The publication of *Things Fall Apart* in 1958 was a major event in the literature of the English speaking Commonwealth. It drew attention to the awakened conscience of the African people, in the particular context of the Nigerian experience, as their society passed from the colonial order to the new order of national creativity. The novel demonstrated how an African writer may contemplate the experience of his people with the understanding and vision of an artist, instead of the anger and hatred of the political activist. It showed how the fictional artist may use the history of his people as a resource to be mastered by art, while dramatising the tensions and ambiguities of the past from the vantage point of the present. History as experience in a space-time dimension as well as a mythical frame of reference provided a narrative matrix which the novelist could use for an imaginative rendering of his cultural situation.
In the process, the novelist could enlarge his vision from the particulars of his usable past to the universal concerns of the human predicament at large. Conscious of the novelist's responsibility to society as a teacher to his people, and at the same time aware of the artist's ultimate allegiance to the medium of his art, Achebe had also demonstrated, in Things Fall Apart, how these two concerns could be reconciled to advantage. Achebe's subsequent writing extended his vision and craftsmanship to other themes such as the search for identity and the quest for power and the survival of a traditional way of life caught in the turbulent stream of change and crisis, and the anxieties affecting individuals as a consequence.

Achebe's four novels, comprising the 'Ibo Quartet', provide a perspective of cultural assertion in terms of a contemporary awareness of the African individual trying to come to terms with different cultures and societies, all of which are in the melting pot of historical change and transformation. Achebe's fiction is firmly rooted in an understanding of the factors that have variously contributed to the definition of the human condition in the specific context of cultural change affecting the 'African
personality. A study of his novels reveals how the cultural perceptions of the new Africa, in transition from the past into the modern world, can be projected in a fictional idiom combining the indigenous African narrative traditions and those of the European genre of the novel.

Social change has been one of the dominant factors in the African way of life which has been in ferment ever since the advent of European colonial rule. In the encounter between Africa and Europe, during the colonial regime, African culture had at first been a passive witness to the subversion of its traditional tribal structures of society by the European influence. There arose, subsequently, a new social awareness among the Africans leading to a reaction against the West and a reassertion of the African identity. The emergence of independent African nations after the Second World War brought about a more active response to nationalism, culminating in the acknowledgment of a creative historical role for Africa in the shaping of the future world events. The writers of Africa have been in the forefront of the African Renaissance, which has been characterized by the rise of a rich
and articulate literature representing African reality from the African point of view. The west had brought with it new ideas and values and world-views and institutional systems which have affected the customary and traditional organisation of African societies both in their internal and external aspects. In the wake of these changes, there has been an attempt to rediscover an authentic African identity as well as explore its possibilities in the contemporary world. This eagerness for the rediscovery of Africa constitutes one of the major preoccupations of African writing today.

The contemporary African intellectuals have attempted to counter the 'Dark Africa' syndrome, which is a western myth, by revalorising the distinctive contribution of Africa to civilization and emphasising the appropriate role that Africa has to play in the present and future. While non-African writers from Joseph Conrad to V.S. Naipaul have tended to stress the mystery of Africa and its enigmatic and ambivalent personality, African writers, both Francophone and Anglophone, from Aime Cesaire and Leopold Senghor to Chinua Achebe and Wole
Soyinka, have persistently endeavoured to create a different African Image. The national impulse, before and after the achievement of independence by many African countries, has been consistently reinforced by a Pan-African awareness which has inspired both the freedom movements and the post-independence philosophies of cultural reconstruction of African societies. Much of this effort has found expression in the quest for the African personality as a synthesis of the past and the present and a unification of the African and the European world-views into a single pattern and source for the evolution of the New Africa in political, social and cultural spheres. The Negritude movement which represents this African quest has found expression in diverse ways. Its major premise is that Africa is no longer a recipient culture but a donor culture, capable of making its own unique and distinctive contribution to human excellence, and of sharing the complex experiences and aspirations of the contemporary world. The West Indian poet, Aime Cesaire, and the doyen of Francophone culture, Leopold Senghor, have both insisted on the need to reject the European
influence altogether and seek the radical assertion of the African cultural traditions which constitute a genuinely usable past. Many African writers, following Cesaire and Senghor, have pleaded for the forging of a new life through a renewed encounter with the ancestral traditions of Africa. The Ghanaian poet G. Awoonor Williams writes, for instance:

And in the season of search
When the discoverers land on far off shores
And the others who took the big boats return
We shall find our salvation here on the shore, asleep. 1

He invokes the aid of Africa's ancestral spirits to regenerate the African soul and provide a tap-root in the significant soil of Africa:

Sew the old days for us, our fathers
That we can wear them under our new garment,

After we have washed ourselves in
The whirlpool of the many river's estuary. 2

Birago Diop, David Diop, Abioseh Nicol and many other
African writers have also emphasised the concept and atti-
tude of an African Return. As Jean-Paul-Satre has observed,
egritude rests on a single passion constantly and tumul-
tously offered, often culminating as in Senghor's poetic
vision of an African paradise, in a creative myth dramatising
a new role for Africa. Besides its political overtones,
the negritude movement has also led to a creative redis-
covery of African aesthetic traditions and the rich African
heritage of folklore and its representative art forms both
in the spatial and temporal modes. The characteristic
vocabulary and patterning of folk narrative, oral history,
dance, music and drama have been pressed into new and
daring uses, thus creating an exciting new literature
rooted in the African experience and imagination.

2. George Awoonor Williams, Rediscovery, p. 13.
The negritude philosophy has also formulated new ways of looking at the nature of social change which has affected the synchronic world-view of the past. The traditional African societies were primarily tribal communities based on strong kinship ties and familial loyalties controlled by a group dynamic regulated by custom and ritual making for intimate corporate living and fertilising interaction among individuals and neighbourhoods.

The political systems were either segmentary or acephalous and basically spatial in their structure and content. For instance, the Ibos in Eastern Nigeria were under a political system in which authority belonged to associations of people from the unit which was either a village or a group of villages. Staffs of authority or 'Ofo' were held by those leaders who were adroit, wealthy and wise. Decisions were taken and affairs settled at the village meetings where all people were free to speak. The assumption was that the community was greater than the individual as against the western notions of self-centred individualism.

The village was itself held together by a plurality of kinship relations exerting their pressure as a micro-system
of authority and usage shaping and controlling the individual's status, style of life and role enactment. For the tribe-oriented individual, to exist was to live with the group and for it, and there was no stress on personal flowering or fulfilment apart from, or independent of, the collective milieu. The Ibo entrusted their welfare to the associations. No single leader could take decisions without the consensus or agreement of others. The unity of the tribal group was thus the main spring of action. The strength and cohesion of tribal life was the result of the concept of the over-riding supremacy of the community above the individual. The members of the community observed rituals and held festivities on regular occasions to derive favour from 'Chukwu', the Supreme God, and the ancestral spirits. The Ibo also maintained an animistic world-view and the laws concerning the relationship between men and gods had to be obeyed and customs of worship followed scrupulously. The invisible but omnipotent present pervaded all social action and personal behaviour. Priests and priestesses had a special relationship with the gods and provided connections between them and the people. This mediating function reinforced the hieratic
organisation its sacred authority. While Chukwu was the supreme deity, 'Chi' was the personal God. The ancestral spirits were also associated with a well-recognised order and hierarchy. The Ibo believed that ancestral worship enabled them to lead a happy and prosperous life with the blessing of many children. Reverence for life reflected through a reverence for the deity, respect to the aged, and honouring the brave, contributed to personal status as well as social stability.

Egwugwu, analogous to the panchayat of the elders in India, was the congregation and the abode of the ancestral spirits. The Ibo ardently believed that one became possessed when the mask of the ancestral spirit was worn. Unmasking the ancestral spirits was a taboo never to be thought of among the Ibos, for fear of violating the authority of the sacred laws. The communal life of the Ibos was characterised by the performance of rituals, covering the whole span of life from birth to death; and the individual's affiliation to the community was reinforced through various initiation and reorientation rites and ceremonies conducted under the proper instruction of
the priest who gave religious force and sacerdotal sanction to even simple transactions such as the passing of the Kola nut. Feats of valour and demonstrations of physical skill at the time of the initiation rituals characterized the training and education of the youth in the ways and mores of tribal life.

It was this cohesive and self-generative social order that lost its substance and meaning under the impact of the western values and institutions. Achebe's Ibo novels dramatize pognantly the disintegration of the Ibo social order through the loss of ritual and the disorientation of an accepted world-view of which the rituals were the controlling events. Consequently, in Achebe's novels, things fall apart and individuals are no longer at ease.

Folk tales and songs were as essential to the Ibo as palm oil and palm wine for social interaction and communion. In these traditional narratives, the story in itself was not so important as the narrative discourse which was a composite of music, dance, recitation, miming
and pageantry, all of which left much room for imaginative improvisation by the story teller. In other words, the folk-tale was performed rather than merely told. The Ibo people were proud of their oral literacy and their bardic traditions, and story-telling was an artistic accomplishment, much praised and well received. The mastery of proverbs and folk anecdotes, interspersed with wit and wisdom, humour and satire, was an important factor in the narrative idiom. The singers and troubadours interpreted and comprehended the world and its nature through the medium of the folk tale. Some of the tales were recreational, reflecting legendary tribal memory, and often focussed on contemporary situations and contexts. Mothers skilfully narrated stories to the children who circulated the stories among others, thus building up a traditional repertoire of folk narratives. The folk narrative served a basic educational function in the clan. The didactic and moral motivation lent a parabolic flavour to the stories, enabling the listeners to cultivate ethical discrimination and an awareness of the difference between good and evil. The folk narratives were a
product of composite art forms, assimilating music, dance, poetry and drama, and spiced with riddles and gnomic exercises in moral instruction and proverbial invention.

The Ibo cosmology was a complex mosaic of diverse myths, beliefs and concepts, all rooted in the tribal ethos. The tradition-bound Ibo society gave equal and appropriate significance to the natural and the supernatural, to the supreme deity and the personal god and the oracle and the sacrifice, all accommodated into a hierarchical pattern of their functions and potencies. The Ibo way of life was governed by a distinct sense of time and space, which was traumatically violated by the intrusion of the western notions of social and human relationships. The vagueness and the generalised perception of time and space had perhaps prevented the development of any kind of central authority among the Ibos. For instance, Captain Winterbottom in *Arrow of God* tells Tony Clarke:

Oh, about six miles, not more. But to the native, that's foreign country.
Unlike some of the more advanced tribes in Northern Nigeria, and to some extent
Western Nigeria, the Ibos never developed any kind of central authority. 3

II

This has implications for the art of written literature which presupposes an authorial presence, autonomous and apart from the participating group. Imaginative writing, as a product of aesthetic distance, envisaging a central consciousness or the point of view of a single writer, is a western idea that contrasts with the tribal art of Ibo narrative communication. Oral literature of the tribes, as Michael Crowder points out,

..... is the expression not of the genius of one man, but of the group, whose corporate property it is. 4


This offers a creative challenge to the modern Nigerian writer who may, as Achebe and others do, bring about a new kind of accommodation. The application of the modern fictional genre to the traditional oral narrative forms and folk materials results in a new organic form capable of projecting genuine African experience. It also provides a context in which to redefine the role of the novelist in his society from a new perspective. Taking such a stand, Achebe, considers the novelist as a teacher to his community providing a humane literacy as well as a fresh sociological awareness and commitment. He seeks to extend the aims and ideals of the traditional folk narrator to the writer of written literature, especially fiction.

Here, then, is an adequate revolution for me to espouse—to help my society regain its belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and it is essentially a question of education in the best sense of that word. Here, I think, my aims and the deepest aspirations of my society meet...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 imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them. Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct from
pure. But who cares? Art is important but so is education of the kind I have in mind. 5

The modern African writer can derive inspiration from the traditional oral literature as well as the new European models without the loss of dignity or purpose, and without diluting his artistic impulse or vision. As Ezekiel Mphahlele points out, the African writer is

'the sensitive point of his community'. 6

In expounding the genius of his tradition he must also rediscover it for himself and for his fellow beings.

The Anglophone writers of Africa have also revealed an attitude of circumspection towards the heady enthusiasms of the negritude movement. They have concerned themselves, instead, with chronicling and transcribing the


6. Ibid., p. 204.
cultural situations with an integrity going beyond the polemics of protest literature. Achebe has described the task of the African writer as a creative reassertion of the African personality in the following words:

The whole pattern of life demanded that you should protest, that you should put in a word for your history, your traditions, your religion and so on. One big message of the many that I try to put across is that Africa was not a vacuum before the coming of Europe, that culture was not unknown in Africa, that culture was not brought to Africa by the White world. 7

While restituting the image of Africa in terms of its past culture, the creative writer should be equally aware of the historical and contemporary developments or the alterations of the traditional culture in the light of the new experiences to which African societies have been exposed. In other words, Achebe conceives of the role of the African writer as a creator of the uncreated conscience

of the race, not in the red heat of passion and protest but in white light of comprehension and sympathy.

Cultural conflict is a major premise in African writing today which reflects the problems of identity, affiliation and continuity, in terms of which the individual in a transitional society strains after accommodation and fulfilment. Social change in African cultures springs from the shift from a space-oriented way of life to a time-oriented outlook. African tribal cultures, with their strong traditional sense of place, and characteristic organisation of kinship relations in spatial terms, have been exposed to a different cultural system of the west in which the consciousness of time plays an important role in the evolution of institutional structures. The sense of the past in western terms is largely derived from a linear conception of time and the principle of causality as the controlling motive behind all historical movement. On the contrary, the African concept of the past is governed by the cyclicality of events transcending historical contingency and comprehending the totality of
spatial experience. The collision of these two differing assumptions and archetypes of the past has led to the conscious search for new patterns of accommodation on the part of the individual and the community. This theme of cultural polarity and anxiety finds its universal expression in modern African thinking and writing.

The African writers and leaders of opinion have become increasingly conscious of the nature of western colonialism with its economic exploitation and the consequent cultural deprivation of the African people, whether they were subjected to the policy of assimilation or of segregation. Both implied the loss of the African personality, the detribalisation of African society and the destabilization of the old values and ways of life. The healthy patterns of corporate and community life tended to be undermined and eroded by the centrifugalism brought on by the rise of individualism. Education imparted by the western missionaries, administration conducted by the European bureaucracies, and the dispensation of justice proceeding from western concepts of right and wrong, have all driven a wedge into the African psyche.
European colonialism has also meant the traumatic experience of slave trade resulting in the disruption of the traditional African life. The imperial form of western rule undermined the democratic patterns of tribal administration and justice. The establishment of urban centres of industry and commerce had also caused the breakdown of the rural and pastoral economy. The dichotomy between the city and the country was accompanied by a gap between generations which have gone out of touch with one another in terms of human affiliation, motivation and aspiration.

The rise of nationalism in Africa has been accompanied by a quest for the usable historical past and a growing sense of cultural pride and also an awareness that western education is essential for survival and fulfilment in the modern world. African reality as it exists in the postcolonial era necessarily includes the modernist impulse implying the adaptation not only of western technology but also the western values of efficiency and progress based on rationalism and the empirical outlook. The shift from agriculture to industry, from a pastoral to an urban pattern of living and the pursuit of western education
instead of tribal law has resulted in the rise of a new generation of young men who are more interested in pursuing the new political and social applications of power. For instance, even Ezeulu, the upholder and custodian of the old order in Arrow of God, realises the need to equip his son with western education, sensing instinctively that the need of the moment was not to look back in anger but to make ready for the future. The proverbial wisdom of the traditional community is also brought to clarify the attitude:

... a man of sense does not go on hunting little bush rodents when his agemates are after big game. 8

III

The Nigerian writers have, in fact, adopted a less aggressive attitude towards negritude than writers elsewhere in Africa, turning their attention to the portrayal

of local culture and the texture of tribal society in transition in terms of a naturalism which mediates between the values of the past and the actuality of modern life. They have also concerned themselves with issues beyond the usual anticcolonial stock-responses, revealing the predicament of individuals coming to terms with reality in terms of individual psychology. Cultural crisis thus gets related to the crisis within the individual personality, and creativity comes to be viewed as a vehicle for expressing and resolving the tensions among individuals within and outside the social milieu. The romanticisation of the past with the village and the tribe as the sources of national culture, yields place to a realistic portrayal of the present, with urban culture, social change and psychological conflict as the materials for imaginative writing. The consideration of manners and morals arising from the new culture of the cities, with its shifting realities and values, becomes a focal theme in African writing, giving rise to satire, humour and comedy, as, for instance, in the novels of Cyprian Ekwensi and Wole Soyinka. The dialectic between local assertion and cosmopolitan awareness imparts to African writing a high degree of contem-
poraneous authenticity. Once the cultural themes of protest and revolt became exhausted, the African writers have turned their attention increasingly to the problems of modern life in which individuals strive to gain their own sense of life. As Bruce King observes:

'It is likely that the previous tendencies will continue, as they reflect common aspirations and instincts inherent within any culture: the affirmation of local dignity and traditions, the exploration of the problems of modern society, and the attraction towards a cosmopolitan sophistication and a place in world culture.' 9

Social change as a concomitant of the African imagination is intimately related to literary style and the linguistic medium adopted for creative expression. The English language, which is an acquired rather than an inherited language in most African countries, has come to remain as a bond, rather than a bondage, a means of rediscovering cultural inheritance, of reassessing the

past and interpreting the African soul to the world. English has become an integral component of the contemporary culture of the African people which links them with the whole world as their witness and audience. In adopting English as a creative medium, the African writer has found for himself a new voice capable of communicating the articulate energy of his race and producing new resonances of meaning and connotation. Writers like Achebe, Soyinka, Okigbo, Tutuola, Ngugi and others, have added to the suggestive range of English expression a new complexity and subtlety that differentiates African English from its British or American counterpart. In blending English usage and syntactical structures with native idioms, local patterns of discourse such as proverbs, aphorisms, riddles and folk idiosyncrasies, the African writers have extended the expressive scope of the English language and developed it into a communicative system of a remarkable resilience and adaptability.

The English language has acted as a shaping power, capable of articulating the authentic being and personality of Africa, of singing the song of the new Africa to the
world in its own characteristic tone of voice. As G. Awoonor Williams concludes in 'My God of Songs was Ill':

The cure god said I had violated my god
Take him to your father's gods he said in my tongue
So I took him to my father's gods
But before they opened the hut
My god burst into songs, new strong songs
That I am still singing with him. 10

Commenting on African and English writers, Chinua Achebe observes:

The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience. 11

In adapting English as a vehicle of fiction, Achebe has in fact developed an irony which stylistically can

10. George Awoonor Williams, Rediscovery, p.31.
absorb and balance a variety of moods and attitudes ranging from gentleness to anger, sympathy to sarcasm, and commitment to detachment, and which is consistently suited to the recreation of the baffling intricacies of opposing cultures locked in a conflict brought about by man's misunderstanding of himself and others both as individuals and social aggregates.

IV

Nigerian literature in English has been one of the most fertile products of the cultural encounter between Europe and Africa. Within a short span of thirty years, it has given rise to a galaxy of talented writers of poetry, fiction and drama, drawing sustenance both from traditional oral literatures, and from the reality of the present, rapidly changing society. In fact, there has been such an outpouring of creative talent in Nigeria, since and after the Second World War, that it is possible to describe it as the Nigerian Renaissance. The factors contributing to the many-sided flowering of letters in
modern Nigeria have been the expansion of opportunities for higher education in Nigerian University as well as abroad, and the exposure of young Nigerian writers to the contemporary English literary tradition. The growth of the national economy following the rapid industrialization and urbanisation of Nigerian society has also contributed to the wide proliferation of employment opportunities for the educated young. The nationalist movement has also resulted in the emergence of a new elite comprising political leaders, intellectuals and writers who have been called upon to participate in, and extend the activities of a modern society. The expansion of literacy and the growth of the native press and mass communications have also created an indigenous reading public interested in literature. The University communities of Ibadan, Lagos and other cities have encouraged intellectual interaction among the younger intellectuals, drawing them together into literary schools and groups, and encouraging them to write for news papers and magazines. Cyprian Ekwensi started writing short stories during the mid 1940's and, along with Aluko and others, turned to urban themes involving the anxieties and exhilarations of an emerging
generation of young men and women who have been motivated by ambitions for advancement and experience. Ekwensi's *People of the City* (1954) explores the brave new world of the city in which the past lay dead and the present had to be siezed and manipulated for promoting personal interests and opportunities. Sango, the enigmatic hero of the novel, is made to experience the cruelty, violence, corruption and spiritual sterility of the city, which find a reflection also in Achebe's *Man of the People* and Soyinka's *The Interpreters*. Ekwensi's other works, including *Jagua Nana*, also underscore the deromanticised myth of modernity by means of a social realism which absorbs the varying moods of comedy, satire and irony, besides naturalistic documentation and analysis of urban life. Amos Tutuola put Nigeria on the Anglophone literary map with the publication of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* in 1952, which effectively demonstrated the possibility of expanding the Yoruba folk materials and idiom into an extended story of modern life through symbolic indirection, oblique allegory and mannered rhetoric. Around the quest motif which is the core of the novel, Tutuola weaves riddles, creation myths, moral parables, miracles and *marvels*, drawn from a surreal past and deflected into a contemporary awareness showing the
disjunction of the modern psyche. The Yoruba sacrificial myth and the narrative paradigm of dismemberment are deftly built into the theme of quest resulting in an impressive unification of sensibility.

Elechi Amadi, in his *The Concubine* and the *Great Ponds*, and Flora Nwapa, in her *Efuru* and *Idu*, Onuora Nzekwu in his *Wand of Noble Wood*, Gabriel Okara, in *The Voice*, and Wole Soyinka, in *The Strong Breed*, have all contributed to the emergence of Nigerian fiction projecting the crisis of Nigerian culture in transition. They present social and secular themes built around complex individuals and evoke a sense of life clarified and dramatised beneath the violence of the surface events and the ambiguity of modern existence. By and large, these writers have concerned themselves with the theme of today. They look at a society which is changing so swiftly and so painfully that its existential thrust and its pattern of causality, often lost and missed in historical documentation, can be
placed in the right perspective only through the objective correlatives of imaginative fiction. Chinua Achebe in many ways represents a beginning as well as the fruition of the Nigerian Renaissance, and his Things Fall Apart is as seminal to Nigerian literature as a book of beginnings, as Huckleberry Finn is, to modern American fiction.

One of the consequences of colonial rule in Africa has been the amalgamation of diverse tribal communities into national states. Modern Nigeria is one such state in which the Ibo, Yoruba and Hausa peoples, living in Eastern, Western and Northern parts of the country, have been merged into a single political establishment. In addition, the Ijaw people living along the river Niger and in the mid-west have also been drawn into the organisation. These diverse peoples have their own languages, traditions, cultures and social ethics and other anthropological particularities. They have maintained their strong regional individuality including their unique systems of law and authority. With the advent of the British rule in 1900,
which replaced the authority of the earlier Royal Niger Company, the old societies were thrown into the melting pot of change. The indirect rule of the colonial administration was characterized, as in the case of the Princely States of India, by the chiefs and emirs and the tribal elders holding responsibility for the local affairs. With the rise of the educated youth, a sense of nationalism developed, culminating in the achievement of Independence in the year 1963 when Nigeria became a republic. Although political change conferred upon the various tribes a single nationhood, the distinctive attitudes and norms of cultural life continued to prevail at the regional level, often leading to internal conflict and tension. In the post-colonial period, as Achebe remarks:

The colonial departure from the scene was not really a departure. I mean independence was unreal and people like Nanga were actually used as front men, as puppets, by the former colonial power. As long as they could go about saying they were ministers, as long as they enriched themselves, they were happy and they would leave the real exploiter at his work. 12

Much in the manner of post-colonial India, political disorder, regional hostility and public disturbance have characterized the political life of Nigeria, eventually making room for the military take over of the country in 1966. The conflict among the regions led to the counter-coup on the part of the Eastern region which declared itself as the Republic of Biafra. The civil war that ensued, fought from 1967 to 1970, in which the Biafran movement was suppressed with a heavy hand, resulted in the massacre of thousands of eastern Nigerians and the brutalization of the national character and the alienation of many intellectuals and writers from the establishment. The Biafran crisis led to considerable self-examination and introspection among the latter and created a mood of anguished scepticism towards the new tendencies of black colonialism and the hollowness of negritude as a genuine expression of African realities. Negritude had tended to falsify African life and, in particular, the political aspirations of the Nigerian peoples. Achebe, Soyinka, Okigbo and many other writers have experienced the traumas of the civil war, having had to suffer a kind of internal expatriation, which posed the
threat of a creative dead end in their careers. However, the turmoil and ferment of political events developed a new secular consciousness in terms of which the Nigerian writers have been forced to reexamine their attitudes to the past. The 'lost generation' of the Nigerian writers returned to the lost culture of their people with a historical sense which has been markedly modern both in its conceptual content and experiential detail. In the process, the cultural conflict syndrome in Nigerian writing has been extended from the Afro-European encounter to an examination of the realities of power and the conflicts generated by them within and among the subcultures of the Nigerian society. The satirical vaticinations of writers like Soyinka and others in presenting a de-romanticized picture of post-independent Nigerian society have proved to be prophetic. There has been a shift in attention from the adulation and glorification of the past to a clear-eyed analysis of the decreative elements of the past as they modified the attitudes and assumptions of the present. The gentle ironic thrusts of a writer like Achebe, in A Man of The People and No Longer at Ease, have acquired an
authentic meaning in the perspective of Nigerian civil
dissension. Achebe himself replied, in answer to a ques-
tion, as to the lessons to be drawn from the civil war:

... Facile, smug: secession does not pay.
I believe, that if we are to survive, as a
nation, we need to grasp the meaning of our
tragedy. One way to do it is to remind
ourselves constantly of the things that
happened and how we felt when they were
happening. 13

This was a plea that instead of indulging in poli-
tical romanticism and unexamined idealism, the Nigerian
writer has to confront the reality of the present order
of things and adopt the tools of social realism to talk
meaningfully about his society. In other words, the past
as myth has to be viewed not as a means of self-glorifica-
tion but to be utilized as a symbolic correlative of the
historical evolution of the contemporary human condition,
or to replace the diachronic approach to history with a

13. Chinua Achebe, Morning Yet on Creation Day,
Preface, p.XIII.
synchronic attitude to human institutions enveloping the individuals in a given society. The writer's duty is to determine and indicate the destiny of his people in the throes of cataclysmic change affecting the inherited structures of reality and causing a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety. He must go back to the radical foundations of truth, undoing the existential mischief caused by images usurping reality and cliches of human behaviour clouding human perception, and both leading to distortion of the essential truth of their culture. Achebe, who has steadily held before himself the function of the novelist as a truth-teller and soothsayer to the community in which he lives, has, in his fictional works, consistently sought to strike a balance between the past and the present, viewing both from the kind of distance which can only be exercised by the equal and spacious eye of a committed but at the same time detached artist. In doing so, Achebe becomes the novelist not only of African Being but also of African Becoming.
Chinua Achebe grew up at the cross-roads of cultures, African and Western, Ibo and Christian, tribal and contemporary, which makes him eminently suited to his role as a chronicler of the life of his people as well as an interpreter of their many-sided experience. Born in Ogidi in Eastern Nigeria in 1930 into the Ibo tribe, he grew up in a Christian family, his father being an evangelist and Christian teacher, while many of his relatives and neighbours continued to adhere to the religious and tribal customs and practices of the Ibo community. Achebe grew up at a time when African nationalism was beginning to express itself through political action against the European colonial rule, a role for which many Nigerian young men were cast by virtue of their European education. Achebe was educated at University College, Ibadan, and studied literature, instead of medicine, in England where he absorbed Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth and also encountered writers like Conrad, Graham Greene and Joyce.
Cary who had portrayed Africa in their works. The latter spurred him on to set the record straight and project what he considered to be the authentic image of Africa. Joining the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, in 1954, and rising to the position of the Director of External Broadcasting in 1961, he plunged himself into the activities of the Nigerian writers who were interested in creating a cultural Renaissance in Nigeria. Turning to fulltime writing in 1966, he had already established himself as the creator of the Ibo tetralogy comprising Things Fall Apart (1958), No Longer at Ease (1960), Arrow of God (1964), A Man of the People (1966). In 1966 the massacre of Ibos in the north of Nigeria and their persecution in other areas forced him to leave Lagos into a European exile, during which he wrote a number of critical essays, poems, short-stories and cultural analyses reflecting the intellectual aspirations and attitudes of his fellow Nigerians. Morning Yet on Creation Day, a collection of Achebe's essays and articles published in 1975, projects his viewpoint on the concept of universality, the role of the writer and critic and especially on the Africanness of African literature.
Beware, Soul Brother, poems by Achebe published in 1972, reveals his distress that found expression during the years of the Nigerian civil war. The Sacrificial Egg and Other Stories, Girls at War and Other Stories published in 1962 and 1972 respectively, stand to testify Achebe's exquisite description of the daily life of the market in a realistic manner. Much travelled in Africa, Europe, America and Asia, Achebe has made a powerful impression on Commonwealth writers and has assumed a number of academic positions as Professor of Literature and creative writer. In 1971, Achebe started the Magazine, Okike, as a forum for new writing in Africa. Achebe is now acknowledged as one of the most important writers of fiction in Commonwealth Literature, as a writer who has portrayed Nigerian life in universal terms of human experience measured by the criteria of universally acceptable classics.

The publication of Things Fall Apart in 1958 marked the beginning of the new wave of writing in Africa and also led to a re-examination of Nigerian history between 1890 and 1965 which is embodied in his four Ibo novels. Taken together, they project an image of Nigerian life different
from the one found in the records of Western writers based on Western assumptions of racial superiority and colonial hubris. *Things Fall Apart*, set at the turn of the century when the British first came to the Ibo land, records the disintegration of the tribal society under the impact of colonial rule. *No Longer at Ease* is set in the 1950s at a transitional point when the British administration was preparing to hand over the running of the bureaucratic institutions to the native people. *Arrow of God* turns its glance back to the past describing the interaction between the Ibo and the British cultures and is centred on the quest for power in its changing contexts and connotations. *A Man of the People* is set in post-independence Nigeria, dramatizing the slow erosion of the principles of morality and ethics in a society which has tended to get out of touch with its own genius in the past as well as its vision of the future that motivated the struggle for independence. The four novels, while tracing the evolution of the Ibo society through times of change and crisis, are also a sensitive record of the lives of individuals who are affected by the shocks of change and transformation.
As a novelist of his society and its people, Achebe brings to bear upon his fictional materials a double consciousness inherited, as he says, from his own personal background as one who has grown in and out of two contradictory worlds at the same time.

On one arm of the cross we sang hymns and read the Bible night and day. On the other my father's brother and his family, blinded by heathenism, offered food to idols. That was how it was supposed to be anyhow. But I knew, without knowing why, that it was too simple a way to describe what was going on... What I do remember was a fascination for the ritual and the life on the other arm of the crossroads. And I believe two things were in my favour - that curiosity and the little distance imposed between me and it by the accident of my birth. The distance becomes not a separation but a bringing together like the necessary backward step which a judicious viewer may take in order to see a canvas steadily and fully. 14

Achebe's writing is thus primarily concerned with filling in and animating the chosen canvas, in much the same manner as Hardy sought to do with Wessex, or Faulkner with

Mississippi, or R.K. Narayan with Malgudi. Achebe has conceived of himself as a novelist responsible to his society, as the sensitive point of his community, redeeming the image of Africa as a dark continent under the long night of savagery, and at the same time undeviatingly committed to the truth of life and the truth of his art. The recurring and unifying theme of Achebe's fiction is the nature and quality of human development under the stress of tradition and change with the individual human being, with all his achievements and failures, and limitations and possibilities, as a central premise, making for the agony of self-knowledge and the wisdom of new awareness. Giving the example of his treatment of the character of Ezeulu in Arrow of God, Achebe distinguishes between saying and showing, and his own preference for the latter. As a fictional artist he is interested in the interaction between events and human character, with a preponderant emphasis on how dramatic action, while shaping the character of an individual, also brings it to judgement. It is the predicament of individuals rather than the anthropological details, except as dramatizing factors, that Achebe as an
artist is consistently concerned with. It is the texture of life rather than the structures of society that Achebe is essentially concerned with. What happens to societies is interesting from the point of view of what happens to individuals because of their inability to resolve the ambiguities of their inherited concepts of human dignity and heroism. Exposed to the hazards as well as the temptations of power and glory, new-won freedom, opportunity and status, in a changing social environment, Achebe's individuals are ill at ease with themselves and seek to live and act upon by the principle of expediency. In portraying the complex fate of individuals in his particularly chosen social context, Achebe combines a discriminating social awareness with an uncanny sense of the historical process and an unfailing insight into human motivation. Achebe, for all his commitment to man and society, is also an artist and craftsman of meticulous objectivity which is reinforced by his fictional art. Blending the comic and the tragic, and resolving the existential tension within an ironic mould, confronting experience with imagination, Achebe achieves an authenticity which is rarely to be found in the purely ethnic literature of protest or in the naturalistic fiction
of despair. The violence, the sentimentalism and the romanticism of the literature of commitment are consciously overcome and exceeded by Achebe in his fictional art.