of which the Hon'ble M.A. Nanga is the typical representative. Achebe's fictional aim is to expose and satirise the insidious evils that have entered

into the institutional structures of the society and thereby offer a frame work of values in which the punitive logic of satire turns into an emphasis on moral discrimination.

Achebe reveals a society which has no longer the excuse of a colonial hand to rationalise the failings in private and public behaviour of the people, but must take upon itself the responsibility for the corruption and depravity that have crept into the body politic. With the easy access to power and leadership gained by political independence, the corporate character of the people undergoes a drastic change, what with the old values yielding place to the expediencies of political power aimed at fostering personal interests above those of the community. The aims of this new, overtly democratic order are material progress, personal fortune and social status. Political corruption, economic exploitation and cultural romanticism become the means of achieving these aims, and Chief Nanga is the real man of the people both in the literal and ironic senses of the title. Odili, the sensual man, with a pronounced zest for life, although himself uncorrupted, is drawn into the situation and, under the stress of circumstances, loses
his innocence and comes close to being another Nanga. The convergence of these two unidealised individuals towards a shared depravity is the main theme of Achebe's novel. Together they bring about a turn of events when corruption becomes a dominant force in public life and makes a violent military coup inevitable to fill the political vacuum.

The novel opens with the visit of Nanga, the Minister for Culture, to the Anata Grammar School where he had been a teacher at one time, and where his former student Odili is now working as a teacher too.

Nanga recognises his old student Odili and to the dismay of the Headmaster treats him cordially and even invites him to his home in the city. Odili is aware of the moral decay which has set in both among the leaders and their followers.

Here were silly, ignorant villagers dancing themselves lame and waiting to blow off their gun powder in honour of one of those who had started the country off down the slopes of inflation .... They were not only ignorant but cynical. Tell them that this man had used his position to enrich himself
and they would ask you as my father did - if you thought that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth. 10

The political cynicism of the leaders is revealed in the assassination of a former Minister of Finance, with a brilliant academic record and the right perspectives on the economic situation, for being un-African. On the other hand, Nanga the selfish, corrupt and ambitious tribal chief is considered to be the true leader, verily a man of the people. Odili, the young graduate school master challenges chief M.A. Nanga, the corrupt Cabinet Minister. In fact, Odili has much aversion towards the minister right from the beginning of his association with him as school master. While the Headmaster tries his best to please the minister, Odili maintains a sarcastic distance towards the visiting dignitary. Odili observes how the village folk admire the minister.

"Owner of the book!" cried one admirer, assigning in those three brief words the ownership

of the Whiteman's language to the Honourable Minister, who turned round and beamed on the speaker. 11

Odili with his western education and rational views fostered by it, recoils against the attitude of tribal sycophancy of the people towards the chief whose source of power is drawn from the tribal ethic. Odili holds political views of a far different type and has political ambitions too, which leaders like Nanga, tempered by the realities of public life, consider to be impractical and hence ludicrous.

His own student has become his antagonist, which Nanga is unable to anticipate but, clever politician as he is, he turns his histrionic charm on him, practising the subtleties of disarming agreeableness towards a dangerous rival. He invites Odili to his home in the city, welcomes him wholeheartedly, introduces him to the members of his family, allots him a decent lodging in a part of his house during his stay there, and accords him V.I.P. treatment.

Besides, he takes him to Chief Koko, Minister for Overseas Training in order to make Odili get the scholarship he wants in pursuit of his studies abroad.

However, being an educated person, brought up on the ideals of western rationalism and civic virtue, Odili sees through Nanga's deceptive mask. He holds the resentful view that Nanga is absolutely corrupt and beyond redemption despite his public avowals of honesty:

my motto is: Do the right and shame the Devil. 11-4

Odili is critical, and feels himself morally superior to Nanga. He describes himself as a person who simply couldn't stoop to lick any Big Man's boots, but when Nanga invites him readily accepts his invitation. His vulnerability to the temptation of a good life is exposed by Nanga's motivated hospitality.

The eccentric behaviour of Chief Koko, the Minister for Overseas Scholarship, with his comic geniality and pseudo-patriotism, underscores Odili's own perception of the seasonable duplicity and blatant opportunism of leaders in the political behaviour of his times. But Odili's ideal of political honesty is subverted by his romantic instinct

for the good life which draws him into the unheroic reality of the political world represented by Koko and Nanga. This 'personal heresy' puts a different gloss on the events and personalities he encounters. Whereas earlier, he had envied Nanga and his like for the high positions held by them and despised the low morality which they practised, he now views them admiringly as models of human dynamism. The lure of power and the dream of high living tempt him into a fascinated acceptance of the amoral politics of his rivals.

His earlier ideals begin to look rather attenuated in the midst of the whirl of activity created by Nanga's indefatigable energy. 12

Odili discovers that he is hypnotised by the treatment accorded to him at Nanga's and by the luxury of the suite assigned to him. The question of bribery and corruption, which he aims to root out, becomes unanswerable to him and he feels that he is himself no exception to the general law of political behaviour. He thinks he can now discern the reasons behind the unscrupulous behaviour of Nanga

and other ministers, though he still condemns their crudeness and vulgarity, their corruption and depravity. Swinging between untried idealism and the meritricious affluence of public life, Odili's unresolved political sense makes him easily vulnerable to the lure of power, status and fortune. The ambivalence of Odili's attitude is revealed when he observes:

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 that 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 ourselves in. 13

Odili, despite the abstract clarity of his discernment cannot help his fatal attraction to Nanga whose glad eye casts a disarming enchantment on him. Odili also becomes aware of the contrariousness of public opinion and

attitudes, which seem to exonerate and even admire self-dramatising leaders who exploit popular feeling by the techniques of propaganda and the vote-catching rhetoric of promises and allurements. Nanga's unscrupulous practices have been rewarded not only with wealth and status but also with popular acclaim and respectability. He may lack integrity, but he is adored and liked by those very people whom he had exploited and cheated. Odili is fascinated by this paradox and discovers that people always get the leader they deserve and desire. Nanga, a naturally gifted maverick of populist sentiment, has exploited the solipsistic tendency of mass opinion, and has projected himself as a man of the people, by means of his ready wit, folksy charisma and affected cordiality and benign humanity. His vast and intimate knowledge of the people's psychology has enabled him to flatter their needs and pander to their appetites in order to acquire and consolidate his own power. His greed for wealth and his covetousness for position are efficiently covered by the mask of his public image as a complaisant and benevolent servant of his people. His unerring worldly knowledge and his cunning political instinct have combined to attract popular appeal and centralise delegated power in his hands.
In fact, Odili's growing perceptions of Nanga's political personality constitute his education in the political process in the post-colonial situation. But ironically enough, his perceptual processes are rather theoretical and abstract, and fail him in mastering experience through knowledge. Because of this untutored political adolescence abetted by his incorrigible naivety, Odili is unable to take an adequate measure of men and affairs. It takes a personal shock of recognition to undeceive him out of his intellectual innocence. In fact, he is stunned and repelled when his girlfriend Elsie is sought to be enticed away from him by Nanga on the pretext that she is only a good time girl, the impression Odili himself had created. Nanga makes advances to Elsie who screams, but Odili doesn't go to her rescue, and leaves with a feeling of being ridiculed. Odili remains inactive and apathetic when the occasion demands otherwise. He just cannot show the natural reflexes of a cuckolded lover, for the cue for passion is lost in the inertia of self-hatred. In a tone of unavailing rationalisation of events, he remarks:

I find it difficult in retrospect to understand my inaction at that moment. A sort of
paralysis had spread over my limbs, while an intense pressure was building up inside my chest. But before it reached raging point I felt it siphoned off, leaving me empty inside and out. 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. 14

The traumatic event ends Odili's close association with Nanga who is now held in deep disdain and contempt. Odili seeks revenge by seeking to seduce Edna, Nanga's parlour-wife. Edna, sensing his motive, admonishes him and keeps herself away from him. Thus Odili becomes Nanga's rival and antagonist in his personal as well as political life. Foiled in personal rivalry, Odili seeks to attack Nanga on the political plane, holding him responsible for the chaotic state of affairs in the country. He becomes an active member of the Common people's convention formed by young intellectuals headed by Max. But the convention is no match to Nanga, the seasoned man of the people, who has

no political scruples and is ready to use all Machiavellian means at his disposal to liquidate his opponents, Odili experiences the brutality of Nanga who assaults him on the public platform where they both appear as contestants to explain their ideologies and manifestos to the people. The audience laughs at Odili's political immaturity while acclimining Nanga's experienced leadership. Nanga sets against Odili all the weapons in his political armoury, hired thugs, obscene propaganda, character assassination, blackmail and mayhem. The voters are heavily bribed and doused with all kinds of wild political promises, with the result that Nanga wins at the hustings. Odili has neither money, nor strategy. He is a misplaced intellectual in the complicated world of political intrigue, deceit and electoral diplomacy.

As Edna's father remarks, when approached for votes, Odili is quite insignificant.

'My in-law is like a bull', he said, 'and your challenge is like the challenge of a tick to a bull. The tick fills its belly with blood from the back of the bull and the bull doesn't even know it's there. He
Nanga, as a typical hard-boiled politician asserts that politics is not the right subject for persons like Odili who ought to help the nation by remaining merely as experts in their respective fields. He comes to Odili's native village when Odili and his father, who is the local Chairman of P.O.P. in Urua, discuss and chat. Odili's father receives the Minister who in turn greets Odili and offers him his long-cherished scholarship and even an amount of two hundred and fifty pounds. Odili's father is astonished at the Minister's kindness and makes a speech supporting Nanga and admonishing his son. Nanga advises Odili to leave politics and prosecute his studies abroad.

'Your good friend Maxwell Kulamo has more sense than you. He has already taken his money and agreed to step down for Chief Koko.'

'Impossible !'

'Look at him. He doesn't even know what is happening; our great politician !

You stay in the bush here wasting your time and your friends are busy putting their money in the bank in Bori. Anyway you are not a small boy. I have done my best and, God so good, your father is my living witness. Take your money and take your scholarship to go and learn more book; the country needs experts like you and leave the dirty game of politics to us who know how to play it ...! 16

Obviously the people want not the elite, scholars, intellectuals and idealists, to provide political leadership since the nation is governed by corrupt politicians like Nanga who insist on their share in the national cake and the people are in fact spell-bound by the speeches and promises of the opportunistic politicians. Odili is defeated but his friend Max is killed—run down by one of Koko's jeeps during the election campaign.

Odili's political defeat and discomfiture are episodically underscored by the people's treatment of the tradesman Josiah who tries to make juju with the blind beggar Azoge's stick. Josiah invites Azoge the blind man to his shop and

gives him rice to eat and palm-wine to drink. Azoge is elated and thinks that Josiah is a kind man; but the latter secretly takes away the blindman's stick and keeps a new stick which is like the old one. However, Azoge notices the change and begins to shout till a crowd reach the shop and understand the situation. Many comments and gestures against Josiah's evil motive follow and within a week Josiah is ruined; no man, woman or child goes near his shop, and he becomes the victim of the social boycott. Josiah's action is against the will of the whole people (the owner).

Josiah has taken away enough for the owner to notice. 17

Josiah is outlawed because of his low principles and standards in life while Odili is defeated because of his inexperienced high principles in the political sphere which is corrupt and immoral.

The Josiah episode gives a symbolic edge to the predicament of Odili. Democracy is the blindman's stick over

which the fledgeling politician cannot practise the art of jujú, or the electoral magic, and failing in that he must necessarily invite public wrath and humiliation. It is inexperience and naivete, and not deception and corruption that meet with popular disapproval and resentment. Somehow, in politics cleverness and cunning get rewarded, while honesty and integrity meet their Waterloo. Nevertheless, politics is an art of possibility, and an excess of political passion invites defeat, and ideology, no less than exploitation overreaching itself becomes counterproductive. Even the cleverest of politicians cannot cheat all people all the time, and once their credibility is lost, leaders are unceremoniously thrown out by popular upsurge and upheaval. After all, there is such a thing as the worm turning, and the backlash of public opinion may wipe out the most cunningly built-up political careers. The mercurial shifts in mass-politics are demonstrated in the aftermath of the election during which the excessive graft and corruption of those coming to power begets its own populist nemesis. Chief Nanga and his henchmen are removed as ingloriously from office as they had come to it, when they are dislodged by the Military coup. In a sense, people do not tolerate
those who overexercise their power and authority, for taking away more than the owners can notice at any given time compels them to make a hue and cry. Public opinion is now expressed in the very same words in which the villagers of Anata had spoken of Josiah, the abominated trader.

Only in their case the words had meaning. The owner was the village, and the village had a mind; it could say no to sacrifice. But in the affairs of the nation there was no owner, the laws of the village became powerless.

In the context of the detribalisation of the post-colonial society, there has been an erosion of the old semantics of political collectivity, and public opinion has become the shifty stratagem of a mindless mob reacting, rather than acting, towards political change. In such a situation, it is the strength of the solitary individual rather than the collective will, which is likely to provide the basis for redemptive action. In fact, when Edna agrees to marry Odili, the humanistic balance appears to be restored in favour of the sensitive, if defeated idealism of Odili. Although he is not especially cut out for heroism, he learns from inside

the circle, what the circle is, and the novel ends with an emphasis on Odili's acquisition of a clear-eyed view of political realities, in the isolation of his convalescence in the hospital. At the end of his political tether, Odili tries to sort out the meaning of the exquisite chaos he has gone through, and ponders:

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. And I don't mean it to shock or sound clever. For I do honestly believe that in the fat dripping, gummy, eat—and—let—eat regime just ended—which inspired the common saying that a man could only be sure of what he had put away safely in his gut or, in language ever more suited to the times: 'You chop, me self I chop, palaver finish'; a regime in which you saw a fellow cursed in the morning for stealing a blind man's stick 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—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. 19

The major interest in No Longer at Ease is the failure of the ambiguous hero pitted against the forces at work in a hybrid society, and its chief motivation is sociological. A Man of the People extends that theme towards a political dimension. It presents the conflict between two different value systems in relation to political power as embodied in the rival protagonists Odili, and Chief Manga.

A Man of the People is ostensibly a political novel in which public ethics and private morality are shown in a complex relationship and are contextualised by a social situation in which expediency is of the essence of political behaviour. Achebe provides the narrative framework in the retrospective consciousness of Odili, the narrator, who presents the story from a point of embarrassed hindsight and comments on the events into which he had been plunged at a time of political crisis in his country. Odili, adopting the role of the witness self, ponders over the facts and the causes of his failure, both as an individual and as a public figure. He is an unreliable narrator in the sense that his involvement in politics culminates in a sense of cynical detachment.
His alienation from his people results in a feeling of disillusionment which he cannot overcome through a feint of detachment. Contrasted with him is Chief Nanga whose blatant opportunism is accompanied by a warmth and vitality of personality. This keeps him close to the primitive loyalties of the society which he exploits in order to attain personal power and status. The action of the novel centres upon the choice between Odili's romantic idealism and Nanga's manipulative pragmatism whose ironic implications are dramatised through the reminiscential narration of Odili. The political realities of the third world society in the post-colonial aftermath are described by juxtaposing the personalities of the two rival protagonists. Odili's political naivete prevents him from taking a full and correct measure of his adversary, Chief Nanga who, as a political impresario exercises the kind of personal charm and hypnotic cunning which raise him to the status of a man of the people. But under the impact of various events that finally overwhelm him, Odili grows in political awareness and comes to realise, though belatedly, the complex nature of politics as an impossible art of the possible. Coming under the influence of the charismatic spell of Nanga, Odili, like many others in his society, becomes a mimic man adapting Nanga's ways and
thereby claiming the same status of the man of the people.

As David Carroll points out,

Odili is discovering the paradox that
detachment implies lack of understanding
while involvement precludes objectivity. 20

Odili's proclaimed public morality is compromised
by his private vendetta against his rival, which contributes
to the ambiguity of his situation. While Odili is repelled
by the blatant immorality underlying Manga's political activi-
ties, he is, at the same time, attracted by Manga's politi-
cal wit and skill in making his various manoeuvres against
his opponents. The narrator's attitude towards his antago-
nist from initial contempt and disdain to sympathy and detach-
ment. Consequently, his narrative becomes a kind of personal
apology through which he seeks to rationalise his own politi-
cal naivete as well as to clarify for himself the meaning of
events of which he could not take full stock at the time of
their actual occurrence. In a sense, Achebe seems to be

presenting in the character of Odili the same kind of personal decline and corruption that Obi in *No Longer at Ease* had been exposed to. Odili's fastidiousness crumbles under the weight of political actuality that throws a cordon around him and limits his political behaviour and modifies his personal style of life. His early idealism gives place to the political ethic of survival which is devoid of any moral sensibility. Odili's ideological hostility towards Nanga eventually assumes a personal dimension; and his attempts at seeking revenge against the Chief subverts his excessively high principles in political life. His attempts to strike against his opponent by wooing his rival's parlour wife away from her husband smacks of a strategem invented by his alienated cuckolded self. Analysing his political motives, as a historian of his own confessional chronicle, Odili observes:

> It was difficult to say; things seemed so mixed up; my revenge, my new political ambition and the girl. And perhaps it was just as well that my motives should entangle and reinforce one another. 21

Odili's intellectual crisis is made to stand for the decline of political romanticism and the emergence of a new political realism out of the chastening experiences undergone by the adolescent politician in the third world situation. In the process, the vehicles and tools of political power employed by Odili's party come to bear cynical resemblance to those adopted by unprincipled politicians like Nanga. As David Carroll points out:

The private self emerges from its defen­sive cocoon and declares itself, while the public self comes down from its impossi­bility high and disillusioned standards and seeks to achieve the possible. 22

As Odili interprets the past events of his career, he realises how he had been driven to the wrong choices all the time, for he is the kind of person who could never make the right choice at any time. In his climactic denunciation of the man of the people as an 'honorable thief', Odili realises that the one significant gesture on his part as an angry idealist had been rendered inconsequential. He had

grossly underestimated the popular instinct for political charisma, which makes people worship apparent success, unmindful of the hidden duplicity and chicanery of the successful demagogue. While he is interned in the hospital amid the confusion of the political melodrama that is enacted outside, Odili acquires a new sense of reality tempered by experience and chastened by hindsight. The military intervention during the political turmoil turns out to be an ironic reassertion of the tribal ethic of striking back when leadership overreaches itself by taking enough for the owner to see. The episode of the blindman’s stick is, in this sense an allegorical epitome of the political instinct of the people who in the last analysis hold the key to all political power. An appropriate, and publicly acceptable balance between political visibility and political invisibility seems to be the requirement of success in the world of power.

In *A Man of the People* Achebe thus demonstrates the relationship between the leader and the people in African societies whereas in all modern societies the political will of the people, although temporarily blinded by self-
interest and opportunism could, at the time of crisis, re-assert itself and remove the kind of leadership which threatens to undermine its ultimate sovereignty. Although the novel was tragically prophetic of the events that subsequently took place in Nigeria, projecting a cynical and disdainful view of political morality in the new nations, its dramatic thrust is to go beyond the titular irony and indicate the possibility of a new order based on the awesome power of the democratic instinct and will of the people.

No man however great can win judgement against a Clan. 23

This immemorial wisdom of the tribe has not been invalidated by the duplicity and deceitfulness of political leaders wearing the mask of respectability and popular sympathy. In this sense, what comes dangerously close to a political parody is transformed into a political fable in which the values of democratic hope are obliquely reaffirmed. This is achieved by Achebe by adopting the technique of the point of view, in which the unreliable narrator-protago-

nist plays a catalytic role in enabling the readers to reverse his judgments of events and personalities. There seems to emerge a semantic perspective in which the narrator's motives are purified or neutralised. Irony affirms a basic faith by indirection in disengaging the reader's judgement from the protagonist's prejudices and self-pitying postures. The ambiguity in the narrator's loyalties provides a breakthrough towards a political insight into the temptations and problems of power and projects a voice of mediation that controls the shape of the novel as a whole. In its preoccupation with the political behaviour of newly independent nations as well as in its emphasis on the eventual triumph of the people's political instinct and will, A Man of the People stands out as one of the major political novels of our time.