



Romanus Okey Muoneke. *Art, Rebellion and Redemption: A Reading of the Novels of Chinua Achebe*. New York: Peter Lang, 1994. Pp. x, 176. \$37.95.

In *Art, Rebellion and Redemption: A Reading of the Novels of Chinua Achebe*, Romanus Okey Muoneke attempts an overarching analysis of the literary output of one of Nigeria's leading men of letters. Muoneke, a professor of African literature at Texas Southern University, uses three categories—the art, rebellion, and redemption of the book's title—to describe and contextualize Achebe's five novels by means of a kind of critical triangulation. Muoneke succeeds in breaking down some of the major theoretical, literary, and cultural issues arising from the texts under consideration; in this respect, the tripartite structure serves his purposes well. At the same time, the rigidity of the three-part division leads Muoneke to some rather pat conclusions, judgments which seem determined by his own categorizations rather than by some inherent feature of the work in question.

In a brief introduction, Muoneke discusses the peculiarly political valence of terms such as "art," "rebellion," and "redemption" in late-twentieth-century Africa, "a continent torn apart by colonialism" (1). Muoneke next unpacks—with the support of such disparate authorities as *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Wole Soyinka, the Bible, David Diop, Albert Camus, and Mario Vargas Llosa—the quasi-spiritual implications of his three controlling concepts. (We might say that art, rebellion, and redemption function as a critical Holy Trinity for Muoneke, who does not find it necessary to problematize the implications of his own critical apparatus or multicultural methodology.) Muoneke, arguing that art, rebellion, and redemption have both local applications in the Nigerian context and international relevance, is thus able to claim that "universality is present in the themes [Achebe] explores" (5).

Universality proves to be of fundamental importance to Muoneke, as he lays out in the first chapter, "The Artist and Society," the trans-historical and ubiquitous significance of writers. Moving effortlessly back and forth between the work of Plato, Igbo theology, French existentialism, the Romantics, and contemporary African critics and writers, Muoneke asserts that writers have played the role of prophets in society since time immemorial. This semi-divine status, Muoneke holds, puts the writer in a position that entails some social responsibility, insofar as the writer is privy to knowledge whose very source makes it of vital interest to all. Therefore, according to Muoneke, no matter how transcendental the nature of art itself, being an artist involves being in the world. Muoneke enlists the support of Chinweizu, Soyinka, and Achebe himself to argue for the sociopolitical dimensions of artistic production. And, in a particularly convincing reading, Muoneke points out the ways in which Ali Mazrui's *The Trial of Christo-*

pher Okigbo takes firm political positions at the very moments at which it attempts to assert the apolitical nature of art. While some of Muoneke's claims for the eternal qualities of art seem somewhat underthought, his insistence on the basic politicality of art in general, and of Achebe's art in particular, is on target.

"Rebellion," the second chapter, is the first to take up Achebe's novels themselves. Muoneke divides African literary responses to European colonialism into two distinct camps: "(a) Negritude—a cultural and literary revolution initiated by the Francophone writers; and (b) Nationalism—a political movement that spread mostly in Anglophone countries" (41). Locating Achebe squarely in the latter category, Muoneke demonstrates through extended readings of *Things Fall Apart*, *A Man of the People*, and *Anthills of the Savannah* the ways in which Achebe formulates his critique of nationalism. Achebe's first novel, argues Muoneke, lashes out against colonialism itself, while *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* position themselves against abuses of civilian and military political power, respectively.

Unfortunately, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*, which do not fall neatly under the rebellion rubric, are left out of the discussion altogether. This omission appears to be an attempt by Muoneke to ensure the smooth operation of his three-part formula by dismissing deviations from the curve: *No Longer at Ease* is Achebe's least satisfying novel, *Arrow of God* his most perfect; excluding them from what is supposed to be an analysis of Achebe's complete oeuvre shows the study to be unfairly selective of its data. The shortcomings of Muoneke's method are thus exposed. It is disappointing that Muoneke omits these texts, for a clever reading of *No Longer at Ease* could make it a more complicated and interesting novel for the cynical reader or critic.

Although Muoneke finds redemptive motifs in each of the five novels (and therefore does not need to leave any of the books out of his discussion), the third chapter, "Redemption," simply tries to do too much. Redemption for Achebe, Muoneke writes, involves the "realization of the 'adequate' society," where adequacy is accomplished by the successful negotiation of "duality, moderation and balance, gender, and women's plight" (97): Given the recent critiques of Achebe's work made by feminist thinkers such as Buchi Emecheta and Florence Stratton, most intriguing in Muoneke's description of adequacy is his insistence on the centrality of gender to Achebe's conception of redemption. According to Muoneke, Achebe uses such figures as Okonkwo's wives in *Things Fall Apart* and Clara in *No Longer at Ease* to provide us with "typical examples of oppressed women," victims who will ultimately gain liberation (that is, redemption) in the character of Beatrice in *Anthills of the Savannah*. This is perhaps too kind a reading of Achebe's first two novels, as neither seems to have any self-consciousness about its representation of women as marginal figures

in male-dominated societies. Further, while Muoneke is correct to assert that Beatrice marks something of a departure for Achebe, he does not address the somewhat ironical characterization of Ikem, through whom the reader discovers the novel's more enlightened attitude toward women. How, one wonders, does this irony affect what we learn from Ikem's epistolary celebration of Beatrice in particular, and women generally?

While Muoneke is sensitive to changes in Achebe's style and thematic concerns over the course of his career, and although Muoneke performs some insightful readings of the novels, his reliance on the three-part structure interferes with his ability to construct a total, coherent description of the work. Further, a certain religious sentiment appears at times to influence his judgment, particularly in his discussion of redemption and in his apotheosis of the writer. In his conclusion, for example, Muoneke hails the writer's (and Achebe's) ability to "utilize God's gift of understanding . . . to reveal divine mysteries to humanity and to dispense God's wisdom to mankind" (157). Achebe is a writer committed, above all else, to the improvement of society, to helping downtrodden people to "get up," as the Igbo expression has it. As such, Achebe's artistic concerns are far more secular than Muoneke suggests—even if on some level Achebe, like all writers, has much in common with the priest. This problem, too, arises from the overreliance on rigid categories to describe Achebe's work, particularly categories such as redemption, fraught, as it is, with nonsecular connotations.

MATTHEW MULLIGAN GOLDSTEIN



Sneja Gunew. *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies*. Victoria: Melbourne UP, 1994. Pp. xiii, 158. \$19.95.

While the explosion of theorizing in the past decade of cultural studies is exciting, newcomers to the field can be overwhelmed by the complexity of a theoretical canon which is further complicated by its interdisciplinarity. Sneja Gunew will calm such anxieties over theory with her survey of multicultural approaches to literary studies and her integrative analysis of Australian particulars, in *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies*.

The text is as neatly split as the title suggests. The first half is a theoretical "talking" about marginality in literature, and the second a "doing" of theories in Gunew's readings of four different writers: Antigone Kefala, Ania Walwicz, Rosa Cappiello, and Anna Couani. *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies* is part of an Interpretations Series intended to introduce "recent theories and critical practices in the humanities and social sciences" (n.p.). In Part One particularly, Gunew provides biographical and historical contexts that help to situ-