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Beyond Subjectificatory Structures: Chin Ce 'In the season of another life'

LIKE the works of many other politically-conscious Nigerian poets—such as Ada Ugah, Odia Ofeimun, and Niyi Osundare—Chin Ce's collection of poetry, *An African Eclipse*, is clearly concerned with the ethical and moral transgressions of Nigeria's political leaders in its post-independence years. Yet, one would like to demonstrate here how Ce's poetry offers something more profound than a simple sketch of the various past injustices inflicted on a largely poor Nigerian population by both civilian and military leaders following the official end of British colonial governance. Indeed, this paper argues that Ce's *An African Eclipse* conceptualises a non-personal force of Life that not only conditions a revolutionary way of being for its readers but also functions as an ethical principle that has the potential to become the antidote to the diseased morality of Nigeria's political leaders.

In a little-known article on the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, Gilles Deleuze laments 'the sadness of generations without teachers' (77). It is a sentiment that finds its conceptual correlate in the frustration that characterises Chinua Achebe's criticism of post-independence Nigerian leadership. 'The Nigerian problem', Achebe writes, 'is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true

leadership' (1). Given the context of a succession of corrupt civilian and military administrations, Achebe's frustration with the inability of Nigeria's leading political figures to assume the role of teacher to the nation seems entirely merited. But the concept of a teacher to the nation goes further than simply setting a good example for others to follow. 'Our teachers', Deleuze continues, are those who find 'ways of thinking that correspond to our modernity'. That is to say, our teachers are those people who can find ways of thinking that are not antiquated or antithetical to our present situation – those that are mindful of our 'difficulties as well as our vague enthusiasms' that we experience in life (77).

For Ce, this simply cannot be said of the post-independence Nigerian political leaderships. Indeed, the political emphasis of Ce's *An African Eclipse* ensures that the collection is not without (many) examples of the impoverished condition of what one might call 'State thinking'. So, Ce writes of the profligacy of political administrations and the manner in which such recklessness and wastefulness is learned and repeated by the Nigerian everyman in the damning social commentary of 'Prodigal Drums'; he writes of the rampant egoism of Nigeria's political leaders in 'African Eclipse', which results in the social blight of self-interest and self-importance and claims of billions of dollars in oil revenues siphoned from the Nigerian economy by some Nigerian leaders and their families; and he writes of the willingness of the politicians to hide rather than disclose and resolve social problems and injustices, in the poems of 'The Second Reptile' and 'The Champ'. Taken in concert, Ce's cutting overview of State thinking presents a scathing indictment of a leadership that demonstrates a complete inability to empathise with, and react to, the experience of being a modern Nigerian.

However, in Ce's essay 'Bards and Tyrants' one can trace the

inability of the political leadership to form an appreciation of other Nigerians to a failure of thinking itself. Linked to his discussion of the degeneration of the integrity of the Nigerian university system, Ce reasons that the inadequacy of State thinking is due to the failure of Nigeria's political class to engage in deep personal thought at the hands of a 'liberating' literature:

Nigeria's political elite do not care for literature or any book for that matter, there is hardly any hope that its liberating thought can ever coalesce in the form of a liberating philosophy...Insights garnered from the literatures of their brightest minds have been ignored.
(Ce 2005)

As such, one is forced to conclude that the State's inability to adopt a way of thinking that reflects the experience of being a modern Nigerian is just that –*an inability*. That is to say, the repugnant social effects of an impoverished State thought, which Ce outlines in his poetry, are not the consequence of choice but of true ignorance. With the deterioration in the standards of formal education institutions, the operation of a 'personal thought' that can account for social justice withdraws to leave a vacuum that is filled by an unbridled individualism. Such individualism leads to a blindness to social ills, to a blindness to bony-headed 'Children/On the streets' (*An African Eclipse* 15-16) and to a deafness to the 'cries of torture and murder' that 'sweep the streets' (40-41). Indeed, such individualism cannot offer a way of thinking that corresponds to the difficulty of enduring both the painful lived experience of the ethically and morally bankrupt national leadership and the passion engendered in the promise of self-rule, free from British colonial control. Left unchecked, the Nigerian Everyman only stands to

inherit this caustic individualism which erodes the very pathways to a social consciousness that is demanded by political contestation. Simply put, without access to some kind of teaching that can proliferate creative personal thought, the adoption of such individualism can only result in an unchallenged procession of dictatorial administrations.

Clearly, such a situation is morally, ethically, and politically unacceptable. And it is for this reason that there is a necessity to reposition the role of the teacher. Under such conditions, the role of the teacher must migrate from the shoulders of politicians to the figure of the writer. As South-African novelist and academic J.M. Coetzee notes in response to André Brink, the writer must become the medical diagnostician of the State (Coetzee 1990), ensuring that clinical and critical faculties intersect in order to diagnose, at the very least, the psychological condition of the State. Yet, it is also important to note that Brink's ideas can only come to fruition if, in the words of Achebe, the African writer takes on the role of the teacher:

The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost...In Africa he cannot perform this task unless he has a proper sense of history. (7)

There are two highly important features to note about Achebe's assertion, here; and both are granted considerable attention in Ce's *An African Eclipse*. Firstly, one must recognise that what Achebe promotes in this passage is a programme of recovery by which every Nigerian person can reclaim the act of self-determination. In this programme, the role of the writer is to render visible the

apparatuses of subjectification (those structures that facilitate the loss of 'dignity and self-respect' to which Achebe refers) which condition the individual as a passive, State-governed entity who is unable to enter into any kind of revolutionary activity by appealing to 'a proper sense of history'. So, it is perhaps unsurprising that, as though in direct response to Achebe's call, Ce organises his poems in *An African Eclipse* through a tripartite division of time that leans heavily towards the historical – the past (twenty-one poems), the present (the singular opening poem), and the future (the four concluding poems of the collection). However, it is significant that Ce's artificial temporal divisions are not strictly adhered to. Indeed, one need only reflect on the fact that the poem that opens the collection, 'A Farewell – 'the single poem dedicated to the present – is continually informed by the poems that follow it to understand the importance that Ce ascribes to both the past and the future in the constitution of the present. For example, the sympathetic narrator of 'A Farewell' reminds an unnamed partner:

We saw lined behind the gloom
 Only our own graffiti
 (And phantoms loomed) ahead. (8-10)

The notion of 'graffiti', here, takes on an added significance once the reader associates it with the 'scorched earth' discussed in the later poem 'The Second Reptile' which stands as the result of the Biafran conflict of the late 1960s and the unheeded but continuing erosion affecting the eastern regions of Nigeria, described in 'Windstorm'. Upon reading these, what might usefully be termed, 'poems-of-the-past', the unanchored reference to graffiti in 'A Farewell' becomes indicative of a human violence so grotesque that it inscribes the very earth; a human violence so monstrous that it

produces a permanent physical and incorruptible record of past injustices and discrimination perpetuated by an unthinking political class on the Nigerian people; a human violence, Ce tells the reader, which even the progress symbolised by a nation of skyscrapers cannot hide ('The Second Reptile'). Yet, vitally, this violent act of inscribing the earth (a literal geo-graphism/geography) captured in the simplicity of the term 'graffiti' begins to haunt the 'looming phantoms ahead'—each of the decisions that the Nigerian people must make when postulating the nation's strides into a progressive future. Suddenly, references to geography, to 'the still waters' mentioned in 'Blessings' and the mountains and fields of 'Eagle', invoke the spectre of a past that carries a multitude of warnings for the future. This is why even in his most optimistic of political poems, Ce cautions his readers to 'Watch guard on the mountain' against ambitions that 'may lurk in dark corners/Of the mind' ('Eagle': 11-13).

Undoubtedly, the manner in which the different temporalities of the past, present, and future continually reflect and penetrate each other produces a complex conceptualisation of time that reveals, to use Ce's own words, 'the run of history' (*Full Moon* iii). Indeed, it is in developing an appreciation of this 'run of history' that one can begin to see how Ce's difficult conceptualisation of time is directly associated to the second feature of Achebe's assertion. For it is not just the intricate relationships between the divergent temporalities of past, present, and future that produce 'the run of history' but also the way in which private experiences and publicly accepted 'truths' intersect and pervert each other. With this in mind, one must take careful note of the ethical position that Achebe promotes in this passage since it is the same ethical position that Ce adopts in his political poetry.

For Achebe, it is clear that there is a certain ethical position that the writer must assume in order to fulfil the role of teacher. The writer/teacher must enter into a close relationship with the reader so that the reader can begin the restorative process of understanding 'what happened to them, what they lost' ('The Role' 7). It is an ethical position that is premised on the deep appreciation of the other: the writer's respect for the reader, and the reader's respect for the writer. Moreover, the force of this necessary ethical relationship that describes the nexus of the revolutionary writer and reader is only doubled by the recognition that the lost personal qualities of dignity and self-respect, to which Achebe refers, can only function when placed in direct relation to the social. Nowhere is a dependence and reliance on the social –that is, on 'other people'– more profound than in a consideration of history. And it is this fact, that history demands some semblance of community before it can be said to hold any value, which seems to be the reason why Achebe settles on 'a proper sense of history' as the key thematic concern of every writer/teacher. In such a context, it is certain that an important quality of the writer/teacher is the ability to compose access points to a history that possess the potential to facilitate the reader's ideological migration from a destructive individualism to an ethical entryway into the social.

As such, if it is true that Ce aims to produce a revolutionary literature as a writer/teacher that helps the Nigerian people restore some kind of self-determinism in the wake of the demise of colonial structures of subjectification, then his primary role must remain the development of an ethical position –a position formalised, that is, by a deep appreciation and recognition of the importance of all others. Thus the role of the writer/teacher calls first for the ability to render visible structures of subjectification in order to make them a target

for revolutionary activity, and then, following the demise of such structures, for the ability to propagate the immanent integrity of the everyman by encouraging acts of self-determination born from the ethically-charged event of a deep respect for others. Of course, Ce's *An African Eclipse* demonstrates both of these properties. Ce assumes the role of teacher by producing a political poetry that not only reveals the means by which the Nigerian everyman lost his dignity, self-respect, and sense of history, but also recognises and details the intricate relationship between the individual and society. Played out in a dialogue held between painful personal experiences of the past and the liberatory promise of the future, Ce's poetry encourages a valuable reappraisal of the self that has the potential to lead to social revolution at the hands of a politically informed people. Yet, importantly, I want to suggest that these two properties—the necessity of the writer to render visible structures of subjectification and the necessity of the writer to engage in the ethically-charged event of crystallising a deep recognition and appreciation of others—are linked in a very particular way in *An African Eclipse* by a concept of 'Life' that exists as a separate force beyond the individual.

Writing on the complex relationship between the private and public worlds of the poet and society, Ce states, 'this flow of inner and outer worlds complements the creative nature of soul as synonymous with self-dreaming' (*Full Moon* iii). It is an enigmatic remark that pushes the reader, perhaps too gently, towards a particular way of engaging with his poetry. Nevertheless, the diligent reader is encouraged to reconsider the notion that stands at the very heart of *An African Eclipse*—the soul. It is clear that Ce is trying to negotiate some kind of union between the metaphysical soul and the very physical aspects of the self, here. But, what is not so clear is

how Ce thinks of this union coming into being. Under examination, the significance of the relationship between the soul and the act of self-determination seems to become apparent when one imbues 'the soul' of Ce's poetry with all of the connotations it takes from Christian tradition. At this point, the soul becomes inextricable from the very principle of life itself and necessarily ceases to 'belong' to any discrete entity since it must always remain a non-personal 'principle'. Thus, it should come as no surprise that one's introduction to Ce's notion of the soul arrives via this curious incorporeal order of Life that, in standing apart from the individual, has the power to inaugurate the dawning of each new day:

I have chosen now the day is bright
 (the shining light of
 soul lights) the middle lonely route. ('A Farewell' 14-16)

So, Ce begins his collection of political poems by demonstrating the force of this somewhat mystical quality of the soul, or rather this curious non-personal principle of Life, which makes manifest the very possibility of the day(light). Clearly, this concept of Life exists as an independent force to the individual; but it is also made equally clear elsewhere that the individual must subsist within its domain or suffer the consequences. In 'Darkness', Ce laments about 'A generation without a soul' (9) – a generation which, from the notes appended to the collection, one is encouraged to read as the Nigerian military class since 1966. Without a soul, without access to this non-personal force of Life, the military class 'sent the nation/Blundering in the dark' ('Darkness' 1-2). Indeed, Nigeria's dive into 'darkness' at the hands of corrupt political leaders is a theme that Ce returns to time and again in 'An African Eclipse', 'May 29 1999', 'Darkness Broods', and so on. Importantly, however,

such a dive into darkness is repeatedly attributed to the failure in the relationship forged between the personal and non-personal world, which necessarily issues from this ubiquitous force of Life. Put simply, Ce's poems recognise that such a non-personal force of Life functions as an ethical principle; and, moreover, that it is this ethical principle that guarantees the manner in which we conduct ourselves. As such, Ce's singular notion of an independent force of Life functions as a means to evaluate 'what we do, say, think, and feel' according to the kind of ontological condition that each of these activities implies (Smith xiv).

Here, then, lies the significance of Ce's conceptualisation of this non-personal force of Life –it is another kind of Life, written as the soul, which allows Ce as writer/teacher to render visible all kinds of structures of subjectification by returning to history's lessons, to encourage a deep recognition and respect for others and in so doing raise the potential for revolutionary activity at the hands of a socially and politically informed people. 'In the season of another life' ('Eagle'), Ce's poetry leads a 'new' people to a position where they have the potential to socially and politically re-engineer Nigeria by overturning the practices and apparatuses of a corrupt national leadership that is characterised by its failed ethical and moral responsibilities to the Nigerian population.

Ce is quick to highlight one of the least commonly recognised structures for the subjectification, or subjugation, of the Nigerian people. In just the third poem of his collection, Ce renders visible the means by which corrupt presidential figures and administrations stole the self-respect and dignity of a generation of Nigerian workers. Highlighting the media networks that continually channelled government propaganda to the people, 'The Champ' talks of the duplicitous dealings of trickster presidents with quick

fingers that rifle the national oil revenue for personal gain:

Every now fulsomely
 flashed his many faces
 at national networks.
 Octopus and green his
 hands
 around a hundred contracts. ('The Champ' 1-6)

And, given Ce's observations in poems such as 'Darkness Broods' and 'African Eclipse', the reader is made further aware that this already unacceptable state of affairs is only doubled by a rehearsed and empty rhetoric on social and economic injustices that 'Tumble from liquorice throats' ('Darkness Broods' 8):

Fine speeches and stale State
 Declarations
 With presidential pretences
 On your face.
 There sprawl forgotten bearers
 Of the land's loads.
 You do not see their eyes
 And the bony heads of their
 Children
 On the streets ('An African Eclipse' 7-16)

Through this kind of political 'education' at the hands of incumbent politicians serving their time at state-sanctioned television stations, the Nigerian everyman is reduced to a most passive entity in the eyes of a military leadership, a kind of 'snivelling vermin' ('The Second Reptile' 15). Perhaps it is this impoverished conceptualisation of the Nigerian population that accounts for the ease with which violent acts have been perpetrated upon it. For Ce

makes clear that the operation of subjectification that pacifies the minds of the Nigerian people is matched by an operation of subjectification that conditions the physical body. Thus, 'Ovation' recalls 'the chilling violence' (20) committed by Nigerian military rulers on their way to political power, which resulted in the common Nigerian being further isolated from the political system; and, 'An African Eclipse' evokes the 'cries of torture and murder' that swept the streets where the 'mad dogs', or gangs of enforcers, roamed the streets (40-42) –if not killing, then routinely humiliating and degrading people. It is a programme of violence that results in what Ce quite rightly observes as a measure of bodily limitation, of bondage. Under such means of physical oppression the Nigerian population is left:

Tired and drawn
We trotted the streets
Among a black throng
Without a human face.
Our eyes may be blank
Like drops of phlegm
And sightless
As the dead's...
Who wants to know?
Many loveless hearts
And other drab minds ('Chains': 1-11)

So, the reader is forced to record a pacification of the people, a loss of singularity in the context of a collapse of social relationships and responsibility that ultimately results in the kind of blindness to the benefits of political engagement that allows dictatorships to proliferate. Indeed, Ce details a particularly impressionable and compliant State-governed individual. Yet, while it is certain that such

an individual is capable of reproducing learned violent behaviour – such as witnessed in the poem 'A Cloud'– 'it is also absolutely certain that such an individual is unable to employ such behaviour in any kind of organised revolutionary way. As such, it is unsurprising to find a poem included in the collection that draws attention to the problem of black African fighting against black African, even in the face of what most recognise as a clear political triumph the freeing of Nelson Mandela from a South African jail in 1990:

What justice
That sped the flaming
Wing of the eagle
Through the fire and splatter
of hell now blinds
Our black brothers' eyes?
What cry of soul
Can pierce Nelson's dark cloud
Of black against brother? ('A Cloud': 21-29)

However, at the root of this kind of unthinking violence, which Ce admits belongs as much to Nigeria as it does South Africa, Ce identifies a largely unacknowledged legacy of British colonial rule. The poem 'Naija' gestures towards a forgotten history, a history that saw the British compose the boundaries of what was to become the nation-state of Nigeria.

Pretend this is Nigeria
North or South Left or Centre, Forward
Backward ('Naija': 9-11)

Undoubtedly, such an act of inscription, which Britain engaged in during the 'Scramble for Africa' with other European colonial

powers, began a process of homogenisation that necessarily collapsed the territorial distinction between different ethnic and cultural groups of the West African region, and resulted in the kind of disorientation that Ce alludes to above: 'North or South Left or Centre, Forward' (10). However, it would be wrong to attribute the violence and political turmoil experienced by Nigeria to this common European desire for a singular nation-state. Indeed, rather than pointing the finger at the British colonial administration responsible for fabricating the borders of a new Nigeria, Ce seems more concerned with highlighting what many regard as the deeply flawed political system that fails to provide a suitable framework for the equal representation of ethnic groups that Britain devised upon its official departure from the territory. And it is this flawed political system, which ultimately favours the Hausa/Fulani populations of the north over the Yoruba of the west and (especially) the Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria, which urges Ce to ask:

What further curse of the
Triangle
Awaits your children, folks,
If you let them... ('May 29 1999' 14-17)

Significantly, Ce renders visible this legacy of colonial control as a contemporary structure of subjectification, a political system that still dominates and conditions Nigerian life, that is ripe for either revision or revolution.

Yet, it is most important that Ce does not see this problematic political system as the only legacy of colonialism. Hand in hand with an imported European political system that presumed some kind of majoritarian notion of nationalism, was the development of a truly national economy that pulled people from rural to urban areas to

meet the needs of the capitalist marketplace. Unfortunately, the consequence of such social movement, a production economy, and the demands made on the environment by the discovery of huge oil fields in the 1970s, was an ecological damage that has not only scarred the natural landscape but also the consciousness of many Nigerian writers, such as Nnimo Bassey and Niyi Osundare. Somewhat disheartened at the processes of desertification and erosion that have continually gone unheeded by various state and federal governments, Ce remarks on a modernity that ranges:

From the wastelands of the Savannah
Through the craters of the Niger... ('Windstorm': 12-13)

For Ce, then, the truth of modernity is found in the scarred earth, in the continual processes of penetration and erosion that find their conceptual correlate in the continuing penetration and erosion of traditional values and practices at the hands of 'modernity':

Clouds and sands and stormy
Wind whirl over our land
We are no longer at ease
As things have fallen apart. ('Windstorm': 1-4)

Ce is clearly sympathetic to Achebe's ideas in *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1984), a work to which the poem 'Windstorm' is dedicated. However, for Ce, it seems as though a remedy to the social and political difficulties that face the modern Nigerian cannot be found in hasty calls for Nigeria to simply 'modernise'. Indeed, the reference to two of Achebe's more prophetic novels here *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Things Fall Apart* (1958) –which both concern the decrepitude of traditional values in the face of the colonial encounter seems to highlight this very point. Where Achebe's novels appear to

demand (yet always seem to fail to deliver) a singular leader of the people, Ce reminds his readership that they need not await the equivalent of a 'sage on silent feet' ('Windstorm' 20) in order to undertake revolutionary activity. While the possibility engendered by a future that always resides at a crossroads between the recollection of traditional practices and the progress ensured through innovation may not be arrived at through the 'measured strides' of a singular leader with a clear and purposeful vision, nonetheless the promise of innovation will be realised by a people who struggle for it. Simply, it is 'the people' who must engage in a process whereby they enter into a deep recognition of others around themselves in order to become a revolutionary force.

Importantly, this idea of becoming begins to play an increasingly significant role in the poetry of Chin Ce. As a present participle, becoming refuses to hierarchise, privilege, or determine discrete points in time since it recognises that every living entity is in a continuing moment of change, undergoing perpetual movement. Thus the process of becoming is always and already a revolutionary movement since it is a movement, Ce recognises, which can only distort or pervert State-approved ways of living. What this means is that Ce challenges his readers in his poetry to deny the State's authority to commit ethically and morally repugnant acts with impunity: the acts of violence written in 'Ovation'; the demonstrated ignorance of economic and social issues that forms the fabric of 'An African Eclipse'; the manipulation of the news media for overt political purposes in 'Darkness Broods'; and the continued use of the dilapidated colonial legal and administrative apparatuses witnessed in 'Prodigal Drums'. As such, for the revolutionary potential of the people to be realised the people themselves must first inhabit a position, a way of being, which is outside of those sanctioned by the

State: to challenge the structures of subjectification such as those Ce highlights, to become what might usefully be called a 'private thinker' someone who can draw on their own knowledge of the past to compose their own future rather than a person who is content to passively accept State assertions of 'the Truth'. So it is that the poetry of Ce calls for an awareness of self that is built upon the process of becoming, a process that recalls all the complexity of the ethical relationship to the Other since it resides within the communion between the liquid sites of past and future as they play themselves out in the present encounter between the inner personal world of the poet and the outer public world of the Other.

Together with Ce's claim that this 'flow of inner and outer worlds complements the creative nature of soul as synonymous with self-dreaming' (*Full Moon* iii), the reader is presented with the building blocks to a very specific understanding of the composition of a modern Nigerian ontology. It is as if Ce locates our only political way of existing in the world through the production of the literary artefact. It is a position that Gilles Deleuze has developed throughout his oeuvre. For Deleuze:

writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience. It is a process, that is, a passage of Life that traverses both the livable and the lived. (Deleuze 1)

Given such an understanding, it is certain that every literary work must imply a way of being which is to say, a form of Life. Yet, while the act of writing is an acceptable revolutionary activity in itself, it must be noted that the kind of Life, or the way of living, that writings such as *An African Eclipse* imply for its readership results in an

equally revolutionary force. By understanding 'a proper sense of history', to return to Achebe's phrase, which reveals the structures of subjectification that condition the minds and bodies of the Nigerian population, Ce's readers become private thinkers who begin to inhabit a revolutionary space that is positioned in order to compromise the integrity of State-organised ontologies. It is a process of becoming revolutionary that insists on a new awareness of the self, a self-interrogation that demands not only a reappraisal of the world but also the way in which one engages with it. But, while such acts of introspection always carry the threat of being narcissistic, egoistic or more worryingly, nihilistic because of the potential to fall into an irretrievable solipsism, Ce makes certain that one understands that:

In this awareness of self, both poet and reader are running through time, defying the lower pulls of gravity including the outer world filled with limitation of doctrines, political power and the abuses of it which transience underlines its illusions in the infinite passage of time. (*Full* iii)

Running through time together, exploring history through the lens of today, at a speed that defies the processes of subjectification, Ce seems at pains to explain that the poet and reader are held in an inextricable relationship, a moment of becoming that eradicates the distance between the poet and reader. Bound in such a communion born of the 'highest ethical sense' ('Blessings' 12), it is impossible that the kind of introspection that Ce's poetry requests of its readers can ever result in a nihilistic dive into solipsism. Indeed, Ce is so careful in explaining that the process of writing survives on the interaction of writer and reader

that it is perhaps unsurprising that the first word of the first poem of *An African Eclipse* is 'we' –a gesture that not only underscores the principle of unity that runs throughout Ce's poetry but also one that recognises the significance of something other to oneself:

We met where three ways
 were laid
 between thick forests ('AFarewell' 1-2)

In this ethically-charged environment where poet and reader begin to coalesce, writing can no longer claim to be an activity that attains a discrete form since it must always already be infused with the 'incomprehensibility' of the reader. Indeed, as Deleuze argues, writing can only be an activity that at best attempts to find 'a zone of proximity' to the haecceities that constitute the singularity of any subject. As such, literature must insistently claim to be an act of creation, it must invent the possibility of Life and with it new ways of existing (Deleuze 100). So Deleuze goes on to talk of the need for political literature to 'create a new people', a new collective, a new readership that is formalised by its encounter with the newly produced revolutionary text. In such a manner, the moment of becoming between Chin Ce and his readership that is produced through the revolutionary character of his poetry ultimately facilitates new ways of being a modern Nigerian. Under such conditions, it is no longer profitable to think of the writer as one who simply represents experience through writing, which is to say a writer *for* or *on the behalf of* a people. Rather, the writer must be considered as an inextricable element of the people, to all intents and purposes inseparable from the people, who, in refusing to simply represent personal experiences, creates non-preexistent relations between poets, readers, and the process of becoming

revolutionary, in order to demonstrate new possibilities of Life –new ways of living within a new Nigeria.

Nowhere is this revised treatment of the role of the writer/teacher to society better evidenced than in the enigmatic poem 'Oracle':

The one in the sacred grove
Is he
Who can see
The jaws of the red ant.
...
The one in the sacred grove
Is only me.
Is only you... ('Oracle': 1-4 and 15-17)

It is important to note here the ability of the narrator (poet) to see new things, new moments of life, the impossible detail of the 'jaws of the red ant', with all the implications of a poet-as-oracle who has the ability to regard features of the world that others pass by unwittingly. Without further inspection of the poem one is left wondering whether this is Ce claiming to be a writer *for* the people, the disseminator of an almost unseen and therefore mysterious knowledge. But Ce introduces a certain complexity to this understanding by insisting that the enunciation of 'only me' holds exactly the same value as 'only you'. Suddenly, the poem is no longer about Ce claiming to possess an arcane understanding of the world; it becomes a poem that demonstrates that Ce, and everything he writes, is inextricable from his reader and bound by an ethical contract. Since the differentiation implied by 'I' and 'You' necessarily loses all critical value under such conditions, it must be replaced with the use of a third person singular that *cannot* be used to isolate

or marginalise a subject from an object because, quite simply, it does not inaugurate the hierarchical binary system required by 'I' and 'You'. In this extraordinary 'middle voice' that navigates between the demands of subjects and objects, of absolutes and essentialisms, of Self and Other, Ce's poetry stands as the emission of a collective utterance, a pure speech act, which allows a new revolutionary people 'to find their expression in and through the singularity of the writer'. (Deleuze xiv) – *An African Eclipse*, that is, as an enunciation of the people merely produced through the singularity of the poet.

Let us conclude by invoking the unheard voice that seems to haunt Chin Ce's political poetry and, indeed, this paper. The words of Jean-Paul Sartre are always insightful and inventive, and this passage taken from his seminal text *What is Literature?* captures the very essence of not only the issues that Ce's *An African Eclipse* addresses but also the reason why it must address them:

The writer takes up the world as is, totally raw, stinking, and quotidian, and presents it to free people on a foundation of freedom...It is not enough to grant the writer the freedom to say whatever he pleases! He must address a public that has the freedom to change everything, which implies, beyond the suppression of social classes, the abolition of all dictatorship, the perpetual renewal of categories, and the continual reversal of every order, as soon as it starts to ossify. In a word, literature is essentially the subjectivity of a society in permanent revolution. (Sartre 162-163)

In short, it is a call for the writer to become a teacher: to recall the 'raw, stinking, and quotidian' real world and present an uncompromising literature that, because of its ethically-charged

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access to the world, has the potential to 'free people on a foundation of freedom' itself. Indeed, it is in this spirit that one leaves the last word to the enthusiasm and the promise of possibility engendered in the final poem of *An African Eclipse*:

And when the thick, dun smoke
Has dispersed
Mournfully in the dark clouds.

And the dusts have settled on the fields...

Let your gaze sweep the fields
Where the trees bear new fruits
In the season of another life.

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