SECTION G: LITERARY INSIGHTS

‘Steamed into Well-Done Mutton’: The Solar Plague and Discursive Formation in Chinua Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah*

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Abstract

Chinua Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah* is studied under a rich variety of critical approaches, which is expected for such a major literary work. Some of the studies are under the umbrella of discourse analysis. This paper is located within discourse studies, but in the specific aspect of discursive formations. Of the available published studies on *Anthills of the Savannah*, many explore nodes which are seen by their authors as contact points to extra-textual history or social reality or as signposts leading back to the author’s intended meanings. This paper goes to the depths of discourse following the track, or as Jacques Derrida would say, the traces left by the sign *end* on signifiers like *witness* and the wilting, wild *Sun of April*, eventually permeating the entire narrative. A sign which is not a stand-alone complex of signifier and signified, but affects other signs, giving them extra dimensions of meaning, and rendering them thereby symbolic, is of necessity itself symbolic and, moreover, in this present case, sustains a vision that the narrative as one *act* symbolizes: the Last Days. The individual incidents are also affected: although they occur in narrative time, they are at the same time familiar as events of the Last Days, that is, apocalyptic. The study unveils the mythology of the Last Days, with its plagues, as the formation sustaining the whole, and accounting for the work’s intellectual structure.

Keywords: apocalypse**,** *estate* of world literature, discourse analysis, discursive formation, tradition

Introduction

It is helpful in a discourse analysis of texts to ascertain the discursive formation to avoid treating texts and discourses as if they were all the same kind and obey the same identical laws. All discourses depend on their discursive formations for constitution. Chinua Achebe’s *Anthills of*

the Savannah which is under study in this paper is an apocalyptic literary text by reason of its discursive formation based on the mythology of the *end of the age* or the Last Days. Some literary works may be successfully analysed without the initial act of ascertaining their formation, but this successful analysis is really because the formative is carried as a badge by the discourse as it were. For some other discourses, the discursive formation has to be painstakingly made out.

A literary work is a complex thing, but always understood to be one object. A novel is the literary work in its most complexity. A single novel can incorporate in a sustained manner discourse from mythology, religion, political life, social history, interpersonal relations, agriculture, buying and selling, love relations, struggle, community building and dismantling, and so forth. For this reason, it offers many entryways to criticism and discussion. Many such entryways have been explored in dealing with *Anthills of the Savannah,* like the politics of postcolonialism (Kalpaklı), women emancipation (Shamim), ideological concerns (Olusola), the metaphorics of Anthills (Opata), the poetics of care and solidarity (Akwanya), the discursive value of naming (Olaluwoye), and so forth.

Discursive formation is not an approach to the novel, just as a study of narrative structure is not really an approach, but lays bare the work's constructional logic. The discursive formation is similarly unveiled. The discursive formation of a text is basic information needed for reliable discourse analysis of the text treated as an 'instance of discourse' (Benveniste 219), especially where it is not explicitly stated as part of the instance of discourse, so that analysis could proceed with tacit acknowledgment of it. In this, the role of the discursive formation is even more far-reaching than the understanding of the constituent structure, as literary criticism may be effective whether or not it is premised on the knowledge of structure. Ascertaining the discursive formation may even help to explain the constituent structure itself.

In Michel Foucault's account, discursive formation identifies and positions the founding entities of narratives, and may be analysed into the 'formation of objects, formation of the subjective positions, formation of concepts, formation of strategic choices' (*The Archaeology of Knowledge* 130). The formation of concepts is of special importance to this paper, as it relates to statements involved in recreating 'a perceptual process', and 'whose succession characterizes the architecture of a text' (63). These statements 'may be of the order of experimental verification, logical validation, mere repetition, acceptance justified by tradition and authority, commentary, a search for hidden meanings', and the like (64). Such are the minimal, and usually archaic, narratives from which the work exfoliates, at the same time grounding that work in tradition, and validating its search for intelligibility. This exfoliation proceeds, according to Riffaterre, by means of expansions and conversions.

In what Habermas calls *practical discourse,* that is, discourse with participants taking turns equally to speak, with an object on which they attempt 'to reach an uncoerced agreement ... on the basis of reasons that are acceptable to all' (Ciaran Cronin and Pablo De Greiff x), the discursive formation is marked in the utterances themselves, since the utterances are typically

tied to the object concerning which the participants in the discourse attempt to reach an understanding. The same is true, more or less, of political speeches, homiletic discourses, sales talks and haggling over prices, and so forth. In forms of discourse where the need to reach an understanding has no part in the constitution of discourse, nor 'the speaker's intention to influence the addressee in some way' (Issacharoff 80), analysis will not advance much without a notion of the discursive formation. A prior determination of this constitutive element of discourse will help to ensure that the right assortment of instruments is put in place for the specific task in hand.

Discourse analysis can deal with a wide variety of linguistic events, including literature, provided that each text's or discourse's peculiarities are given due recognition and analysis proceeds in full mindfulness of these peculiarities. For example, it is not a negligible fact that one has before one a ritual text or a recording of a ritual event taking place. Although language appropriated by a subject and applied to something satisfies the minimum condition for discourse, still it does not follow that an utterance is necessarily discourse, because it is spoken by a subject. In ritual, there is an utterance. Language is spoken, and it is even applied to something, but all this happens without a subject appropriating the language system to himself or herself. The utterance does not contain 'the indicator of person' (as such (Benveniste 219), but of an accredited role-player. The ritual utterance is a quotation applied whole in bringing about a specific designated effect in the ceremonial of a group. Therefore, a ritual does not satisfy the minimal conditions for discourse, and if subjected to discourse analysis, the results would be of little value. A literary work like the novel may contain instances of discourse, but it is treated in this paper and may be analysed as one self-contained instance of discourse.

But discourse analysis alone would not capture the complexity of the literary work in as much as it is *allegorical*; that is, in Heidegger's phrasing, it 'makes public something other than itself' *(Poetry, Language, Thought* 19). What it manifests that is other than itself must be something that is in some way already known, otherwise it would be obscure, and perhaps it would not be knowable that the text was making public something other than itself. What it presents is *always already* (Derrida 2, 90) in the minds of the people, tradition itself. This is not to confirm the prejudice that a literary work must embody the local tradition which has given birth to the author. What is at issue is in the first instance what pertains to the *estate* of world literature (Milosz xv), without ruling out what pertains to the estate of the literature of a country in the large sense of the word – which could be Africa, Igbo, or Nigeria. The 'possessions' of this universally owned estate include the literary forms – lyric, narrative, drama, and the modes, tragedy and comedy; they include myths, not in their individualised forms, like 'the sky-bull [] in convulsive cloud humps' of Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (155), but in the generalized form of myth of origins, creation myth, the fall, the knowledge-seeker, and so forth. For example, notwithstanding that 'the logic of punishment, is an undiscoverable rationality' (Ricoeur 354), the myth of crime and punishment is universal, and encountered in some form in every culture. The making public of this myth in Sophocles' *Antigone*, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick,* and Chinua Achebe's *A Man*

of the People is a significant fact. These works belong together at a certain level where the name of Chief Nanga or Ahab, Thebes, Nantucket, or Bori, ships and whale hunting, electoral violence, or the sprinkling of sand over a dead body – the kinds of things Hegel counts as the work's 'configuration in an external and phenomenal mode' (613) – are not issues of any importance.

Two other points to note: the discursive formations of literary texts are indicated, not necessarily expressed, within the text itself; they come with the linguistic signs that the poem makes art out of, and may be present in those signs 'not as a total presence but as a *trace*' (Derrida 119). These are signs capable of configuration into poetry, and of configuring others by inclusion, so that 'everything that had been presented to view, now takes on a new mode of being' (Foucault 287). These signs have 'an ineluctable memory' accumulated as tradition (324); hence their 'peculiar mode of being is "literary"' (327). Of course, they also function in the everyday mode, where they analyse simply into signifier-signified (Saussure 65), a dyadic structure which characterizes a language fashioned for analysis and calculation, a scientific language, therefore, and different from the symbolic one that characterises myth, ritual, and poetry. Whereas the sign's ideologeme reduces the gap between the representer and the represented, there is an asymmetrical relationship in symbolization between the signifying system and what it manifests. As Julia Kristeva explains, the linguistic sign came into its own in the seventeenth century, taking over the space of representation from the symbol, but retaining:

the fundamental characteristic of the symbol: irreducibility of terms, that is, in the case of the sign, of the referent to the signified, of the signified to the signifier, in addition, all the 'units' of the signifying structure itself. The ideologeme of the sign is therefore, in a general way, like the ideologeme of the symbol: the sign is dualist, hierarchical, and hierarchizing. A difference between the sign and the symbol can, however, be seen vertically as well as horizontally: within its vertical function, the sign refers back to entities both of lesser scope and more concretized than those of the symbol.... The semiotic practice of the sign thus assimilates the metaphysics of the symbol and projects it onto the 'immediately perceptible.' The 'immediately perceptible' valorized in this way, is then transformed into an objectivity – the reigning law of discourse in the civilization of the sign (40).

The seventeenth century marks the birth of the novel which, apparently became possible because of the appearance of the sign capable of rendering representation 'immediately perceptible'. There was no way, however, to make universals like 'heroism', 'courage', 'nobility', 'virtue', 'fear', 'treason' (38) immediately perceptible, with the result that the 'civilization of the sign' did not utterly abolish that of the symbol, which in fact resumed, as Michel Foucault has shown, in the nineteenth century, with the re-appearance of the word freighted with memory as the poetic word itself (324).

So the word occurring in a poem is freighted, without having the ability to keep any of its potential interpretations out of play. These signs make a strategic appearance in the work such that they are not mistaken: they are part of the foundation, and are not discovered by the

narrative along the way. If there is a thing like a writer finding his/her voice, it is not with respect to making art. Art always entails the dimension of a formative from something already known.

With the discursive formation, moreover, it becomes clear that the poem is a unit, a work of art, an object with respect to which the idea of animation has a certain appropriateness. The work has organic life, and every part, down to the level of the individual word, shares organic solidarity with all the other elements. Chinua Achebe brought out this sense of totality in his response to an interview question about decision-making and the shaping of his stories. In his practice, apparently, art-making does not have much to do with decision-making and shaping to a desired end; according to him:

When a story comes to me, it comes complete; this means the kind of person who will tell the story is part of it, the kind of language used is part of it (*Conversations with Chinua Achebe* 51).

Achebe's role as an artist is none other than bringing the story to birth. Northrop Frye explains the function of the poet in basically these terms:

the poet, who writes creatively rather than deliberately, is not the father of his poem; he is at best a midwife, or, more accurately still, the womb of Mother Nature herself: her privates he, so to speak. The fact that revision is possible, that a poet can make changes in a poem not because he likes them better but because they are better, shows clearly that the poet has to give birth to the poem as it passes through his mind. He is responsible for delivering it in as uninjured a state as possible, and if the poem is alive, it is equally anxious to be rid of him, and screams to be cut loose from all the navel-strings and feeding-tubes of his ego (98).

A deliberate writer fits his work together, one thing after another to bring it to a determined end. A creative artist has the poem to bring out 'whole and complete' (*holên kai teleian*, as Aristotle phrases it in the *Poetics*, chapter 23). He is under responsibility because what he has in his possession is, according to Heidegger, a gift:

Most of what man works and produces may be considered as rightly acquired and he 'deserves' to own it. But ... this 'poetic' endowment is not a 'merit' of man of which he may be proud, but a 'gift' of higher powers owed in the first instance to the devoted response of the poets *(Existence and Being* 204).

'The devoted response of the poets' of the ages past is the reason that the higher powers ceaselessly endow their gifts to men and women who, if they are writing *creatively* rather than *deliberately* will exercise care over. The work as a whole, 'independent and self-contained' (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 24), is the outcome of this care.

Discovery through Philology

Discourse studies, and its governing principles embodied in philology is commonly classified with stylistics as one of the language-based approaches to literature. But there are major

differences not to overlook. With the literary work of art, undoubtedly, there is only language to deal with, but this is a language that has configured as art. Stylistics studies has the basic presupposition that art is *deliberately* made, with the writer choosing words from the lexicon which *he* likes better, and linking them together with a specific goal in mind: to convey his message effectively, perhaps even to a certain kind of reader. It shares much in common with formalism, and has in fact handed down formalism – and stylistics ought to know this. Here is Shklovsky's poet at work:

The devices by which Tolstoi enstranges his material may be boiled down to the following: he does not call a thing by its name, that is. He describes it as if it were perceived for the first time, while an incident is described as if it were happening for the first time. In addition, he foregoes the conventional names of the various parts of a thing, replacing them instead with the names of corresponding parts in other things (25).

It is by suchlike operations, Shklovsky argues, that an object is withdrawn 'from the domain of life' and transformed 'into a fact of art' (61); in art, accordingly, an incident is seen 'as if it were happening for the first time'. The effect is the renewal of language, the literary devices (141), and perception and 'our awareness' itself (154).

Unlike stylistics, philology recognizes the existence of a literary language characterized by memory, and philological investigation is a mode of archaeology, resulting in the unearthing of what lies in the people's mind. Foucault states it this way:

Philology, as the analysis of what is said in the depths of discourse, has become the modern form of criticism. Where, at the end of the eighteenth century, it was a matter of fixing the frontiers of knowledge, it will now be one of seeking to destroy syntax, to shatter tyrannical modes of speech, to turn words around in order to perceive all that is being said through them and despite them (325).

In modernist literature, language has become as symbolic as before the age of the sign, and critical labour is no longer a search for meanings and decidable messages: these can no longer be ascertained with certainty. The task now is to try and 'perceive all that is being said through [the words] and despite them', ready to follow up every flicker of significance, and repressing or overlooking none.

Language as a locus of tradition, its archaeology for the contents of that tradition in a way privileges the language of the text. That is what is directly investigated, namely the language of symbols, since only such as these give access to the possibility of multiple significations. In the irruptive passage in pages 27 to 28 which the text calls Ikem's 'heat-haze reverie', the language is heavily symbolic, and calls attention to itself as a pure utterance, rather than a personally directed discourse. The personal, psychological appurtenance is at most an unconscious sense of what really is going on in Kangan, which the man himself would not entertain at the conscious level: witness his great hymn to the Sun in which the solar mythology is more *traditional* – in

both *estates,* the universal and the national. It is the sun of apocalyptic thought that we see in Ikem's reverie:

The sun in April is an enemy though the weatherman on television reciting mechanically the words of his foreign mentors tells you it will be fine all over the country. Fine! We have been slowly steamed into well-done mutton since February and all the oafs on our public payroll tell us we are doing just fine! No, my dear countrymen. This is Brigadier Misfortune of the Wilting 202 Brigade telling you you are *not* fine. No my dear countrymen, you will not be fine until you can overthrow the wild Sun of April. Later tonight, fellow countrymen, you will hear the full text from General Mouth himself—I am only a mouthpiece—you will hear the words direct from him after the national anthem shall have been played backwards. Until then, beloved countrymen, roast in peace.

This reverie hangs, and seems unconnected even to the hymn to the sun. Given the 'customary critical notions of unity' that guide the reading of literary texts (Culler 234), the passage is a damage to the textual system, unless its correlates are found within the narrative.

The favourite language of successful coup makers is notable in 'my dear countrymen', and the playing of the national anthem to usher in the statement of the justification and purpose of such an action. But the key internal linkages to the narrative itself is 'General Mouth'. General Sam does refer to himself as 'General Big Mouth', who may end up with his picture printed 'on the cover of *Time* magazine with a big mouth and a small head' (*Anthills* 15). This is directly linked to a 'funeral' – no one else's, but Sam's (16). The interlocutor of the President on the occasion, Professor Okong, is rendered *uneasy* because of 'the word funeral'. There is a sense of an ending, a sense of finality in the word. This sense of an ending is no doubt dissimulated in the reverie's 'roast in peace', no less than in the idea of overthrowing 'the wild sun in April' and 'later tonight'; and no less again that in the idea of 'the national anthem [being] played backwards'. The references to coup-making and coup announcement are of course evocative of Sam's own accession to power. All the loaded expressions have come together in the reverie by 'dream work', 'a particular form of thinking' (Freud 510), which 'is under some kind of necessity to combine all the sources which have acted as stimuli for the dream into a single unity' (202). Not only are whole histories condensed into one narrative, but also mythologies. The 'sun' is a hub where many of the strands of movement in the passage converge.

'The sun in April' both gives the temporal parameters of the crisis of this narrative and identifies it as the source of the oppression that must be *overthrown* for the wellbeing of the roasting countrymen: it 'is an enemy'. This oppression is especially hard in Abazon where there is no drinking water perhaps to help alleviate the hardship because General Big Mouth had stopped the boreholes being dug in parched Abazon for water because they had voted against his bid for a life presidency. The conflation of General Mouth who will announce the new overthrow with the ruling General Big Mouth who has become the figure of the devastating 'sun in April' in part underscores that the people are not involved, and in part that the ruling military have become a

law unto themselves. This devastating Sun in April both calls up the solar figure of the mythic tradition, at least by personification and subject status, and is also, and paradoxically by the same personifying feature, 'an enemy', utterly dissimilar to the sun of tradition. Life is scorched and wilting under its blaze just like the solar plague of the Book of Revelation (16.8). The sun in April, laying waste since February, *is* that plague. This plague of the Last Days connects to Chris's watchfulness in the opening scene of the narrative to see where these goings on 'will all… well, end'.

The little word *end* is the major symbol and the word with the most freight from tradition, and occurs in the first passage of sustained narration in *Anthills of the Savannah.* We read:

> And so it begins to seem to me that this thing probably never was a game, that the present was there from the very beginning only I was too blind or too busy to notice. But the real question which I have often asked myself is why then do I go on with it now that I can see. I don't know. Simple inertia, maybe. Or perhaps sheer curiosity: to see where it will all… well, end. I am not thinking so much about him as about my colleagues, eleven intelligent, educated men who let this happen to them, who actually went out of their way to invite it, and who even at this hour have seen and learnt nothing, the cream of our society and the hope of the black race. I suppose it is for them that I am still at this silly observation post making farcical entries in the crazy log-book of this our ship of state (1-2).

Things are not what they were at the beginning – at this stage though; and having *seen* and *learned* from what he had seen, Chris is prepared for the possibility that nothing really had changed, and things had been disordered from the beginning. But there is going to be an end, and it is going to be bad. This is why he is thinking of people who even at 'this hour' – a very important apocalyptic word – are letting this *happen* to them. Not for their own sakes is he thinking of them, but because being 'intelligent, educated men', 'the cream of our society and the hope of the black race', they nevertheless 'actually went out of their way to invite' this disaster. This solicitude does not extend to 'him', because he is the one causing this oncoming disaster: he *is* 'the Wild sun of April'. In point of fact, the age that is coming to an end is his – an age in the history of Kangan; not a 'history of the reigns of the good kings', as *The Awkward Age* would put it (87), but of the bad. This bad ruler is bound up with the age, and bound up as well with its end. Apocalyptic endings are marked by the sweeping away of certain kinds of people, beginning with the driving out of 'the prince of this world' (John 12.31).

Chris who had played a major role in helping to form General Sam's government is remaining at his post not because of any hope of helping to move things forward or change the course of things. He is staying on long after it had become clear to him that governing no longer interested the President; long after all substance had given way to ceremony. He is staying on for one purpose only: 'to see where it will all… well, end'. The opening of this novel is a scene of stagnation, with the cabinet clustered around their immobile chief. The only kind of action going

on is backbiting and watching for opportunity to trip up one's neighbour, especially if contrary to the general stasis he is trying to move on. This stasis suits the President perfectly. So he would not allow so much as a resignation. He says as much to his cabinet, probably meaning it for Chris who is the only member speaking out:

'If anyone thinks he can leave the Cabinet on this issue he will be making a sad mistake.'

'Anyone walking out of that door will not go home but head straight into detention' (*Anthills* 119).

Sam's own career as a leader is to all intents and purposes at an end, and with it all hope of improvement in the quality of life of the Kangan people.

Yet the days succeed one another. Chris is not deceived that this could go on indefinitely. He is staying on at his post to see *where* all this would end. It is a kind of final end that he has vision of. Such is an apocalyptic vision. Such an end is going to be a spectacle in itself, a spectacle which has already played out in Ikem's reverie, although at the conscious level he is optimistic, and working for change. With the lights available to him, his attitude is summed up in: 'right now he [General Sam] is still OK, thank God' (46).

But how does Chris know that he himself would not be swept away in the apocalypse? The vision entails an apocalyptic tornado that would sweep away lives and possessions indiscriminately. But there are some not likely to escape the indiscriminate destruction, Sam, for instance. Chris's interventions in the cabinet may be his way of attempting to obviate this by restarting governance again. But having failed there he now focuses on others who would probably be in the firing line, Ikem Osodi and himself. He confides in Beatrice:

I mention [the threat by the President] only to show how tricky things can become of a sudden. That's why I have said a hundred million times to Ikem: Lie low for a while and this gathering tornado may rage and pass overhead carrying away roof-tops and perhaps… only perhaps… leave us battered but alive (119).

In its destructive phase, the apocalypse can sweep away everything, bad and good, into 'the winepress of God's anger', as in the phrasing by the Book of Revelation (14.19).

Apocalyptic Literature

The apocalyptic genre of narrative is situated in the Bible, and may have gained expression in an unmistakable fashion for the first time perhaps there. The theology is complex, but as a literary genre, it is the unveiling of what ought to be already known, but somehow remained hidden, covered over by some sort of fraud. The unveiling takes dramatic form in the Bible's Book of Revelation. For the writer of the Book of Revelation all the 'incredible wonders are the inner

meaning or, more accurately, the inner form of everything that is happening now. Man creates what he calls history as a screen to conceal the workings of the apocalypse from himself' *(The Great Code* 136).

Beneath the apparent stasis of General Sam's government, much activity is in fact going on, but activity of a certain kind. There is a glimpse of it as part of the novel's opening scene, which spills over to chapter 2:

> His Excellency's deep anxiety had been swiftly assuaged by his young, brilliant and aggressive Director of the State Research Council (SRC). He proved once again in his Excellency's words as efficient as the Cabinet was incompetent. Every single action by this bright young man from the day of his appointment has given His Excellency good cause for self-congratulations for Major Johnson Ossai had been his own personal choice whom he had gone ahead to appoint in the face of strong opposition from more senior officers. And it had happened at the very tricky moment when His Excellency had decided to retire all military members of his cabinet and to replace them with civilians and, to cap it all, add President to all his titles. There were unconfirmed rumours of unrest, secret trials and executions in the barracks. But His Excellency rode the storm quite comfortably thanks to two key appointments he had personally made—the Army Chief of Staff and the Director of the State Research Council, the secret police *(Anthills* 14).

General Sam has two governments in place, the official one which is called the Executive Council, and a hidden one the State Research Council, the secret police. The unveiling of this secret arm of General Sam's government is one of the big projects of *Anthills of the Savannah*; and it is tantamount to the unveiling of arbitrary rule and human rights abuses on a vast scale. We already see here 'unconfirmed rumours of unrest, secret trials and executions in the barracks'. The brutality and recklessness are also unveiled, as in Chris's interaction with the BBC correspondent who comes to interview him over the killing of Ikem:

In a voice full of emotion but steady and without shrillness Chris had described the official account of Ikem's death as 'patently false.' How could he be sure of that? Because Ikem was taken from his flat in handcuffs and so could not have wrenched a gun from his captors. So you are saying in effect that he was murdered? I am saying that there is no shred of doubt that Ikem Osodi was brutally murdered in cold blood by the security officers of this government.

The correspondent was deported the next day (172-173).

The lifting of the veil on the orgy of violence by General Sam's cohorts is enacted in chapters 13 and 14 of this narrative. In this unveiling is also the 'judgment of the prince of this world' (Revelation 16.11). In *Anthills of the Savannah*, the judgment is of course concretized in the destruction of the evil ruler just at the point where what is to him the last enemy Chris Oriko is gunned down. It is a heroic moment for Chris however, since he is gunned down trying to rescue a girl from rape by a drunken policeman. And whereas Ikem had implied that he was not man

enough to take a bullet in the chest, he more than answers Ikem's sarcasm. He had scolded the man shortly to kill him:

'A police officer stealing a lorry-load of beer and then abducting a school girl! You are a disgrace to the force.'

The other said nothing more. He unslung his gun, cocked it, narrowed his eyes while confused voices went up all around some asking Chris to run, others the policeman to put the gun away. Chris stood his ground looking straight into the man's face, daring him to shoot. And he did, point-blank into the chest presented to him (215).

But there is bitter irony in this last judgment of *Anthills of the Savannah.* Chris is a major force of moderation in this narrative, along with his friend Ikem Osodi and his fiancée Beatrice Okoh. But somehow the two men are counted among those to be *gathered out of the kingdom for having caused offence* (Mt 13.41); and their accuser is none other than the fiancée, who calls the other her brother: Well, you fellows, all three of you, are incredibly conceited. The story of this country, as far as you are concerned, is the story of the three of you… (66).

But Chris himself confirms the charge: Actually you are quite right. That's what I've just said myself. We tend sometimes to forget that our story is only one of twenty million stories—one tiny synoptic account (66).

Still the suffering of Ikem and Chris is distinctly tragic. In terms of the story, it is the tragedy of the three of them, or at least two, not necessarily for the twenty million. For some of the twenty million encountered at the road accident site where Chris is killed, there is at most embarrassment at the turn of events: This our country na waa! I never hear the likeness before. A whole President de miss; like old woman de waka for village talk say him goat de miss! This Africa na waa! (213).

Apocalyptic thought, however, 'allows itself to be diffused, blended with other varieties of fiction – tragedy, for example' (Kermode 8). It is highly blended with tragedy in *Anthills of the Savannah*. Given Achebe's faithfulness to what in Aristotle is called 'the requirements of the art' (*Poetics* chapter 25), there is always a classic aura hovering over his work, and there is no sentimentality about it. The suffering and dying of Ikem and Chris in the chaos unleashed by Sam, in which the evil man himself also perishes, recalls the Greek stage where the punishment often appears to exceed the offence, as in Cadmon's charge against Dionysus *(The Bacchae* 1346). But they are not innocent in the tragic sense, even though 'the tragedy of innocence' is possible, like the case of Iphigeneia or Hippolytus (*Anatomy of Criticism* 220). They are *good men* in Aristotle's sense, precisely the kinds of protagonists whose sufferings evoke the tragic emotions.

Suffering by both the guilty and 'good men' alike is a feature recurrent in Greek tragedy, as in the *Agamemnon,* the *Bacchae,* and *Antigone,* by adhering to the requirements of the art of

tragedy. In *Anthills of the Savannah* the experience is cathartic for the narrative itself, not just for the audience or those who hear what is afoot (Aristotle, chapter 14). The survivors are left in a state of tranquillity in the last scenes: they have lived through the worst, and it is as if there is nothing still worse that they could fear.

Unlike in Achebe's other tragedies in which the future beyond the overthrowing of things may only be conjectured, the future has begun for the survivors in *Anthills of the Savannah*. There are in fact two futures separately for the survivors (the ones the story knows by name), and for Kangan. The latter is a future which according to Kermode 'is traditionally held to resume the whole structure' (6). Thus in General Ahmed Lango taking over the reins of government in Kangan, there can be no expectation of addressing the needs of the people, 'needs of water which is free from Guinea worm, of simple shelter and food' (*Anthills* 73).

Double futures, however, are normal in apocalyptic sequences. In biblical apocalypse, according to Frye, there is an immediate 'future and the eternal world' *(The Great Code* 85). The immediate future is structured more or less like the one that is swept aside, but the eternal world is one which is representable only 'by figures predictive of that part of it which has not been historically revealed' (Kermode 7). The immediate future in *Anthills of the Savannah* is the time of General Ahmed Lango. The vision of the eternal world is glimpsed in the group of survivors.

In the final scenes, Beatrice is now in her full functioning as the mystical daughter of the Almighty, and his plenipotentiary. She inaugurates a new society, and apart from the founding members, the survivors themselves, the first formally initiated member is Ikem and Elewa's baby daughter, who is given a boy's name, Amaechina, and with it a male child's cultural function of perpetuating a line. However, she means the name in a symbolic sense, more than just a biological:

'It's a beautiful name. The Path of Ikem.'

'That's right. May it never close, never overgrow.'

'Das right!'

'May it always shine! The Shining Path of Ikem' (222).

'The Shining Path of Ikem' includes his impact and memory, his values and nature of commitment.

Beatrice also assigns what nationhood means, and the role of the individual in it, and does this at the same time as she deciphers what is in fact an oracular discourse from the mouth of the expiring Chris:

> You know why I cried? Chris was only just beginning to understand the lesson of that bitter joke. The bottles are up there on the wall hanging by a hair's breadth, yet looking

> down pompously on the world. Chris was sending us a message to beware. This world belongs to the people of the world not to any little caucus, no matter how talented…. (*Anthills* 232)

It would appear that the members of this new society are going to be the witnesses to the new value system in which people are like Chris, ready to learn from experience where everyone is aware and thoughtful towards the twenty million others as co-owners and equal partners in the Kangan commonwealth.

Indeed Kermode underscores the role of witnessing in apocalyptic literature. There is need for 'authoritative witness[es] to the Last Days' (15). They witness not only by faithfully documenting the facts and experiences of the Last Days, they also pay the ultimate price as their supreme act of witnessing. Northrop Frye reminds us as follows:

In Revelation 11 the calamities of the last days include the martyrdom of two 'witnesses' ('witness' is the literal meaning of 'martyr') (*The Great Code* 179.)

Conclusion

The experimental nature of Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* probably first appears at the level of narration and characterization, with its multiple narrators and points of view, and also multiple characters where it may not be an easy judgment which takes precedence as the main one. This experimentation, as we have seen, extends also to the discursive formation, for apocalyptic thought is commonly discussed a part of religious phenomena, and does not frequently form secular literature. But literature does not recognize any limits to its venturing, where it may carry off materials or discourse structures to make art out of. This is the case with all the arts as well. On the other hand, some treat the very religious scriptures as themselves art works, and collections of art works. Northrop Frye's *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, for instance, treats the Bible as a collection of great poems and narratives, but even more as a source of formations and textual generators which have been drawn upon in the making of great literary works, to say nothing of sculpting, painting, and music. There are such famous works as John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Michelangelo's *Moses,* Da Vinci's *John the Baptist,* and George Frideric Handel's *Messiah.*

A full analysis of *Anthills of the Savannah* will show that all the constituent parts of the narrative are phases of unveiling of apocalypse. And the instrument that enables explication of these individual elements and a demonstrable relationship among them based on the discursive formation not only provides adequate practical criticism of the work, but has wider implications for narratology and literature itself. Analytics of discursive formations have a major contribution in narrative theory. A novel may indeed look like an 'unmediated, uncrafted window on life', as Fowler puts it. Such a vision can lead to a criticism that takes parts and constituents of a

narrative as if they existed for their own sakes. But as Fowler states it, 'the "world out there" of the novel is an artifice constructed through the novelist's technique, and we must be inquisitive about the means by which this shaping takes place' (3). It is this inquisitiveness that leads to the discovery of the novel's discursive formation; a function that truly preserves the meaning of artistic creativity. Our analysis in this paper has shown that discursive formation is the springboard and nerve centre that networks the entire story, with all its parts, into a unity, and indeed accounts for the construction and incorporation of each of the parts. By providing a minimum statement whereby objects, subjective positions, concepts, and strategic choices are formed, narrative can be seen to exfoliate from within, providing the impulse for construction and linking of incidents together to create actions that add up to a *muthos,* or 'synthesis of action' (*tês sustaseôs tôn pragmatôn* (Aristotle 1453b[1]); that is to say, we have a story of a certain kind: the story of the knowledge seeker, the Fall, the Last Days, which is in fact the same as the originating impulse that gave rise to the story in the first place, the discursive formation.

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